

Book review of 'Sobre la libertad humana'

Bernard Reilly
Villanova University

Nov 1977

Sobre la libertad humana: En el reino asturleonés hace mil años. By CLAUDIO SAINCHEZ-ALBORNOZ. Prologue by JULIO GONZALEZ GONZALEZ. Madrid, 1976. Espasa-Calpe. Illustrations. Tables. Pp. 199. Paper.

This compact volume is perhaps the best possible introduction for the student and general reader to the massive work done on early Spanish medieval history by Sanchez-Albornoz over the past half-century. In the five brief essays which comprise the work, he argues again his familiar theses that the incomplete Muslim conquest of the eighth century, the development of a Christian redoubt in the Cantabrians, and the existence between the two of an empty "frontier" in the valley of the Duero, combined to influence the development of a society unique in western Europe.

In this society the necessities of defense and, eventually, the Reconquista kept the authority of the crown direct and strong. The poverty of the Cantabrian region kept the nobility and the church weak. The slow, painful process of the resettlement of the meseta of Old Castile was, as a result, essentially the work of the class of free, small landholders with the support of the crown. It had produced, by the year 1000, a world in which the peasant class was largely free, not servile, worked its own land, not another's, and as a result owed military service, could plead at law and possessed substantial lights of local self-government.

The professional historian will see in this little book the reflection of the old master's incomparable mastery of the available source materials. He will sigh, with Sanchez-Albornoz, for a more complete editing and meticulous examination of those sources and those still unedited. But even the student will recognize the author's long-time preoccupations—the assertion of Spain's originality in Europe, the definition of Spain as Castile, the search for a historical foundation for liberty in Spanish society, and an abiding suspicion of church and aristocracy. The historiographer will discern much of the history of Spain in the first half of the twentieth century, prompting and enriching the vision of this diminutive volume.

The Ted K Archive

Bernard Reilly
Villanova University
Book review of 'Sobre la libertad humana'
Nov 1977

The Hispanic American Historical Review, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Nov., 1977), pp. 722-723.
Duke University Press

www.thetedkarchive.com