

NIGEL TOWNSON: *The Penguin history of modern Spain 1898 to the present*, London, Allen Lane, 2023, 608 págs.

The work of synthesis is perhaps the most difficult for the historian, as the inevitable generalisations that are sometimes necessary will irritate the specialist, which is ultimately what professional historians today are. Raymond Carr's *Spain 1808-1939*, second edition 1808-1975 (1966 and 1982), became the standard history most widely known in the Anglo-Saxon world. If we stop to consider the volume of works published on Spain in English and Spanish since the early 1980s, it is obvious that the vast increase in scholarship on Spanish history is close to unmanageable. Yet Nigel Townson has embraced this undertaking, taking on the enormous challenge of producing both an accessible and rigorous history of Spain, that is sure to act for many in the English-speaking world as their first introduction to Spanish history. Townson's work is enlightening and informative. He is a clear and engaging writer and, this volume should be read by both its intended audience and, by those whose professional life is dedicated to the study of modern Spanish history.

Whilst amongst professional historians there is a broad consensus around the factors that have determined Spanish historical development, certain aspects of Spain's history continue to intrude into the present and are heavily prone to politicisation. In much, if not most of this volume, Townson does a nimble job. He appropriately and rightly returns Spanish history to its European home, constantly offering us appropriate points of comparison to other south European societies. These assessments are invariably of value, including when applied to seemingly exceptional events, such as the crisis of 1898. Spain emerges as not only undergoing many of the upheavals of its neighbours but also as a society that articulated a profound civic and at times revolutionary political culture. This can be termed the normalisation of both the country and its historiography. For an English-speaking readership, this is particularly important because attitudes and perceptions of Spain, partly attributable to the historiography of individuals such as Raymond Carr, are still heavily laden with myth. As Townson notes, «Spain displayed the same basic modernizing trends as other European societies during the nineteenth century» (p.9) and if we move into the early decades of the twentieth century «it was still more advanced than most countries in Eastern and Southern Europe» (p. 53).

Outside of the period between 1931 to 1950, I was repeatedly struck by the judicious and nuanced argument that Townson employed. He provides an excellent survey of the post-1998 period up to and including the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. Yet when we reach 1931, Townson seems to feel the

need to challenge *all* leftist interpretations of the Second Republic, the Civil War and early Francoism. Perhaps this can be interpreted as an intent on his part to provide a non-partisan account of these three periods and incorporate much of the valuable historiography of recent decades. We are informed in detail that the Second Republic was not the model democratic experiment it has been made out to be. Some of this seems to be reiterating a critique that is now widely accepted among historians, as I do not know of any contemporary historian of Spain who would claim the Republican experiment was beyond critique and that it represented some democratic idyll. It is hardly surprising that a new political experiment made mistakes, both major and minor. If the Second Republic is given a psychosocial and political memorialisation in Spain today, it is because it is deemed to be both a great improvement on what went before and of course, of what came after 1939. It is remembered because it represents something of value. That the new ruling elites of the Second Republic were inexperienced, had contradictory ambitions, exhibited rhetorical radicalism but pragmatic practice, is hardly novel. For example, we are told that after the elections of February 1936, we see «the determination of the workers to attract revenge for the repression of 1934-1935» (p. 184). Yet we are not informed what was the nature of this revenge. Again, no one today disputes that what happened at Paracuellos was a war crime though many would challenge the view of Townson that most of the International Brigaders were «Stalinists» (p. 248).

I noted earlier that Townson does a strong work of comparison throughout. We are informed that post-war Spain was hungry but so were other European countries, including post-WWII Germany, Greece and the Netherlands. Whilst we are given exact numbers of those who died of starvation in these instances, a figure of deaths by starvation in Spain in the 1940s is strikingly absent. We are also told in detail about the legal procedures that marked Francoist repression. Whether a legal machinery provided the framework for mass executions or these were extra-judicial, or in the case of Spain, some combination of both, seems to be the least important aspect of the repressive process. This was an artificially constructed jurisprudence of a new regime that imposed its system and interpretation of justice and used the law as a weapon of violence. Whilst Francoist Spain employed a veneer of its own legality to its procedures, this would have been little comfort to those it executed.

Once we leave early Francoism, the book returns to a perceptive survey of mid and late Francoism, the transition and beyond, which makes even more jarring some of the puzzling interventions Townson makes of the period 1931-1950. We are left with a volume that is valuable and deserves to be read.

Between 1898 and 1930, and again from around 1950 to the present, Townson often produces outstanding work. However, his more partisan interventions, seemingly positioned against a perceived dominant leftist narrative of the Republic, Civil War, and Francoist repression, detract from the balance of the volume, preventing it from becoming the definitive successor to Carr's account for English-speaking readers.

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JOSÉ LUIS AGUDÍN MENÉNDEZ: *El Siglo Futuro. Un diario carlista en tiempos republicanos (1931-1936)*, Zaragoza, Publicaciones de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2023, 558 págs.

La obra *El Siglo Futuro. Un diario carlista en tiempos republicanos (1931-1936)*, de José Luis Agudín Menéndez, ofrece un exhaustivo análisis del periódico homónimo durante la Segunda República española. Este trabajo, que constituye una versión reducida de la tesis doctoral defendida en 2021 por su autor, se suma por méritos propios a las principales aportaciones de la historiografía académica sobre el carlismo, de la que también se nutre Agudín: desde los estudios de Martin Blinkhorn, Julio Aróstegui o Jordi Canal hasta los de Eduardo González Calleja, Antonio M. Moral Roncal, Javier Ugarte o Francisco Javier Caspistegui. Sin prescindir de los variados —y a veces imprescindibles— marcos teóricos e interpretativos ofrecidos por estos y otros investigadores, el autor ha desarrollado en los últimos años valiosos estudios centrados en el carlismo, el tradicionalismo político y la prensa católica en la España contemporánea.

José Luis Agudín ha acometido una compleja labor que debía afrontar un obstáculo inicial nada desdeñable: la ausencia de fondos archivísticos tanto de la empresa periodística como de sus propietarios, teniendo en cuenta que las instalaciones del rotativo fueron confiscadas tras el fracaso del golpe de Estado de 1936. No obstante, este escollo se convierte en uno de los puntos fuertes de la obra, ya que la pericia investigadora del autor le ha permitido suplir con solvencia las carencias derivadas del uso de fuentes tan variadas como dispersas. El resultado es un texto sólidamente estructurado, construido a partir de la riquísima información recopilada en una decena de archivos —algunos con varios fondos documentales de interés, como el Archivo Histórico Nacional o el Archivo General de la Universidad de Navarra, que conserva el fondo de Manuel Fal Conde— y en más de medio centenar de periódicos, principalmente *El Siglo Futuro*, objeto de una sistemática revisión.