Sanctifying the Hispanic March: Crusades, Politics and the Twelfth-Century Historia of Raymond of Barbastro

Barbastro, located on the foothills of the Aragonese Pyrenees (Spain), was a strategic city for the eleventh- and twelfth-century military struggles between Christian and Muslim kingdoms. Known to historians as the destination of the first official ‘Crusade’ (1063-1065), Barbastro was finally captured by King Pedro I of Aragon and Navarra in 1101. The present paper seeks to discuss, by examining a hitherto neglected liturgical source, some facets present in the afterlife of Barbastro as a part of the newly formed Christian frontier territories. A late twelfth-century Psalter and Hymnal from the city of Barbastro, currently in the Lleida Capitular Archive (Ms. RC_0029, olim Roda 11), contains a hagiographic portfolio for St Raymond, Bishop of Barbastro-Roda (d. 1126). Written ca. 1138 this material represents one of the earliest extant ‘libelli’ for a saint in the territories of the Spanish March. I seek to present the main characteristics of the saint, and, more importantly, to discuss how his elevation is tied to pressing issues confronting the community of Barbastro. An analysis of the vita and historia reveals the liturgical ‘corpus’ of St Raymond participating in contemporary issues touching on developing a regional crusading ideology, settling ecclesiastical disputes, and acting as a peculiar specula principum to Arago-Catalan nobility.

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