

introduction

Mark Gredler: So good morning, we're here with Jaime Nuño and tell us a Little bit about the foundation and what we have here.

Jaime Nuño: Well, the Santa Maria la Real foundation of historic heritage is an organization that has a long life, its origins date back almost 40 years ago. But well, it has had a very slow development process, always primarily linked to the recovery of the Monastery of Santa Maria la Real in Aguilar de Campoo and then after we started those works it was proposed the intervention of the whole environment, fundamentally in Romanesque art and has been expanding its horizons as to work in much of the Spanish heritage, studying it, reporting it, programs for scheduling jobs, tourism programs, well... everything that has to do, as we say, with the natural heritage, cultural and social to promote further development.

Mark Gredler: Yes, very well. So, how did you become interested in the subject of erotic Romanesque art?

Jaime Nuño: Well, we have been working many years in the Romanesque art, especially in the setting of Aguilar de Campoo, and once we developed a series of courses to spread this heritage and normally every time we distribute issues to address, work issues on knights, on castles and once well, could be interesting getting in the subject of erotic Romanesque since they spoke plenty of it but I considered there wasn't a serious analysis. It doesn't mean that I had done the serious analysis, but it seemed to me it was important to see the status of the issue and see possible lines of future research. And well, as a result of that it's a topic with a lot of interest and maybe because it's an interesting topic it has had its development.

Mark Gredler: Yes well, it's a very unknown topic, at least in the United States; most Americans have no idea that there is this kind of art in the churches of the 11th and 12th centuries.

Jaime Nuño: Of course, medieval art... the Middle Ages is considered a dark age in which people were subject to a rigid morality from the church in which they are not able to do anything but build, survive and pray. It is a completely false image, in the Middle Ages as in any other historical period, people have had their joys and sorrows, their moments of euphoria, festivals, prayers, everything. The thing is that, of course, we always judge the past... not only the past, but the present even of other cultures, of other territories, we judge them by our mental systems and you can't do that; the historian must free himself of his own moral framework or functionality of his society if he wants to correctly analyze others, because not all values are universal nor are eternal. Things change as years go by and with centuries and in different territories which doesn't seem bad to us, might seem good, and what we think is good to them might seem an aberration. So anyone can happily judge other cultures, other periods; but a historian cannot do it if he wants to be serious.

Mark Gredler: But it's really difficult to put yourself in the mind of a medieval person, it's almost impossible for us to think like someone used to think.

Jaime Nuño: It's difficult; it's difficult for us to put ourselves in the place of another, even of someone that is around us. And it's true since we always start working with many prejudices, and also since we are subjects we are subjective and we can't help it. But within that, knowing that we have our own culture, each of us that we have a personality and that we are individuals, it's difficult to be fully objective, almost utopia, but you have to try to be as objective as possible, without achieving the purity of objectiveness but try to at least not be subjective. And it's true that putting yourself in the world of the medieval man is too complicated, first because those are very different mentalities, and second because the information we have it's always very... scarce and partial, the first hand information. And furthermore, because even the documentary sources of the time admit many lectures, it's not like anything now, now we can grab a newspaper and the same news offered to a newspaper, offered to another, it's radically different; so which is the truth? Probably both have as much truth as lie. So in the medieval sources, documentation written in the Middle Ages was written with a purpose, and we have to know that purpose. Not everything we read about the Middle Ages written in that time was true or was... it could be biased, mostly in a time in which many of the information has a clear function, to indoctrinate or propaganda of the institution or the personality that wanted that written. But anyway, knowing that, those are also the techniques of the historian, he has to know to spread it and logically when it reaches the audience the historian must make that proposal as well, to explain, apart from what he thinks it's true, what is that he thinks could be manipulated, because if the historian is based on completely subjective missions, the people who don't have the historical analysis capacity, what are they going to think? What we as historians offer them in a silver tray.

Mark Gredler: Yes... well, your article *Sexo y Arte Románico* of El País, you begin with an interesting phrase that is "fornicators, exhibitionists, venerable elderly that masturbate, passionate lovers, lonely phallus... seem strange images to decorate a Romanesque church, in plain, dark and repressive Middle Ages." Since that time was repressed, what are some of the statements given about this subject? Of procreation...

Jaime Nuño: Well there is... to begin with, it catches my attention by far how in a place like a Christian catholic church there could be representations of what is considered as not appropriate for the Christian morality. I mean, lust is one of the big sins for Christianity, however there are representations that are clearly of exhibitionists, men and women naked that make love, that seems a contradiction. So of course, the first that calls our attention is why is it in a church? And there have been many explanations, one of them, the first maybe, is that it was a liberty of the stonemasons, meaning it was a stonemason, a crew that worked and it seemed to them that it could be hot, a little risqué and so they did it. I think it's difficult... it seems to me it's very difficult because you can see them, they are not hidden, they are not in places or sites that are remote and many of them are important monasteries, an important monastery that probably paid to the community or the canonical, whoever they were, would allow to do something that was against what they considered pure, that was not considered just, couldn't be done. It seems to me that idea is out of place, to think someone does freely

and is damaging who is paying for it. On the other hand, it has been said that they try to reflect the true sin, meaning, sin is reflected and lust and its one representation of what could be the sinful medieval society. It's represented in the exterior of the churches, in these corbels, in these windows, the sins; meanwhile, inside the representations would be of purity. Outside is the world; inside is the house of God. But this idea doesn't fit either, because in... yes, it's true that most part of these representations are outside, but there are also churches that have them inside and in places that are well seen, even in the arch of triumph. It has been said as well that it's an encouragement to procreation, that people was needed... it's an explanation mostly Hispanic, people for the reconquest, to repopulate, but in that case it would explain the representations there are in Spain, but not the ones that you can see in other places of Europe. It's true that they always needed arms, meaning, kids were an asset, but I think it wasn't necessary to encourage to procreation because there were many childbirths, that wasn't the problem, the problem was the survival of the newborn. A woman could have fifteen, seventeen children and survive two or three. The problem wasn't that people was... they held back at the time of having children, all the contraire. So that idea doesn't do it for me either. It has even been said that they try to represent the enemy, the vices, and it has been tried to see also the image fundamentally of the Muslim, again that would be an idea in Spain to obtain a better contact with the Muslim culture and could be a little logical, but in places of Europe like Ireland and England where the contact with the Muslim world were the ones that went to crusades... seems more difficult. But in any case, also in the images of these men and of these women, mostly the women, they go with the Christian attire, they are really Christians.

Mark Gredler: There are really no signs that these figures have a Muslim person.

Jaime Nuño: It's true, it's true that the Muslim to the enemy, the enemy whomever it might be... meaning, for example, it happened in the trial with the Templar, with the Templar when the King of France wanted to keep all the riches and all their goods, what did he do? What was done in those times, tell them they were homosexuals, that they did satanic rites... the enemy always had that image. The witch, the Muslim and everything, it was the worst. So well, it was... but I think to represent merely the idea of the Muslim, not only by the attires but by the context, seem unlikely. It's true they seem many times in the context of music and the women are dressed with sheer attires that could be similar to a more Muslim fashion, but also the dresses of the dancers that were used always a little bit more, I don't know, more charming, more close to the body, more sheer, more silky in order to be able to make the movement of the arms and the body more attractive. I don't think they are necessarily a Muslim image. And so, I think that in reality what is reflected is a pretty daily image, I still think the Muslim world is pretty closer to the classical world in terms of mentality than we think. It's true that the church tries to avoid all of that, but to them the classic world was the best, it was... it had been the golden age, the Romanesque, we call it Romanesque but they didn't call it that way, but they did try to imitate the roman world. Carlo Magno tried to imitate the ways and the culture of the classic world, always the Middle Ages, the renaissance, until the XVIII century, have even been trying to look even in the sources from antiquity for the essence. And even, I believe the popular culture, the traditional culture by the rites they had, even the religious rites were even closer yet to the classic world than it was in centuries after and it

was probably the counter-reformation, the world of Trent that made the Christian world completely asexual, it wasn't before. You only have to read medieval poems, the examples, the stories, the Cameron ones so well known; they are full of sex everywhere. If that had been truly sinful, it hadn't been published nor had that success. When you read the poems of Guillermo of Aquitania, one of the most important personalities from the political standpoint of Europe, the poems that make you think that some president, some great personality, some great politician of our time published poems of that sort and on top of that to be well known, wasn't in an anonymous form, seems odd to us but they did. And then you say well, sex wasn't as rare or hidden or sinful as it might seem. And there is the line on which you have to keep working, revising the literature, reviewing the documents of the time.

Mark Gredler: Yes well, two centuries later but I am a fan of the Libro de Buen Amor (the Book of Good Love) and there are similar things.

Jaime Nuño: All the tradition of the frogs, the *herrenarias* that is during the Middle Ages, at the end of the Middle Ages the Song-book of Baena, when you see some of the poems it makes some of us blush, but then, how come people in the Middle Ages published this? And also, when you read that type... the Buen Amor book is written by an archpriest, meaning a church man. It even seems odd because if it were someone of critical thinking, that is hard enough, but someone critical of the official thinking of the church, all good, but it's someone from the church that writes it. And even these elements that we're seeing and don't fully understand, this erotic Romanesque, we don't quite understand it... of course, by not understanding it with the thinking of those who did it, we judge it with our own thinking. It's like when the prehistoric men thought the thunder was God because they didn't know how it was produced, then like us the only explanation we have is our morality, we apply that morality to that of other centuries, but it doesn't have to be that way.

Mark Gredler: What we find nowadays, well we find obscene and something to hide, but people back then didn't see it that way, right?

Jaime Nuño: Well let's see, there were even rites like *risus paschalis* that it was the priest who on Easter in some churches it's said that the joy was such because Christ was resurrected that day that dirty jokes were told and even obscene scenes were made starring the own priest, because it provoked laughter. Maybe it would have something else to do, I say, with the festival, normally the erotic scenes appear in a context of music, circus, and joy and so that can be their joy.

Mark Gredler: Well you were saying that these erotic scenes inside the churches even came to masturbation...

Jaime Nuño: Yes, there's actually a study about *risus paschalis*, an Italian doctor, I don't quite remember the name, talks about it; even talks about the debate there was among church intellectuals, we're talking about the end of the Middle Ages, there are some who defend it as precisely a demonstration of joy and there it ends. Not even within the church was it well seen or frowned upon, there were people, and there were opinions for everything. Logically with the passing of the centuries and a more severe morality, more puritan, in a general level Christianity

became more puritan starting the XVI century, Catholicism, protestants and all the creeds that have a bond with Christianity, it wasn't like that until then. There's something else that has to be understood, sex is private for us, even when someone practices it in public it seems to us like a real scandal. But in the vast majority of the houses in the Middle Ages, in the XI and XII centuries, when these representations are made or even after that, are real huts, almost all Europe... the houses are pretty similar, a house with a partition wall in the middle, a roof with a partition in the middle, on one side the livestock and on the other the whole family. Only one room where you eat, where you cook and where you sleep. Of course, the parents are there, the children and even some grandparent. So sex was there. In hospitals people... well, it is known that men and women were separated in all, but you slept in shared beds, it seems to us that sharing beds especially among men is horrendous, women still can share but not men. However still, medieval hospitals entered two or even more in a bed if it was necessary. Maybe that physical touch wasn't as evil, it's true the church punishes it, chases it, it... well, specially the penitential, put within the own penitential are references even to impose punishment to the way the sex has been practiced, so of course there is something to condemn and to condemn it it's described with detail, which is even more remarkable.

Part 1

Part 2

Jaime Nuño: And it's also true that these Romanesque representations are orthodox sex, meaning, there are no positions in general, there are also things that don't fit very well but there are positions that have to not be tolerated by the church. Because positions a little more creative were condemned because they said it didn't favor procreation as much, so the normal position and the women is funny, appear naked but also always with the head covered by the head cloth; those are married women. There are also women with the hair loose, that are... that would be the single ones, yes that is rarer, but in any case that would be a sinful evidence and in Segovia, in Fuentidueña if I recall correctly, there as a representation where there is a woman with the hair loose and a rustic, a rustic noticeable because they always have a head cloth and the rustic the shepherds of the mountain those are the ones that represent sin in general, people without education, more superstitious...

Mark Gredler: But the musicians as well, right?

Jaime Nuño: Those are also people indeed more joyful but that doesn't mean it's not seen as something not fully acceptable, meaning, in some way the music is condemned, there are clergymen that condemn... they condemn joy, that's something that Umberto Eco files very properly in *The Name of The Rose*, laughter, you can't laugh, it's sin. But there are people for everything, truly... but music also brought a lot of joy and the bishops had musicians at their service, the kinds had musicians at their service, religious music and profane music, meaning, there has always been a strict disciplinarian, authentic Taliban that is said now in everything. But one thing is what someone who admits to absolutely nothing can

do, not even laughter, and that society is like that or that the whole ecclesiastic stratum is like that.

Mark Gredler: Even joy was associated with festivals as well, right? Even carnival.

Jaime Nuño: Yes, we even say that there moments in which joy was boundless, the medieval man for that was... much more devious, so to speak, much more in extremes than us. Joys were huge and the sorrows were brutal. Now it's hard to see people that laughs out loud, there are smiles, there are joys, there are hugs, but for example, there is a trait where it's shown that we are calmer with emotions, that's with death. We die, we dress ourselves in black, the sunglasses, you cry a little, but there are no signs of tragedy; the medieval man would tear his cheeks, rip hair off, quarrel and cry. But would go inside a church and there were important relics in it and would cry out of joy, and the sermons of San Vicente Ferrer are famous because they would make people cry. Now... well, some might get excited and shed a tear when listening to a great speaker, even more so if it's something very emotional, but that was much greater and much more... main is the medieval in that way, tremendous joys and tremendous cries as well. So probably inside all that there was also the way of living it and condemning it, there are people who thought it wasn't wrong... it seems to me that it was much more diverse than we think, the big mistake we have now is thinking that in medieval society was something uniform and plain. I don't believe it was something like that, there's still a lot to learn but little by little it's coming out, the ways of thinking, the attitudes, they also had to enjoy and enjoy logically.

Mark Gredler: Well, speaking about laughter, going back to the subject of the Libro de Buen Amor book, I think there is an important part of the Libro de Buen Amor book, it was laughter and humor but also do you agree that humor, laughter were important for the erotic Romanesque?

Jaime Nuño: Yes, when we see... of course, if we take for example a book or a work of indoctrination parting from the church they tend to be rigid, very serious, but when we leave that frame and take the literature of the time, the Buen Amor book, from the Romanic time we don't have much but we do have little stories and a little after, well into the XIV century, almost all the stories are very humorous, all of them in the humor key. The Cameron one is continuously humor, the Libro de Buen Amor book... the irony, that is always very much present, it won't be in the stories and telling them... also there always seems to be a matter of someone smart, someone slightly clumsy, there is deceit, there are continued... I don't know, everything to provoke, those works are about showing lessons but precisely the teaching through humor. It seems to me that when we see those works, it makes me think that the medieval man had an expression that we never know and that is how we read it. When those works had their implantation, of course it is as if we read... we take and we base ourselves only in what the great philosophers of the time would read, and they have another sort of debate that didn't reach the common people, but what is known about troubadours, always a little life, the joy; they had enough with working hard and being waiting or at the shadow of any trouble. But that's how it happens with the societies now let's say... less developed, more problematic, even after all people are laughing, because it's fundamental survival to laugh. And in the most dramatic

moment, you find a minute to celebrate, to enjoy with friends or to laugh at anything. Even when you read things about the Spanish Civil War, the trenches for example, the tribute to Cataluña now, you say, inside the trenches they must have been laughing, there were shootings but logically suffered a lot and died, but they also had to find time for humor. And in the Middle Ages I think humor is what's reached us the less but had to be present and even so, these elements are a way of showing joy of life, it's a speculation of now.

Mark Gredler: Very well, going back to the subject of ancient roman, the Romans of antiquity that a lot of the Romanesque comes from there but also there were phallic charms and these things for Romans that had a different sense, but for Romans it was the protection against the evil eye, and for good luck...

Jaime Nuño: All the cultures I think have had a reference in sex, it's the way to continue the species, the way in which animals reproduce, it's a moment of pleasure and joy, but in almost every culture they have had that sort of fondness and protection. It was very common at the roman time also representations of sex, they appear in the paintings of private rooms in Pompeii of what is being recovered, the littler lighters that were put on the night tables, they have many indecent representations. There are some representations that are very pretty with small bells that were put at the entry of the doors, so when you opened the doors they would sound to tell the owner...

Mark Gredler: Yes, the phallus with bells.

Jaime Nuño: Yes, there is a phallus of that Samon that proceeds from a town and is kept in Barcelona, it's of a naked woman riding a phallus and putting a crown, crowning it, and underneath it was little bells and that is supposed to be a ring to hang it, the door would move and well... it's humorous. But also in the corner of the streets there were phallic representations, there was a cult to sex in what is linked with Priapus, Bacchus, Venus... its life, that is life and it's not seen like an outside thing, and Christianity did differentiate that, however. And the hangers with phallic representations are very common, which might be a sort of protection just like against diseases, we don't know it very well but when someone carries a pendant probably that is... the way it is done nowadays, you carry it because it's an emblem, you think it protects you or it identifies you somehow, whether it be form a religious standpoint or not; it has always been done that way. And the roman world has that type of representations and sex, vigor let's say of sex is also reflected in the vigor of the Gods, all the Gods have... even practice sex with violence if it were necessary, pretty savages the classical Gods. However Christianity goes on to become a more asexual religion, even though in principle there are representations in Christianity even older where Christ is also linked in a certain way with sexual potency. That is very diluted, much more diluted, but well, it's the same that after all Christianity is a religion with its origins in Judaism and that itself is more forgotten, but when you read the Old Testament, sex is everywhere and big personalities, big patriarchs and big kings were not precisely a model of virtue in their sexual behavior according to our criteria now that is different. But... well, there it is.

Mark Gredler: Well, when your partner Cesar did the route in Spanish television, there was a man in the route that had an interesting thing to say that, let's see if

I can find it... had said something like that it was daily life, normal life and people wanted to enjoy life and it was a very normal thing.

Jaime Nuño: Yes, just so, that's what I think as well, sex was part of life, I have already said that in a house... houses with many rooms begin to function very much at the end of the Middle Ages so then you can have your own private room, but not back before then. It was... it was there and well, I think sex forms part of life. Its true church doesn't criticize sex, what criticizes is to enjoy, the pleasure. Children... let's say, sex is to have children, to procreate, the pleasure part is that many times what they say is that you can't enjoy it at all, you can't laugh, you can't... what we said before, there is who thinks that is the way and there is who thinks it's not the way even inside the very own church. So that's why I believe it's not really frowned upon. But what they do advice is that it has to be done in a certain way and what is generally represented is that way.

Mark Gredler: You had even commented in your article of El País that there was a rule in which they must only procreate on Sunday night.

Jaime Nuño: Well, no... it's just that later on the church, the church stratum try to regulate your whole life, in principle in a certain way with some logic but sometimes they go overboard, one of the ways for example that intervenes is regulate the diet and so goes lent, so that you can't eat meat, won't stop generating a health problem specially among the rich, but the others were more difficult. They end up establishing peace and truce with God, meaning, a way that for divine saying to impose peace. The commandments do say not to kill and that we have to love each other and all that, but in the end the church says you can't fight (wrestle in bed) Saturdays nor Sundays and you end up adding days, days, days and in the end I think, I don't know if you could only fight (wrestle in bed) Mondays and Tuesdays, of course it was another thing to pay attention to that. But well, you try. And for example, in the eyes of the church a woman with her period is impure, can't practice sex, can't practice sex in certain holidays, can't practice sex during pregnancy until a time after has given birth. There is an Italian author, Alonso Giordano, that has calculated that in some years there are so many dates and if a woman is pregnant, she couldn't have sex for about four hundred days, meaning, during that whole year, and this would be an exaggeration. Another thing is that... that written was the truth and was the daily life, right now you just have to compare it to the writings of our time, imagine that any book that might seem absurd is kept and within a thousand years they say well, at the beginning of the XXI century, look what they thought. But there was what one or a group thought but the society wasn't like that. There are many things written now about morality, rules of behavior, about psychology that well, are opinions but are opinions; some serious, some debated but society isn't precisely like that. And many times even it's the contrary of what we talked, if you read the constitutions or the law, the law says you don't have to kill, but says you don't have to kill because there are many killings in general or because there are certain sorts of crimes, that is almost... other things that happen in the case of crimes. But also then you have many rules of behavior, happens in any society, there are rules of behavior that aren't illegal, are tolerated and that some seem better and some seem worse, you have again the law for that, in United States, the states have very diverse laws, it's the same country, almost like in Spain but you have over there even more and there are things even contradictory in one

place and another from a moral standpoint even what is the truth? Surely people from one place and from another with very different rules must think exactly the same. Because one thing is what the rule says, the writings, and another is what is being done.

Part 2

Part 3

Mark Gredler: ...it's just that normally the law is like you say, the law is against one thing that happened and these things happened, but there were some strong laws against sex with animals and...

Jaime Nuño: Yes, there is one thing... well, there are even things that are truly tolerated and that to us won't seem okay. For example, when you read the *Siete Partidas* of Alfonso X written in the mid XIII century, well those are very strict rules, very basic that can result from a society of that time in principle not as sophisticated if you will, like now. So then there is a moment that says women that are not sacramental or something like that, talks of the loved, the concubine, the lover and that you may have another woman. That is curious because it says God forbade it, the church doesn't want that, but that ancient wise men seeing that it could provoke many evils, evils such as rapes, attacks, tolerated it. It says, it's not good, but its tolerable comes to say and regulates it, it says the rights those women have. Meaning, it doesn't mean you can't have it, it's saying it's not good, it's frowned upon, that it goes against religion, but well, you can't exaggerate either and then ends up regulating the rights and inheritance those women must have. So of course, it's true that later says if a Christian man is found with a Jewish woman, you have to kill her, or... normally if it's a Christian woman and a Muslim man or a Jew, kill both; in the scenario that the Christian is a man, another punishment is imposed and kill the other. And yes, all that is homosexuality, bestiality and all that is considered a sin... there is no place where you can see the slightest tolerance about it.

Mark Gredler: But at the same time, just like erotic Romanesque, some say that it's all a representation of sin, those sins are not represented in Romanesque.

Jaime Nuño: Those sins... there is a representation in some French Bible, it seems to me is the *Bible moralisée*, that does have representations of homosexuals, but clearly condemning it, meaning it's a little the image of Sodom and Gomorra, what is shown in the Bible; it's described but simply to justify the punishment. Here in the representation, for example, when there's an exhibitionist couple, no one is attacking them or anything that allows thinking it's really condemned. It's true that there is nothing that allows us thinking it's a manifestation to provoke towards that, meaning, it's not praised but there is nothing that is condemned. However, in the subject of homosexuality it is condemned, at least in the writings that are much clearer. I'm saying it's not the case with sex with men and women because it shows that the church doesn't like it when it's for pleasure, but it has to be normal so that the species can go on. It's also remarkable, for example, some representations like there used to be in England, Ireland, what it's called the *sheela-na-gig*, that was like a sin and really are monstrous beings, which increases their monstrosity showing an

exaggerated sex but it is a monstrous representation. It is also true there are some characters that are masturbating, there are some in Cervatos and are like deformities but curiously enough most part of the ones masturbating have a thoughtful demeanor, of honorable elder men with long beards that are thinking and are... it's also a shocking image of classical look, like antique scenes.

Mark Gredler: Those are very different than The Song of Roland, right?

Jaime Nuño: Yes well, I say it's a field in which there's still research to be done, there's a lot to read about the culture of the time, read between lines and probably there isn't a truth about all this, it's not that it's sinful or not, because I say that I'm not convinced, that what they are trying to show is just sin, I don't want to say it's the contrary but I just want to say that there are some elements that clearly, precisely because of the monstrosity, that ugliness, they can represent a vice but there are others that doesn't seem to me like it's that way. And when I see the Villanueva de la Nía church, in the arc of triumph a woman with her legs spread open, well... it would distract us from the mass, I don't know if it distracted someone from the XII century, I don't know but I consider it. If not, why is it there?

Mark Gredler: But I also think it could be that the meaning of this art was more than one meaning, and the intention was to be able to give many different interpretations for example.

Jaime Nuño: Well, many times it's said that sculpture and Romanesque art is because it's true, there are texts of the time that say that paintings and sculpture have to teach the people who don't know how to read the truths of the bible, but well, that's being said in a generic way. I have said it many times; I can't imagine the priest in the church every Sunday, every day of mass, telling the capital again. Among other things because many clergymen were so little educated that not even they would understand, the councils, the synods, talk continuously about that, of the lack of preparation rural clergymen have. It's not the same as a big personality of the court or an important bishop or an abbot from a monastery with a grand library and a cultural trajectory than someone that is in a village and hasn't left it or surely doesn't really understand the very Latin being spoken in the mass, so of course the village folk don't either.

Mark Gredler: No but this reminds me that one with a lot of knowledge, one being very wise could have a mistaken interpretation too, for example going back to the Libro de Buen Amor book, there's this story of the Roman and the Greek, that have a debate using signs and both misinterpret what one says to the other.

Jaime Nuño: Yes, it happens in the Middle Ages and it happens now, you can be very wise but be mistaken, because if not you would be infallible and I think that very few, there are very few infallible. You can have criteria, standards, ideas and according to that you give your opinion but your opinion doesn't have to be... there's people like now that research in a more serious way and procures having a wider range of data to get to a conclusion and there are others that establish a theory with two, they still pretend both that the theory will be final but not necessarily the most... or just because any things are repeated, are true. It happened to me writing once, I'm a formed archeologist, writing about medieval ceramic and there's a certain type of medieval ceramic that is dated in this zone,

came to date between the VIII and X century, where does that come from? From a very old excavation in which someone, the archeologist, fifty years ago found an Visigoth brooch in a stratum, in one above found a Christ from the XIII century and said what is in the middle of those two moments, didn't have any other criteria, rightfully or wrongly said that. The next one, who found that type of ceramic, since he didn't know, had a reference. And the third, had two already. The twentieth that wrote, had nineteen references. But all with the same strength: none. I said of course, when you get there after thirty, forty years and say that's not true, you have to arm yourself with an amount of arguments because they say well, you come here to argue everyone else, but it's just that those arguments come from something that is unstable.

Mark Gredler: So if the first person has a good imagination, he could be wrong.

Jaime Nuño: Of course he could be wrong. Look, the theory that has been most successful about Romanesque art is the first one formulated, since this doesn't fit within the philosophical framework of the church, it has to be done by someone out of the margin, since those are churches this has to be the stonemason that do it freely and it stays there. So of course, it's a theory that in principle could be well thought but you have to analyze many other things and say well, in Santillana del Mar one of the big abbeys here in the north that in the interior there is a man and a woman there that is at a pretty visible height, it seems odd to me that the stonemason would leave it there when it's building it, but well, what are you putting there? It couldn't be that freedom. Surely the stonemason could offer the abbot or the community, I'm going to build this, but others would like to know, like when you're in your home and order a kitchen to be made or the bathroom or a work, but the architect tells you but I'm going to build this, then you can argue or not but you will be able to say hey, what have you done here? You made the kitchen round and I wanted it squared. So...

Mark Gredler: Could they make a suggestion?

Jaime Nuño: Sure, probably they made just like they make representations... I think for the most part the churches don't have a clear iconographic program, because the stonemasons, most part were people that copied... I can say like the construction workers nowadays, a construction worker now has seen a porch that he likes and tells you I'm going to make a porch I don't know where, some windows, I'm going to build some windows... So altogether might result very odd, and he has copied one thing from here, one thing from there... so in the Middle Ages it's true, there were places that had more strength where the good artists worked, and the others went and copied and said hey, I'm going to make a hunting scene for you, I'm going to make... it's that sometimes the same scenes are even repeated in the same capitols, they ran out of repertoire and sometimes repeat the same scene. In the very Cervatos, the same type of erotic capital that seems to be done by different hands is repeated, but what's the point in repeating the same figure? Well surely because they had a repertoire in their notebook and it was what they knew to make, and maybe in their moments the Cervatos community said no, I want figures to be seen, I don't want vegetable representations and in others they did, or those stonemasons were specialized in doing that. We don't know that, it's very hard knowing how the crew of workers functioned, the comings and goings that could happen, who designed it. Of

course, in some great monastery it's easy thinking, well, if the façade is telling the story of the adoration of Christ, the final judgment... but in a small church that you find come across sometimes... it's curious because more in gothic churches than in Romanesque churches, sometimes the corbels are smooth and there is one with a phallus. Why? I wouldn't know what to tell you.

Mark Gredler: Before you were saying that exhibitionists for example in the south of Cervatos, there is one shown in many pictures, you said that it was not necessarily an invitation nor a representation of sin but neither was an invitation to sex.

Jaime Nuño: Well, I think it's not an specific invitation to say this should not be done, daily life... sometimes when a hunting scene is reflected, it doesn't condemn hunting nor does it tell you that you must hunt, it's simply representing a hunting scene or a music scene. Because we can be redundant, just like it seems to us that hunting and for them it was a normal element, hunting doesn't have that... but music does because it's condemned by the church, well sometimes, but also is joy, music contributed to joy, in realizing even the greatness of God; it depends on the way it's seen. Then you have elements that you say they just don't fit, the Bayeux tapestry, that tells the story of the conquest of William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy of England after the battle of Hastings in 1076, tells the whole process of the war and in the margins, up and down, there are various animals and among them are men and women naked and for example, there's a naked woman and a naked man that is inviting and calling. This tapestry was done by the family of the duke, it's said it's done by the family of the duke and is also said it was exhibited in the interior of the Bayeux cathedral. You say now, how can this be? If that morality really exists and this is a sin, why is that there?

Mark Gredler: Well another interesting thing is that some say there is a relation maybe between the Camino de Santiago and the erotic Romanesque, but this is a little hard to prove.

Jaime Nuño: I haven't done any map, I'm gathering information to try one day to draw a distribution map, but it's clear that it's found... for example, there are many representations in Burgos, zones that are not Camino de Santiago, in Segovia. Let's see, there's the debate that I have had many times about what is the Camino de Santiago, there is Camino de Santiago and ways to Santiago. The Camino, the *iter Sancti Iacobi*, the Camino de Santiago is one, but when you leave my house to go to Santiago, that's my way to Santiago, so trying to adjust everything, no. It's true that it seems to me it's the Kilpeck in England, it's said that whoever did the church, whoever built the church, did it after having been in Spain awed by the things he had seen here. We don't know what would be his awe and what things he had seen, there is the famous *sheela-na-gig*, the most well known, but there are erotic elements in the Camino de Santiago. Cervatos is not on the Camino de Santiago, important, could be a route of people from ships that came from Santander, and came in this way... Bolmir, Villanueva de la Nía of course are not on the Camino de Santiago, Santillana del Mar, well in the north way... but that's forcing it too much. Precisely the most famous erotic Romanesque is not on the Camino de Santiago nor on the French way, it's not.

Mark Gredler: But you also said that... as you said, the *sheela-na-gig* isn't always showing her sex but it's spreading her sex with the hands and well, I don't know if that exists in Spain but I haven't seen...

Jaime Nuño: No, I haven't seen any representation or I don't remember one as rare as that one. Because that is a very specific format, of course but it's a format when you think... I don't know all the places or the environment in which it shows, of course if for example we see an exhibitionist, the Cervatos ones where it's most common is in the environment of Cervatos. Why? Because Cervatos is probably the model they copied, it's not that they thought here in a different way or that it was a proper image of the people here, but that someone makes a model and others copy it, you would have to see a little the distribution, I don't dare to see why they are in that zone. Because for example, naked atlas appear in many places, some better represented and some worse represented and exhibitionists there are of everything... the truth is many times the representations of exhibitionists that are in Italy don't look anything like the ones in France or the ones in Spain. There is a model for example, I'm thinking right now that it's a naked atlas shown in Poitiers, France and also in Frómista, so Frómista with a problem and it's that precisely the corbel where the date is says 1904, but remember, I think it's an original corbel, just that they later added the date in the restoration, so they look so much to the Poitiers ones that it's hard to think they made it up, specially because precisely also in the restoration of Frómista, a capital with a naked completely, but a naked without sex, it was mutilated; it was broken during the restoration, they had to put a replica. No one had been shocked about it there for centuries and beginning the XX century someone was shocked so much that the capital was broken, it's ironic.

Mark Gredler: I think that after just two centuries of Romanic when they made this art well, it was already starting to shock people in the XV century, XVI...

Jaime Nuño: No, I think in the gothic world still... well, the gothic world idealizes pure love a lot, almost platonic love, chivalric love, love without sex, in quotations because then...

Mark Gredler: Then the more profane.

Jaime Nuño: That... it's not that it's a religious love, it's a different love because the knights then also do what they do and search for the loved one and when you read poetry of the XV century like the Song-book of Baena, well it's nothing... it's pretty high toned. I think it was mostly starting the XVI century, the reform, the counter reform and if I'm a lot you're more and at the end I think there is a fight for English Puritanism, that it's taken to more consequences... I think that starting the XVI century the Puritanism was being reached until mid XX century or at least until the twenties.

Part 3

Part 4

Mark Gredler: Well that is one of the things Anthony Weir comments, that in the following centuries a lot of examples of this art have been destroyed that make it

really hard to know how many there really were and the distribution the way it really was.

Jaime Nuño: What happens is that it has been destroyed... churches have disappeared, surely many remarkable representations have disappeared, but what has been destroyed also is part of the piece, when a capital was seen of a character with a phallus well they could hit it and leave it without phallus, another thing is that it's in a high shelf and you have to climb something and that is a lot. But the representations there are in San Martin of Elines of the elder is very high and it seems amazing to me and you can see it well from below, and that hasn't been mutilated precisely because I think it's too high. And probably in other places because they had always seen it, unless a priest came from outside that... the rural clergy has formed part of the village in general and has been like it many times, you only have to look at the recommendations of the factory books given after the priest doesn't go, for example, in spring when they get to the meadows and the horses are there in heat, just in case that provoked great scandals it says... the animals in heat must have encouraged a lot.

Mark Gredler: We're eight centuries after or more than that and we still don't have it very clear all that it meant.

Jaime Nuño: Sure, that is one of the charms of the Romanesque art, dear God why do I like Romanesque art so much? Because so little is known about the time that anyone could come and share a theory and it's really hard to argue against it, you can come up with something and say no, I think it's that way, and handle the documentation to say no, this is not true, there isn't much documentation. In the gothic world, there's much, much more written, but in the Romanesque time... so of course, we go to a church, see these representations, imagine whatever we want, what people, what imagination, the imagination is not ours. I'm not saying they didn't have it but the imagination is not ours and of course, also the Romanesque matches with the smaller churches, with rural zones set aside in general and it has that charm. But we still have yet to know, yes.

Mark Gredler: Yes, even of different opinions because this morning Cesar and I were talking with Luis and he has the idea that yes, this art represented sin and it was always outside in the world, outside the church and inside the church the paradise, and the examples of that sex that is inside the church, is there because they were using the stones from before.

Jaime Nuño: Well, to begin with, if they come from another place, where do they come from? A capital of triumph arc is not a capital of a little window or a corbel that can be framed anyway, in Villanueva de la Nía that is a church that has many transformations, there isn't a lecture of walls there of pavements, I haven't seen that the capitals could have been framed or unframed. But even so, let's admit they could have been framed or unframed, where do they come from? It has to be a very big capital and for that it could only be a triumph arc because it has this shape, let's say, three faces are carved and the other glued to the wall; it has to be something like that. And in any case, if they proceed from somewhere else, when was it put there? And what time tolerated that? What thinking was in that time that it was tolerated? Because of course, in recent times, that wouldn't have been tolerated which is when it's more admissible and of course if it's not in

Romanic time, is it gothic time that things start to change a little? In the XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX century? Also there isn't any element that allows us to think so. In Santillana del Mar or the Bayeux Tapestry I mean, the Bayeux Tapestry was thought for the interior of a church.

Mark Gredler: It's clear to me as well that...

Jaime Nuño: Yes, I see... if something when there's a theory you have to try you see that I don't mean to say, many times when a historian begins a work on something, has an idea from which to start. Sometimes it has happened to me, I start with a work idea and at the end what I publish is the contrary, because I have seen that the idea I had wasn't that way and so therefore you're good because it's the way things work differently. But many times when you're in the process of research, questions end up being more than the answers, because each answer produces new questions. It's true that if you manage to answer two things and produce another and so it goes. But of course, trying to understand worlds with mental frameworks that have disappeared, are different, without documentation is really complicated, and so you go back the VIII, IX century and there is nothing. That's why of those circles all there is are great strokes, there have been great theories that have been functioning during many years and at the end have fallen little by little. But maybe the one built and the one who tore it apart, within twenty years maybe it will be falling apart as well, but still remains a little something of one and another bit of another and still that's not the reality.

Mark Gredler: So you have had an evolution of your ideas in the subject since then as well.

Jaime Nuño: When I started working in this it seemed to me the typical idea, what has been written always about the stonemason freedom, I didn't follow that one as much precisely because it seems rather unlike for me, but I won't say in a certain moment with certain things, meaning, instead of creating a vegetal image of a shape, instead of making it another, I don't say anything there. But effectively that they did condemn sin and that they weren't... they had to be outside, sure but when you see there are some inside, that the shapes are different, that when you begin to read poetry of the time, I remember when I have the conference about the one based in the work I have given you, I started reading a poem and I say, do you imagine George Bush, who by then was the president of United States I think or Clinton, I remember this was 2006 or something like that, well the one that was president of the United State then, I say, do you imagine Angela Merkel, imagine José Luis Rodriguez or Zapatero here in Spain, writing and publishing this? And we live in a moment of freedom. I say, why thinking that whoever wrote the... when this was written, and it was written by one of the most important personalities of Europe, the mentality then was different and this didn't form part of the daily life. If there is a great personality that writes it, why would it be sinful, have to be hidden and all that? It's a question, and we'll see if we can answer it or not, but I don't know, it was still honored, still it was someone at the margin, that would have something to be a poet in the time, but well, considering it was... I also put examples, Song of Songs of the bible, it may speak about the mystical body of God, but it's an erotic poem.

Mark Gredler: It's clear.

Jaime Nuño: And then in the Bible enter or don't enter things depending on the criteria that anyone has, and someone is able to convince no, this is a mystical image, this isn't earthly sex, but where are you going with that, your breasts or something like that, your hips... and it would have been out. Then these kind of things seem to me really interesting.

Mark Gredler: It had to do with sex, it's clear.

Jaime Nuño: Well, surely in all this there isn't only one truth, and the good thing is to keep working, finding new elements and I'm trying to draw a map with calm, because I usually don't have time, I'm gathering information, gathering points, gathering all those elements that are falling in my hands and then most of all the different theories... because all in principle can be reasonable and then... some have gotten angry with me because he says I have said he's not right. Well, if he tells me that I'm not right I don't get upset, let him prove it, it's not the same saying no, this isn't true. I say why I say this isn't like that, because I am dedicated to history, I don't get upset with someone that is dedicated to history as well, it's a vice we historians have, taking it to the personal field. So then, it seems very good to me and if I then, saying, understand a little the idea that it's a reflection of daily life that is true, inside that daily life there is a part that is joy and a part that is sin, to which moment each of the figures I don't know if we'll be capable of differentiating. But if that theory that I say someone comes and says well look, see this, see that... and convinces me, bless him.

Mark Gredler: But there are also representations of gluttony...

Jaime Nuño: Yes, and of greed. But for example, many of the ones handling the money belonged to the very own church, when the crusaders had to leave to the West, the one giving them money or getting lands instead of money was the church, made business from that point. Gluttony, country of Jauja, the country of Cucaña is a medieval place. It's a place where you eat, of course for a society that starves many times the wish to have the stomach full it's true they like also the biblical image of the rich... but medieval banquets that are organized, I have been reading a little for example, an inn for pilgrims in Paris, organized a great banquet each year on the day of Santiago and it came to more than a thousand guests and with the leftovers they fed three thousand poor. Seen like that... but of course, we're not going to understand the current church that condemns everything and we can begin with the being also has all sins. Meaning that...

Mark Gredler: Well another thing could be very interesting to write a book about the places of all the examples.

Jaime Nuño: I'm onto that since... I thought a while ago to make some sort of compilations, go back a little to work on the subject, include some of the last theories there are, see possibilities, read about every literature that might have examples of one thing and others and see. And yes I wanted to draw a map, see the different models there are... I have done a classification, the article I gave you is a classification, as I see there's also one here, I didn't know this work, and there are things that don't reach here and drawing a map because a map can help us understand. But the map has to be handled carefully, because we draw a map on the elements that have survived, of course only the ones that remain.

And then I think I explain it there or I have explained it in a conference at least, that when there is a concentration you have to know to what do we owe that concentration. It's not that in that place they were more inclined to sexual joy or anything, but precisely because the church models, let's say there's a school that ends up copying on your surrounding and then by figurative traditions. In Galicia or in Cataluña are less figurate sculptures, so they don't show up as much, here is pretty common, there is a concentration here of Romanesque buildings very big in small place, it's all normal. You have to help understand it.

Mark Gredler: And for the researchers it would be interesting as well to have the coordinates of for example, the examples. The coordinates, the GPS place.

Jaime Nuño: Yes, well we have it now in Spain, we have almost everything geo referenced, the work we're doing in Spain on digital Romanesque reference all the buildings, meaning everything... all the Romanesque Spanish is geo referenced.

Mark Gredler: Since many years ago, but I had many troubles trying to locate the San Pedro de Tejada, in Burgos.

Jaime Nuño: Well I have had problems in Galicia, one of the things I am determined on doing and I never end up doing is a mobile app with a browser for Romanesque churches. Because I have lost a lot of time and you see the analysis and there are many roads, so if you want to go to this church, you go to the church and then you can download or access a little tab or our encyclopedia where you can read the information. I would have been thankful having some of that.

Mark Gredler: It would be very good, in my tablet I have topographic maps of all Spain that an English company has passed all the maps into digital to use in a phone or in a tablet and it would be interesting...

Jaime Nuño: But you have to pay to use it. Yes but right now we're referencing them in our encyclopedia. Sometimes we also have to do corrections because sometimes putting it has to be processed, but well, we estimate there could be nine thousand Romanesque testimonies including what's in museums or small furniture pieces in Spain. But the buildings at least and yes, that are... yes.

Mark Gredler: So let's see if there's anything else... here it is, what this man was saying about the route you made, says it comes from a very lively time where people knew how to live and enjoy, so that was his idea of the reason for this art.

Jaime Nuño: Let's see, as I have said before, even the most miserable life has place for joy, as long as it doesn't have a depressive character it seems to me that joy was there and I refer again to the book *The Name of The Rose* where the monk Jorge doesn't tolerate laughter and even condemns the books and those who read that provokes laughter. If they had that in the Middle Ages and there is now as well, this sort of people. But it's true that manifestations of joy, with for example pilgrim stories that reached Compostela, the description of what it meant to them, the hugs and were given in the mount of joy when they saw the signing made because of that joy of achieving something, which is normal. Imagine in the taverns, in the taverns had to be joy, when someone was born in the family...

there always had to be joy. So then it's not people, it was people like us, maybe with less knowledge than the one we have now but with more, for example, of the world, the environment, we're incapable of differentiating the trees or to read a little in the sky if it's going to rain or it's going to stop raining, they had all that in a different way. Also with their little joys, there were many hard moments... hard especially for us because for those accustomed to a type of work, that's the one there is, meaning for them there was that, couldn't be compared, we can compare with the past, can't compare with the future. Maybe within two thousand years someone says, oh how the people of the beginning of XXI century were! And it seems to us like a good time.

Mark Gredler: Well that's one of the reasons why I had asked about the Camino de Santiago, I was thinking that it could have something to do with the pilgrimage that I had done in the path to Rocío twice with two different brotherhoods... and it's a very religious thing, but at the same time there's a lot of joy, there's a lot of festival until it includes lust.

Jaime Nuño: Yes, the Rocío is famous for as much devotion as lack of self control. The two things coexist and the people that go to the Rocío that cry, that almost jump the fence and whatnot, that since they can't do the procession they... that is a very medieval framework. But at the same time to enjoy all that is... and right now I have finished a book that will come out soon about the Camino de Santiago in the Middle Ages, about pilgrims to Compostela in the Middle Ages, with the prints of another and such. And for example, when it comes to food and drinking, it is seen that pilgrims look also to enjoy and there is a passage about an English pilgrim woman in the XIV century if I remember correctly, that must have... must have had some theme, some psychological issue because she dedicated, after having fourteen children, to pilgrim to Jerusalem, to Rome and to all the places and must have been... she liked to seek attention a lot and do religious manifestations with a lot of song and dance, in a moment the partners... people must have had avoided her and there is a time in which some pilgrims tell her, if you want to be with us don't talk about the Bible and at the moment of eating and dining and enjoy like everyone else. That is a sign that as much devout they were, they also went in a journey of joy.

Mark Gredler: Another example of pilgrims is in the book of Chaucer and some say the archpriest of Juan Ruiz was a Chaucer of Spain, but it was the contrary because the archpriest comes before Chaucer and some even say that Chaucer knew the Buen Amor book.

Jaime Nuño: I think many of these, when you read... I haven't read the Canterbury Tales, I recognize it, it's one of those books that I have at home and one day I will read but no... I have read references and extracts but I haven't read it. But well, for example, when you read some Fable, the French medieval stories that are original, when you read the... the Libro de Buen Amor book, the Cameron one or even some of these poems of William the Troubadour, you realize they must be popular stories, very in the atmosphere and probably were even more compilers than inventors of the same. What is true is that they wrote it with literary grace, because the troubadours, when you read for example the miracles, almost every saint does the same sort of miracle, bring back to life one, one goes somewhere and has been lost, gets attacked by bandits... always comes to be

the same, but the grace is in telling it right. Even when we read a novel nowadays, there are novels that are things that can happen to people but you have to know how to tell it, that's the grace of literature, but probably all this formed part of the woman that cheated the husband that is older than her with a lover, that is... come on, forms part of the whole medieval literature. I think they repeat it a lot and that Chaucer knew Juan Ruiz, that sounds just as odd, we don't know but if one knew the sources of one then others wouldn't be that far.

Mark Gredler: Yes, but it's true that not only in medieval literature but forever what is told well is the reason why the literature is prolonged, it has to be told well.

Jaime Nuño: Sure, it has to be told well and most of all... but in the Middle Ages it doesn't matter how amazing it is, it matters most of all how marvelous it is and if it's well told, and there always are some magical components, of omens and all that makes it a classical. When you read for example, the Mío Cid poem or anything else, the thing of omens and the fly of birds, that must be common and didn't appear in the church, also that of San Martin of Dumio in the VI century or VII, I don't remember when it is, we go to the writings about paganism, the penitentiaries are effectively full of condemnments against sex that must not be but also of that which takes to a crossroads and makes an offer... but when I was an altar boy in my village, I don't remember which holiday we went with little wax crosses and bury them in different places of the village under the stones to bless the fields. Well, if that is not a pagan rite...

Mark Gredler: It's also said of holidays that they took many pagan holidays and changed them to have something in common with a Saint or something of the church.

Jaime Nuño: Well, there is one thing that is clear, it's such a coincidence that Christ was born the 25th of December, that it's not known when he was born. Such a coincidence that Mithras, his great rival in the roman time, was born the 25th of December. It's more logical in Mithras, Mithras was the sun undefeated, meaning it's the birth of the sun. Then it's what the Spanish missionaries did that when they went to America, they adopted the native gods giving qualities of their gods to the saints, but it's that when the Romans came to Spain, what they did was all the pantheon of gods there was here, assimilated some gods. It's easier to say, no we're also part of these, than saying no this has nothing to do with us. It could have been some sort of practice, like for example the human rites, the human sacrifices in America, but for the most part... the carnivals, thousands of holidays.

Mark Gredler: Well just like the Romans did with the Iberian gods, they could have done with the Greeks.

Jaime Nuño: Of course, but it's just that also to the shrines of San Miguel are put in a high place, that Santa Lucia is the sight patron saint, that there are churches or shrines that are Nuestra Señora de las Fuentes, what is that? I mean, I usually say, the Muslims are right, us Christians are polytheists, I mean as polytheists that is not that we have one God, one virgin and many saints, it's just that the same virgin has fifty thousand different ways, because there's the virgin this, the

virgin that... but people within Christianity, people with certain culture that think it's not really the same. There are people that think the virgin of Macarena is the same as the virgin of Carmen, but how is it going to be the same? It's the same! There's one virgin that is the mother of god, in some places they call her a certain way and put her in an emblem and in other place is another. But no, then of course you have to understand that in a popular religion that needs to see the object, that is for example the Muslim world has fought a lot against it but also they have a different sort of emblems with all the subject of calligraphy and all that. But of course, in the Christian world it's not just a certain saint, it's the figure of the place, and in the villages that piece is venerated, not San Roque, that this is San Roque, this is the one from another village, not this, this image.

Mark Gredler: There's even a street next to where I'm staying in Madrid, its called Nuestra Señora de los Peligros.

Jaime Nuño: And the virgin of the hangover in Murcia, although it's the sea hangover, but there is one of dangers, of the olmos, of the fields, virgin of... all. And then also, it doesn't happen as much now but back then women in those towns used to be named Marinava, Mari-I-don't-know, well, all the Pilares that are from Zaragoza.

Mark Gredler: Well thank you so much for your time and for talking to us about the subject.