



PROJECT MUSE®

El perfil de Salamanca. Historia fotográfica de una seña
de identidad (review)

Edward Baker

Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies, Volume 10, 2006, pp. 309-311
(Review)

Published by University of Arizona
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hcs.2007.0004>



➔ *For additional information about this article*
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/214546>

philosophy, and science of the era. Olivera points out that Greco-Roman, Medieval and Christian myths, as well as ancient travel books influenced many chroniclers, such as Columbus (though his writings are not included here), and thus, their descriptions of the New World often mirrored the aforementioned myths and travel books.

A substantial portion of Olivera's introduction is devoted to the importance of myths, whether they are European, such as the Amazon Women, or local, such as El Dorado. In addition he mentions that there were writers, such as Pedro Mártir, whose skepticism of myths made them critical of the chronicles. Although Olivera dedicates three full pages to describe the writings of Mártir, he only includes two, minute excerpts of his works in the introduction, which may be disappointing to the reader.

In the second part of the introduction, entitled "Conquista y colonización del Nuevo Mundo," Olivera offers a panoramic view, from 1492 to 1616, of the Spanish expansion into the New World. The final part of the introduction, "Organización colonial," focuses on the allocation of political and religious power in the New World, and touches on the negative impact that the monopolization of goods, the exploitation of indigenous peoples, and the *encomiendas* had on the colonies. He also mentions the monarchs' unsuccessful attempts to institute the *Nuevas Leyes*, which aimed to protect the right of autochthonous populations.

Olivera makes the chronicles accessible to undergraduate students and laymen by including a glossary and modernizing the spelling, grammar and lexicon. Olivera also abridges some of the texts by omitting information he considers peripheral to the stories. Furthermore, he simplifies some of the chapter titles, changing, for example, "De cómo el rey Nezahualcoyotzin se casó con Azcalxochitzin, hija del infante Temictzin su tío, y del extraño modo con que se consiguió este matrimonio" to "El amor criminal de un rey." These revisions may pose problems, since Olivera does not document them in his book; only by comparing his book to the sources noted in the bibliography, can one detect the numerous omissions and significant modernization

that the documents have undergone. However, by modernizing the language and eliminating information believed by the author to be unnecessary for story development, Olivera offers a book that can be used as an undergraduate introduction to the chronicles.

Judith Caballero
The University of Arizona

El perfil de Salamanca: Historia fotográfica de una seña de identidad
Salamanca: Junta de Castilla y León, 2005
De Conrad Kent

Suele concretarse el perfil de las grandes ciudades en una silueta previa, que ha de ir luego por el mundo de las menciones plásticas [...] como el grito en idioma múltiple de su publicidad universal. La perspectiva aérea de los rascacielos desde el Hudson es el formidable tópico de una Nueva York de todos conocida [...]. La silueta del Madrid moderno llevará en su primer término el Edificio Carrión como una proa en marcha hacia el mejor futuro de la ciudad. (*Ciudad* 1, 26 December, 1934)

The anonymous author of these words, probably *Ciudad's* editor-in-chief, Víctor de la Serna, was attentive to cliché and its uses in the visual imagery of advertising turned to a Madrid building that itself functioned as an advertisement, Madrid's new Carrión (or Capitol) building. By way of contrast, Conrad Kent's object of knowledge and perception, the Salamanca skyline, along with the Roman bridge and the banks of the Tormes, was composed of elements dating from Antiquity, the Middle Ages and early Modernity, but it has been rendered no less a cliché. As the author tells us,

el esquema visual constituido por las torres de las catedrales, la Universidad, la Clerecía y el convento de San Esteban, que asoman sobre los restos de la

antigua muralla, la ribera y el puente romano, ha sido reducido a la categoría de tópico. Aunque sintetiza la historia de la ciudad y su compleja evolución, el perfil de Salamanca no ha sido objeto del estudio que merece (11).

The *tópico* is constructed from an accrual of centuries of images that Kent patiently has accumulated, ordered with the precision of the superb cultural archeologist that he is, and analysed with refined critical intelligence.

El perfil de Salamanca is the author's third book on that city in the space of seven years. Its purpose is "preguntarse de modo sistemático por las perspectivas fantásticas que cada época ha impuesto sobre la realidad material del entorno" (11). He accomplishes this in a book composed of nine parts—an introduction, seven chapters numbered 2 through 8, and a brief conclusion. Of the seven chapters, organized chronologically, the initial one, part 2, works with pre-photographic literary and artistic images of the skyline and the bank of the Tormes, and fully six, parts 3 through 8, are devoted to photographic imagery. These last are the heart of the book.

Si las imágenes de Salamanca de la primera mitad del siglo se basaban en la imaginación romántica europea, las fotográficas de la segunda mitad se inspiran en la fotografía urbana de Londres y París. (43)

Nineteenth-century Salamanca photography—nineteenth-century photographs of Salamanca—begin with Romantic images and then segue illustriously to foreigners devoted to the creation and circulation of images of Spain. Among the first to photograph Salamanca were some of the pioneers of that art and science in Spain, beginning with the Englishman Charles Clifford, whose photographs of the Salamanca skyline in the 1850s set the stage for images throughout the rest of the century by breaking with photography's dependence upon the word and upon Romantic anecdote. Kent observes: "[L]as fotografías monumentales de Salamanca realizadas por Clifford se podían apreciar sin necesidad del apoyo de la anécdota ni de las narraciones escritas. La fotografía [...] se liberaba de

la palabra" (44). As always in nineteenth-century Spanish photography, Clifford was followed by Jean Laurent:

A diferencia de Clifford, el negocio de Laurent produjo miles de imágenes para abastecer un mercado ávido de representaciones actuales de lo antiguo y lo moderno [...]. Jean Laurent había puesto en marcha así una versión fotográfica de la 'invención' del patrimonio urbano. (48-49)

In the terminology of Françoise Choay, Salamanca had begun to cultivate the photographic version of the allegorization of a historical patrimony.

With the new century came the postcard and the snapshot. Kent observes that,

En la postal y en las fotografías obtenidas con las nuevas cámaras, el esquema heredado del perfil se transforma en unas imágenes populares y desenfadadas, obtenidas rápidamente y reproducidas en formatos pequeños. [...] En un momento de expansión del tipo de imágenes popularizadas por la Exposición Universal de París de 1900, los fotógrafos aprovechan las panorámicas de Salamanca para ofrecer vistas de una ciudad en vías de reconstrucción." [...] La vieja ciudad llena de monumentos se redescubría ahora en las nuevas vistas, con las dimensiones rectangulares adecuadas para el escaparate, el correo y el coleccionismo. (65)

Along with postcards came snapshots with hand held cameras and the simulacrum of amateur protagonism and perfectly real consumption and self-consumption of mass culture, for with the postcard and the snapshot the Salamanca skyline enters the age of infinite reproducibility that Walter Benjamin outlined seventy years ago.

In the final chapters, Kent brings the dynamics of material reality and fantasized image into our own time. During the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera Salamanca "se convierte en punto de referencia importante en la red nacional

de carreteras" (93), which puts the city in touch with the rest of Spain, Europe and technological advances as the latter conflict with a still localist and *costumbrista* visión of Salamanca. At this point,

[l]as imágenes descubren un espacio de gran complejidad, no sólo por el desarrollo industrial, el tráfico rodado, los cambios de modelos sociales y el aumento de la población urbana, sino también porque los fotógrafos tienen ahora unas motivaciones e inquietudes distintas de las de sus antepasados. La imagen del entorno se ve beneficiada por la originalidad artística y la expresividad personal de los fotógrafos, precisamente cuando la ribera empieza a recibir nuevas influencias materiales y sociales. (93)

The Franco dictatorship brings with it first the images of Salamanca as a symbol of the Cruzada, but also the reflection of the régime's contradictions (117). Some of those contradictions are expressed in late *franquismo*, when the Ministry of Information and Tourism seek to transform the *perfil* into spectacle, emptying it of its earlier contents. Finally, following the dictator's death in the early hours of November 20, 1975, Kent takes us to a Salamanca in democratic transition and the work of an important photographer, Felipe Torres (1905-1982), and the creation of a "contraperfil", with stark contrasts between the cathedral and its ruined surroundings.

Very little of the foregoing can transmit the wealth of images and their analysis contained in this superb work. Photography used denotatively assumes a clear and present record of shared images, whereas Kent has done something far more interesting. He has undertaken the tasks of a historical and cultural archeologist and unearthed the shards of images of the city that had been lost to us. In doing so he has provided a model for work on other provincial capitals and given us the gift of a priceless treasure.

Edward Baker
University of Washington

Beste Bat: 18 Herri Kanta. 18 canciones populares. 18 Pop Songs

Sala Rekalde, 2004

Edited by Miren Jaio and Arturo/Fito Rodríguez Bornaetxea

Published in 2004 as part of the events commemorating the advent of Basque Radical Rock (RRV) in the 80s, *Beste Bat* was the first in a series of works that, over the last two years, have contributed to develop a much-needed bibliography on the subject. While a few, scattered articles had previously dealt with RRV—a highly politicized appropriation of punk by the disenchanted Basque youth of the 80s—from the perspective of American academia, they tended to center on a particular issue, and how a certain band or song engaged with it. Likewise, with the exception of a couple of historical accounts, written by journalists, and memoirs written by musicians, textual production and critical reflection coming from the Basque Country has been equally scarce. Somehow, Basque "radical" culture has finally become an object of study not only for those who lived its birthing stages directly, but also for those who grew up under its influence.

The *Beste Bat* volume was released in time to coincide with a series of conferences and an exhibition under the same name held at the Rekalde Exhibition Hall, a prestigious modern art centre just down the street from the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. The goal of the event was to establish the culture of RRV as a defining, integral part of the development of Basque society since the creation of the Spanish Democratic State. To that end, the organizers gathered an impressive array of fanzines, videos, and sound recordings that had, until then, been surviving fragmentarily in the closets and attics of collectors and fans. Thus, the first step in the larger process of reconstructing the history and meaning of RRV was the creation of an archive of the antihegemonic products that gave a material presence to this movement. The second, and more complex, phase of the *Beste Bat* event was to provide a forum for discussion for Basque journalists and musicians, as well as US-based scholars, such as Jacqueline Urla and