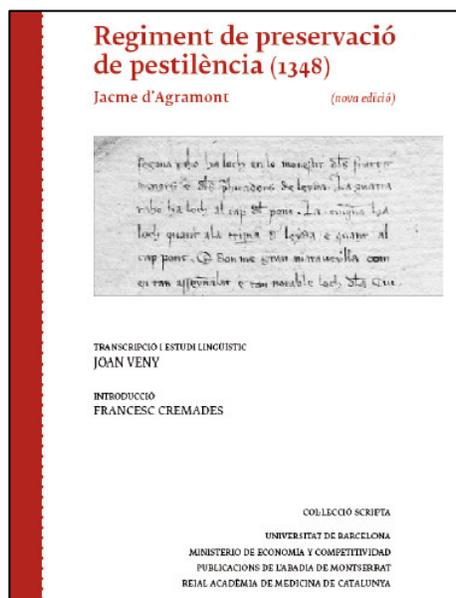


Philip D. Rasico

Veny, J. ed. *Regiment de preservació de pestilència (1348)* [de] *Jacme d'Agramont*. Nova edició. Transcripció i estudi lingüístic [de] Joan Veny; Introducció [de] Francesc Cremades. Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2015. Col·lecció Scripta, Volum 7. 111 pp.

Cremades, Francesc ed. *El Regiment de preservació de pestilència (1348) de Jacme d'Agramont. Història del manuscrit guardat a Verdú, context i versió en català actual*. Tàrrrega: Museu Comarcal d'Urgell-Tàrrrega, 2016. 178 pp.

Reviewed by: Philip D. Rasico (Vanderbilt University)



In June of 1909 Enric Arderiu, archivist of the Biblioteca Provincial de Lleida and co-founder of the Centre Excursionista de Lleida, made an amazing discovery during a visit to the parish archives of Santa Maria de Verdú (Verdú, Baix Urgell). There, while looking through a number of documents arbitrarily bound together in a single volume, he came upon the manuscript of a medical treatise, written in the Catalan language and consisting of fourteen double-column folios, concerning the Black Plague or Black Death, a highly infectious, communicable disease apparently caused by the transmission of the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* via flees and their hosts (rodents as well as humans) and originating around the year 1347 in the region of Kaffa (modern Feodosia, Crimea). The document which lay before Arderiu's eyes was dated 1348 and was signed by its author, Jacme d'Agramont, a native and resident of the city of Lleida as well as a physician, clergyman and professor at the Estudi General of that city, the medieval precursor of the modern Universitat de Lleida. Unlike most other medical writing of the period, the manuscript by Agramont, which he titled *Epístola de mestre Jacme d'Agramont als honrats e discrets seynnors pahers e conseyll de la ciutat de Leyda* (folio 1 recto), was not directed to other members of the medical community but rather to the city's Council of Representatives (*la Paeria*) for

disribution among the local population in an effort to prevent the onslaught of epidemic disease. Moreover, in contrast to other medical writing of the fourteenth century, which in Europe was traditionally composed in Latin, Agramont's treatise was written in Catalan employing a linguistic register that could be understood by the majority of the local population, thus making the author's *Epístola* (later retitled by editors *Regiment de preservació a epidèmia o pestilència e mortaldats* or *Regiment de preservació de pestilència* based upon frequent allusions to this purpose by Agramont) not only the earliest Romance language manuscript of its kind in the Iberian Peninsula but also in Europe as a whole. It was also one of the earliest examples of a document concerning public healthcare policy.

Arderiu quickly realized the unique nature of his discovery of Agramont's medical treatise and he immediately published a transcription of it that same year in the *Butlletí del Centre Excursionista de Lleida*, any II (1909, 55-93), together with a separate edition of the manuscript the following year with contributions from Josep M. Roca (*Regiment de preservació a epidèmia o pestilència e mortaldats*. Lleida: Joseph A. Pagès, 1910).

Subsequent to Arderiu's editions of Agramont's treatise (hereafter referred to as the *Regiment*), news of the existence of the Catalan manuscript of 1348 appeared in several medical journals and volumes the earliest of which was published in 1925 by Arnold C. Klebs and Eugène Droz (*Remèdes contre la peste. Fac-similés, notes et liste bibliographique des incunables sur la peste*. Paris: Droz & Nourry, 60).¹ However, it would not be until more than sixty years had elapsed since Arderiu's original publication of the *Regiment* that the extraordinary philological interest of Agramont's manuscript, and especially its particular dialectal features, would attract the attention of a scholar well prepared to study the history of the manuscript, to correct and modernize Arderiu's original transcription, and to analyze the language of the text.² In 1971 Joan Veny i Clar published the first revised transcription, together with an introduction and a detailed linguistic study of Agramont's treatise (*Regiment de preservació de pestilència" de Jacme d'Agramont (S. XIV): Introducció, transcripció i estudi lingüístic*. Tarragona: Diputació Provincial de Tarragona) in which words joined in the original manuscript are separated by means of an apostrophe for proclitic forms and by a hyphen or a raised period for enclitic elements; the use of capital letters as well as written accent marks are normalized according to the orthographic rules of standard literary Catalan (based upon the eastern dialectal variety); and the use of *i* and *j*, *u* and *v* are regularized in accordance with modern usage. In Veny's 1971 edition, however, the retranscription of the text does not generally indicate abbreviations that have been resolved by the editor nor does it provide translations for the numerous Latin prescriptions (*Recepte*) and other passages in this language that Agramont includes in the manuscript. Twenty-seven years later Joan Veny, in collaboration with Luis García Ballester and Jon Arrizabalaga Valbuena, published an enhanced edition and study of Agramont's treatise (*Regiment de preservació de pestilència*. Barcelona, Enciclopèdia Catalana S.A., 1998), the transcription of which was essentially that of Veny (1971) with

¹ See Cremades (2016, 24).

² The extraordinary linguistic interest of Agramont's *Regiment*, especially with regard to local dialectal features of the manuscript, was first noted by Joan Veny in the article "Interés lingüístico del *Regiment de preservació de pestilència de Jacme d'Agramont*." Quilis, Antonio et al. eds., *Actas del XI Congreso Internacional de Lingüística y Filología Románicas* (Madrid, 1965), vol. II. Madrid: Revista de Filología Española, 1968, 1017-1028.

various minor revisions.

In 2015, encouraged by continued interest in the *Regiment* by linguists as well as medical professionals and researchers in related scientific areas, Joan Veny published a new edition of Agramont's treatise in the "Scripta" collection of Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, a series designed to make available to the public ancient as well as contemporary non-literary texts of particular linguistic interest and especially that related to the evolution of the Catalan language and its dialects. Veny's 2015 edition consists of a forward by Xavier Luna-Batlle, the director of the "Scripta" series, in which he outlines the history of Agramont's treatise as well as that of previously published editions of the manuscript; an introduction by Francesc Cremades that briefly examines the *Regiment* within the context of the Black Death and other *regimina sanitatis* from classical Greek times through the Middle Ages, and also outlines the transmission of Agramont's manuscript within the 20th-century scientific community; an abridged linguistic study of the language of the manuscript by Veny, with special emphasis given to dialectal features characteristic of the speech of Lleida and the western Catalan region, based upon Veny's earlier analyses of the language of the text; followed by a bibliography and a transcription of the *Regiment* in which Veny essentially reproduces his earlier, non-philological editions of the manuscript, especially that in Veny (1998), with additional corrections as well as footnotes with the translation into Catalan of the medical prescriptions and other passages in Latin. The volume includes photographic reproductions of various folia of Agramont's manuscript of 1348, and it concludes with a valuable glossary, prepared by Veny and Cremades, of dialectal forms and specialized terms appearing in the *Regiment*.

One year after the appearance of Veny (2015), Francesc Cremades published the first adaptation ('translació') of Agramont's treatise to modern standard Catalan, a version based upon Veny's revised third edition of the manuscript, in order to make it more accessible to the general reader. Preceding Cremades' retranscription of the *Regiment* are five sections or chapters that are fundamental to an understanding and appreciation of Agramont's work and take up nearly two thirds of the volume.

Cremades (2016) begins with a chapter dedicated to an examination of the history and circulation of the only known copy of Agramont's treatise, the Santa Maria de Verdú manuscript, in Catalonia and other regions of Europe as well as in the United States. Subsequent chapters include an investigation of the identity of the author of the *Regiment*; an historical overview of the origin and development of late-medieval universities in Europe with special attention given to the Estudi General de Lleida and its school of Medicine; a detailed analysis of the nature and history of the epidemic disease known as the Black Death or Black Plague, as well as of its arrival in western Europe and its devastating effects upon local populations, especially those of the Kingdom of Aragon; and an in-depth analysis of the background of Agramont's *Regiment* within the context of the history of Greek philosophy and medical tradition, and particularly the writing and practice of Galen.

In Cremades' modern version of the text Latin words, phrases and prescriptions are translated into Catalan, and the original medieval syntax is edited in such a way so as to make it more fluid, and above all more easily understandable, while respecting Agramont's writing style. Cremades' edition of the *Regiment* is annotated with footnotes that prove helpful, and even essential, to comprehending certain aspects of the treatise; and it is followed by a very useful glossary of medieval medical terms, conditions and plant names mentioned in the text, as well as by a list of prescriptions in their original Latin form

accompanied by Catalan translations. The volume concludes with an extensive bibliography.

The importance of the nearly simultaneous publication of Veny's and Cremades' complementary editions of Jacme d'Agramont's *Regiment* cannot be sufficiently stressed. Both editions make available to scholars as well as to non-specialists a remarkable text from the mid-fourteenth century concerning one of the most dramatic episodes in European history. The fact that Agramont's treatise on methods of preserving the local population of Lleida from the devastating effects of an approaching epidemic was written with the expressed intent that it be made available immediately to the public through its circulation by the city's Council of Representatives is extraordinary by itself. Moreover, the Verdú manuscript of the *Regiment* is also of great linguistic interest. As Veny (2015, 33-34) notes, not only is it the earliest-known treatise on epidemic disease written in a Romance language, it also represents a crucial source for the study of the history of the Catalan language due to Agramont's intentional use of a linguistic register easily understood by the local population, a popular style of Catalan characterized by phonetic, morphological and lexical features specific to the dialect of Lleida and its surrounding region in the mid-fourteenth century.