

DESPUIG, Cristòfol. *Los colloquis de la insigne ciutat de Tortosa*. Ed. Enric Querol i Josep Solervicens. Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2011. 188 p.

The city of Tortosa, halfway between Barcelona and Valencia, is only slowly recovering from the ravages of the civil war, from the loss of tourists due to new bridges over the Ebro which let cars and trains bypass it, and from the malevolent reassignment of sixty of her parishes to adjacent, mostly Spanish-speaking, dioceses to the west or south, extinguishing the old sense of cultural and linguistic unity maintained by priests trained in the seminary of Tortosa.

Given this background, reading in Despuig's *Colloquis* from 1557 about the regional center's good old days gives pleasure and pride to modern inhabitants, now even more so thanks to this new edition, to be recommended to everyone.

The author presents his *laus urbis* in the form of elegant conversations between three men walking about town: the citizens Livio and Fabio, plus Pedro from Valencia. Despuig—who does not write in Latin or Castilian “per no mostrar tenir en poc la llengua catalana” (29)—groups their observations, comments and questions of a historical, political, social or ecclesiastic nature, in six “colloquis,” called ‘macrodialogues’ by the editors (“Introduction,” 5-26).

The first one flows from the unexpected encounter with their friend Pedro. Coming from the south, he states that he feels like he has arrived in the land of his forefathers, the “antiga pàtria” from where Valencians have received their language (40). Fabio and Livio complement this statement with comments on the resettlement of all regions reconquered from the infidels by speakers of Catalan. Livio condemns the “escàndol” that the upper social classes are abandoning the ancestral tongue. Little by little, he fears, the native language will disappear, and Catalonia will look like it has been conquered by Castilians (42).

As the three men approach the cathedral, their conversation turns to ecclesiastical matters. At first Livio talks about the ongoing armed conflict between Pope Paul IV, allied with the king of France (maybe even with “lo gran Turc”), against Philip II, viceroy of Naples (46-51). Changing to a less divisive topic, Fabio gives information about the number of clergymen in Tortosa and their income, criticizing the bishop for not using his to help the “infinitat de pobres mendicants que avui ha en Tortosa” or to contribute to the completion of the cathedral (54-57).

After lunch the three continue their walk about town, beginning the second *colloqui* quoting proverbial sayings which show how the “nació catalana” is “gentil i sàvia” (65). Pedro says that Livio has treated them to a “taula de Barcelona,” but Fabio points out that this old expression has taken on negative connotations “i par que es diga en perjudici de tota Catalunya” (64). Livio recalls the legend of the Empress of Germany's arrival in Barcelona along roads bordered with “taules” full of food and drink. He thinks that the meaning of

"taula de Barcelona" has changed because "d'aqueix refran abús han fet los maliciosos." That he refers to "estos castellans que s'ho beuen tot" can be deduced from the many examples he offers to show that those Spaniards never acknowledge that they own many of their military glories to help from Catalonia. "In their arrogance, per fer gloriosa la sua pròpia nació, no dubten d'escriure mentides" (73). The *colloqui* continues with references to memorable deeds that honor Catalans and their nation.

In the third *colloqui* (87-103) the conversation turns to the city of Tortosa and the privileges granted her by Berenguer IV after the reconquest. Discussions about the origin and name of the city fill the fourth *colloqui* (105-129). The fourth deals with Catalonia's war against John II, enemy of Prince Charles of Viana, preferred by Catalans but assassinated (131-145).

Finally the three arrive at the Ebro, at the place where it can be crossed on wooden planks put across the tops of ten barges tied together side by side. The men get into a boat and *colloqui* six begins (153) recalling first the legend of "Otger cataló from Gotolània" (from where 'Catalònia') which Livio had retold over lunch). But Pedro wants to know more about fishing in the Ebro and the two 'locals' answer with a "lletania llarga" of names of valued fish, adding details about the gear used to catch them. Information follows about hunting, especially birds, then about horticulture, agriculture, forestry, useful wild plants, and minerals. Pedro has to concede that Tortosa is blessed with just as many "excel·lències" as is Valencia.

At this place (171) there should be, I think, a footnote asking if Despuig was inspired here by the description of "les especials *bellese*s de la ciutat de Valencia" found in the letter which precedes—but only in the edition of 1499!—Francesc Eiximenis' *Regiment de la cosa pública*.

But most of the editors' footnotes are just right. They quote variant readings of all manuscripts, explain rare words, and provide information about quotations in the text, or historical or historical events, persons and places alluded to by Despuig.

In this reviewer's opinion, the *Colloquis* should be required reading in all schools of Tortosa and the Terres de l'Ebre (and be recommended to all the others in the Paisos Catalans). The regularized spelling makes the text easily accessible. A few additional footnotes could animate students from Tortosa to do some 'fieldwork,' comparing what is described in the text from 1557 with what they can see for themselves. For example, they could search for buildings or tombs which show, next to the owner's family crest, "una *marca* entretal·lada en pedra," explained in page 44, footnote 37, as "emblema o segell comercial," without an example. What can they find out about Santa Càndia, former patron saint of Tortosa who, in Despuig's time, attracted pilgrims from all over Spain asking for a ribbon of the length of Càndia's statue (53, fn. 117)? My question here is: When did pilgrims start coming, even from Germany, asking for a ribbon with the exact length of the sash or belt the Virgin Mary had worn during her pregnancy, and then, one night in March 1178, appearing among

angels in Tortosa's cathedral, had placed, as a present, on the main altar, the still much revered *Cinta*, mentioned in page 58?

Such questions—and many more the attentive reader of the *Colloquis* will be inspired to ask—show the enduring interest of Despuig's book, now admirably edited by the trustworthy team of Enric Querol and Josep Solervicens, and nicely printed and presented by the Abadia de Montserrat.