



PROJECT MUSE®

Biblioteca Clásica de la Real Academia Española, vol. 2 by
Libro de Alexandre (review)

Clara Pascual-Argente

La corónica: A Journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, Volume 45, Number 1, Fall 2016, pp. 145-149 (Review)



Published by *La corónica: A Journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cor.2016.0025>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/651989>

Reviews

Libro de Alexandre. Ed. Juan Casas Rigall. *Biblioteca Clásica de la Real Academia Española*, vol. 2. Barcelona: *Círculo de Lectores/Galaxia Gutenberg*, 2014. xii +1136 pp. ISBN: 978-84-16072-25-5.

In the brief introductory pages that open his second edition of the *Libro de Alexandre* (hereafter *Alexandre*), Juan Casas Rigall imagines the poet as he considers composing a work on the Trojan War, and, finally discarding that possibility, he prefers instead to write on the life of Alexander the Great –or rather– on both topics at the same time (ix-xii). The scene provides an apt and vivid image of the sheer breadth and ambition of the *Alexandre*, whose foundational status and enduring influence in Castilian literature can hardly be overstated. The publication of this revised version of Casas Rigall's excellent edition (originally published with Castalia in 2007) will, with any luck, contribute to create a wider audience for the *Alexandre*, still too often overlooked outside of studies and courses on the *mester de clerecía*.

The most important accomplishment of Casas Rigall's original and revised editions remains, of course, offering a reliable and readable critical text of the *Alexandre*. Having examined the features and textual filiation of the poem's extant witnesses (two complete manuscripts, *O* and *P*, as well as multiple fragments) and discarded the possibility of a double redaction, Casas Rigall has decided to base his edition on *P*, which he considers the *codex optimus* in terms of both linguistic and textual proximity to the poem's first iteration, but which he emendates as necessary with *O* (or, to a lesser extent, the other witnesses). The reasons for these methodological choices are carefully and satisfactorily explained within the study that follows the poem's edition (621-54), as are the selections of specific variants in the critical apparatus (741-828). The text's spelling and punctuation tries to convey not only the phonological but also the rhetorical, orally transmitted shape of the medieval poem (654-59). This edition stands out not only because of its methodological soundness, but also thanks to the impressive care and thoroughness that Casas Rigall has demonstrated in going back and examining first-hand all of the *Alexandre*'s

manuscripts, fragments, and editions, which has resulted in the elimination of many earlier transcription errors and editorial infelicities. What is more, Casas Rigall's editorial work is not confined to this book: complete transcriptions of all manuscripts and fragments are also available on his web page, together with a fuller version of the critical apparatus (http://webspersoais.usc.es/persoais/juan.casas/Libro_de_alexandre.html).

In all of this, there are no substantial changes from the first edition. The layout of the text has, nonetheless, undergone a noticeable transformation, and is now in line with that of the “Biblioteca Clásica de la RAE” collection. The main difference with respect to the first edition is that the editor's notes to the poem appear now at the end of the book (829-1018), instead of below the text; at the bottom of the page, we find instead a version of the poem in modern Spanish, which is at the same time respectful of the original and creative when it comes to rendering difficult passages, particularly with respect to the poem's abundant sayings and *sententiae*. This is a very welcome addition, as it makes this scholarly sound edition also suitable for use in advanced undergraduate courses. It is a pity, however, that the collection format did not allow for a facing-page layout (the one usually employed, for example, in editions of Old French texts) that would still have kept the notes at the bottom of the text and provided readers with an even greater ease of use. Those readers used to the earlier edition may also miss the stanza numeration of the *Alexandre*'s manuscripts and fragments that appeared on the first edition's margins, but this information is easily accessible in appendix VI at the end (689-720). Finally, the sequencing of the text, extremely useful in a poem of this length and structural complexity, is accomplished here through the inclusion of *O* and *P*'s capital letters (also identified and listed in appendix IV, 677-82) and of running titles at the top of the odd-numbered pages (which reflect the textual division proposed in appendix III, 669-76).

In addition to offering a clear and reliable critical text of the *Alexandre*, Casas Rigall's edition is also remarkable for the extraordinary quality and completeness of the accompanying study that follows it, entitled “La composición del *Libro de Alexandre*”. It starts with a section on “Alejandro, de la Antigüedad a la Edad Media” (541-51), which offers a general overview of the historical facts of, and main sources for, Alexander's life, followed by a consideration on the *Alexandre*'s own sources in relation to the procedures of “medievalización, cristianización y moralización” (549) through which they became a coherent whole. In “Autoría y fecha de composición” (551-69), Casas Rigall reviews and



weighs the different hypothesis about the poem's authorship and date. As for the authorship, he looks at not only the different identities proposed for the author but also whether the work was composed individually or collectively, as some scholars have proposed. He concludes that a single anonymous author (a cleric with a solid education, working perhaps at the royal chancery, and native of the zone where Castile, La Rioja, and Aragon meet) composed the poem, although his anonymity may have been accidental. He then goes on to review the scholarship dealing with the poem's date, explaining the reasons for the current, and tentative, critical consensus around a date of composition in the first third of the thirteenth century. "El problema de la lengua" (569-81) carefully examines the critical discussion about the *Alexandre's* original dialect, concluding that "la lengua del poeta, aun constituyendo un artefacto literario, se funda sobre un dialecto ibérico centro-oriental" (581).

Next, Casas Rigall explores the poem's structure (581-88), noting the difficulty of establishing formal divisions beyond the clear presence of an introduction, body, and epilogue in the poem. However, the capitals present in both *P* and *O* and the narratorial indications that often mark the beginning of a new section are the basis for the division proposed in appendix III (669-76). The same section also contains a brief but useful discussion of the poem's treatment of narrative voice, direct discourse, time, narrative rhythm, and space. In "'Mester trayo fermoso': la poética del *Alexandre*" (588-611), Casas Rigall first examines the *Alexandre's* metrics, concluding that some of the poem's metrical irregularities originated with the poet, and should be considered "manifestaciones de una concepción flexible de un verso y una estrofa en pleno proceso de conformación" (599). He then goes on to consider rhetorical figures and techniques that conform the poem's style, which in his view is defined by a "tensión entre erudición y enseñanza" (601). Yet another of the poem's driving tensions, that between *fortitudo* and *sapientia*, becomes the focus of "Poema heroico, poema didáctico" (611-17), where Casas Rigall examines the debate about the poem's treatment of its main character in relation with the text's overall aims. A short history of the *Alexandre's* influence and critical reception is the focus of "Fortuna e influencia" (617-21). The study comes to a close with the sections on "Transmisión textual" (621-54) and "Criterios ortográficos y signos" (654-59) that I have mentioned above in relation to the critical text.

The appendixes at the end of the book include the letters from Alexander to his mother interpolated in manuscript *O* (appendix I, 663-666); the two original

miniatures on the same manuscript, although not the drawings added at the end of this codex by a later hand (appendix II, 667-68); the *Alexandre's* division in episodes and list of capitalized initials discussed above (respectively appendix III, 669-76, and appendix IV, 677-82); a list of irregular hemistichs (appendix V, 683-88); the correspondence of Casas Rigall's proposed stanza numbering to those on the manuscripts and fragments (appendix VI, 689-720); and some chosen fragments from the *Alexandre's* sources (appendix VII, 721-40). These are followed by the edition's critical apparatus (741-828); notes to the poem's text (829-1018); list of works cited (1019-1052); glossary (1053-1111); and an index of terms and names found in the notes (1113-36).

The study provides readers of the *Alexandre*, experienced and novice alike, with an updated and clear idea of the state of the question regarding the main critical discussions surrounding the poem, such as those about its date, authorship, linguistic makeup, sources, structure, style, or textual transmission. Casas Rigall is very effective at synthesizing and evaluating complex scholarly conversations, and he always does so without distorting those views with which he does not agree. Further, both the study and the notes to the poem have been carefully updated, not only by adding references to new scholarship produced between 2007 and 2012, but also by revising specific sections and notes in order to engage directly with some of those contributions. Although there is no pretension to exhaustivity, and recent scholarly interest in the *Alexandre* has fortunately been so great that a number of significant contributions have appeared since this revised edition went into production, the study and bibliography remain a reliable overview of scholarship on the poem, in addition to a thoughtful and stimulating introduction to some of its main problems. If there are areas less satisfactorily covered in the study, at least for this reader, they would be those dealing with the generic and ideological implications of the *Alexandre*, as well as those related to the poem's medieval afterlife. However, these are subjects in very rapid evolution, and less central to a study designed as a companion to an edition, such as this one, than those areas that are thoroughly developed.

All in all, Casas Rigall's revised *Alexandre* still contains all the elements that made it the edition of choice for most scholars of the poem, but in addition to being updated it has now become more accessible in both price and layout than its 2007 predecessor. While that edition was extremely valuable to those with a scholarly interest in the *Alexandre*, the new one is, thanks to the version in modern Spanish, suitable as well for a broader public, and can, for example,



be used in advanced undergraduate classes—where before one would have had to employ the version in modern Spanish by Elena Catena or the facing-page English translation by Such and Rabone, both good options but not as complete as Casas Rigall's edition. This is wonderful news for scholars and teachers of medieval Iberian literature, since it is now possible to include an excellent critical edition of the *Alexandre* in a wider variety of courses, thus allowing more people to enjoy this magnificent poem, the most original and accomplished of all Western European Alexander romances.

Clara Pascual-Argente

Rhodes College

Works Cited

- Casas Rigall, Juan, ed. *Libro de Alexandre*. Madrid: Castalia, 2007.
- Catena, Elena, ed. *Libro de Alejandro*. Madrid: Castalia, 1985.
- Such, Peter and Richard Rabone, eds. *Book of Alexander. Libro de Alexandre*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2009.

Cirlot, Victoria. Grial: poética y mito (siglos XII-XV). El Árbol del Paraíso 81. Madrid: Siruela, 2015. 377 pp. ISBN 978-84-16208-41-8.

Esta obra se ocupa de la poética y mito del grial desde una doble perspectiva: textual e iconográfica. La autora parte de la hipótesis (13-16) de que los orígenes se hallan en la obra de Chrétien de Troyes, *El cuento del grial*, en la que “estaban contenidas todas las posibilidades que los escritores posteriores supieron desplegar en sus obras respectivas” (16).

En “La pérdida de Jerusalén y la poética del grial” (17-40), sostiene que la obra de Chrétien, aunque se hubiera acabado, habría dejado muchos aspectos sin respuesta, muchas preguntas abiertas, ya que el grial, junto con la reina, son