



Postgraduate/Distance Learning Assignment coversheet & feedback form

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For completion by the student:		
Student Name: José Antonio López Sabatel		
Module code: HPHI7003 Module title: Research Methodology for Historians	Student ID number: 1903071	Educational support needs: Yes/ <u>No</u>
Module tutor: Janet Burton		
Assignment due date: 25 Jan 2020		
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Agricultural calendar from Royal Pantheón of San Isidoro de León (Spain)

The calendar of the Basilica of San Isidoro de León is in the Pantheon of the Kings (space attached to the collegiate church)¹; among the great scenes that decorate the vaults, Christ is represented on two of them that are adjacent to each other. In one, he presides over the apocalypse and in another, he is in Majesty, as Pantocrator, surrounded by the symbols of the four evangelists. The calendar was painted on the inside that marks the boundary between them, namely, in the intrados of the left side arch side facing the altar. The first six months on the west side and starting with January, the lowest. The remaining six, facing east, with December at the bottom and, logically, in the opposite direction, making the two highest, June and July, face their heads. The paintings exhibit a good state of conservation, in spite of they were painted before 1150.

As an iconographic motive, created during the Carolingian era but developed all over the Romanesque period, each month is associated with the representation of a peasant work, carried out by a single character, always male, either as an allegory or performing appropriate agricultural labour for that time of year. All the characters are framed in a circle of about forty centimetres in diameter formed by the geometric and vegetal compositions that separate the images. In each circle, the name of every single month was labelled in a rather Castilianized medieval Latin.

January is represented as two-faced Janus who, standing and static, with one face looking to the past year while with the other indicates the one that has yet to pass. A closed door illustrates the year ended and an open door does so with the year to come.

February, with its climate still cold and not conducive to outdoor work, enters to scene as a peasant, sitting on a stool and dressed in the typical pointed hood cloak who warms himself at the fire.

¹ For further Reading about this particular calendar and the Hispanic medieval calendars in general: Antonio Viñayo, *El Calendario Románico De San Isidoro* (León: Santiago García, 1992). Ricardo Puente, *Calendarios Medievales. San Isidoro De León* (León: Editorial Albanega, 2009). Julio Caro Baroja, "Representaciones Y Nombres De Meses", *Príncipe de Viana*, 25 (1946), pp. 629-656. Manuel A. Castiñeiras, *El Calendario Medieval Hispano: Textos E Imágenes: (Siglos X-XIV)* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 1996). Juan Luis Pérez Arribas, "Estudio Comparativo Del Calendario Agrícola De La Iglesia De Beleña Con Otros Calendarios", *Cuadernos de etnología de Guadalajara*, 36 (2004), pp. 399-413. Marta Poza Yagüe, "Las labores De Los Meses En El Románico", *Revista digital de iconografía medieval*, 1 (2009), pp. 31-42. Juan Coira Pociña, "Ver, Concebir Y Expresar El Paso Del Tiempo. El Calendario Medieval Y El Refranero", *Medievalismo: Boletín de la Sociedad Española de Estudios Medievales*, 23 (2013), pp. 117-155.

In **March**, the mildest temperatures favour the beginning of the work in the fields. Now is the time to prune and fit the vines so that their fruits can be harvested at the end of the summer.

April, the central month of spring, symbolizes the cyclical regeneration of nature. Therefore, it is represented as an allegory embodied by a young man who, with both hands, raises plants, flowers or tender shoots as a sign of fertility of the land.

Nor does **May** involve associated farming work. On the contrary, it is one of the months chosen to illustrate the warlike character of part of medieval society. In this case, a knight with a shield that allows his mount to graze at a moment of rest.

Both **June** and **July** share the activity of the cereal harvest. An attempt is made to bring the focus on the importance of cereal in the peasant economy by tripling its presence on the calendar. **August**, therefore, is time to thresh the wheat with the flail.

September is the month dedicated to the grape harvest, although it is a task in which the whole family participates, in most of the calendars, the collective effort is ignored. Here one can see the peasant collecting the grapes with his own hands and depositing them in a kind of basket.

In addition to cereal and wine, **October** focuses on a third element of great importance in the diet of the medieval peasantry: the pig. Here is depicted a scene of mast feeding ("montanera"), the last phase of breeding and rearing that consisted in bringing the pigs for fattening to the meadows between holm oak groves.

"A cada cerdo la llega su San Martín" or Every pig gets his Saint Martin. As the popular Spanish saying goes and the calendar illustrates, San Martín, on **November 11th**, was in many territories the beginning of the pig slaughter rite that guaranteed a supply of meat and fat that would have to last until the following summer.

With the end of the year and the return of winter rigors, the peasant returns to lock himself at home. In **December**, the calendar adopts a more festive tone, of a religious nature, by showing a relaxing environment with food and drink in the heat of the hearth, emphasizing the winter rest after a hard year of work.

The location of calendars in religious buildings is nothing strange or unusual. The calendar is a human construction; its time is totally social, although is subject to the rhythms of the universe. Its function is not reduced to represent the passage of time but plays an important role in society. It constitutes one of the most important instruments of power because it meant controlling time and its rhythms, that is, work, leisure, rest, etc.

For this reason, the power, and particularly the Church, was very interested in controlling it and, incidentally, adding the features of its own conception of time.²

From the point of view of the historian, it is worth noting that agricultural calendars showed the close relationship between their iconography and the labour and technical reality of the peninsular countryside. In this way, the calendars of the rural Romanesque conform diverse everyday scenes in which the peasant appears holding the useful domain of the land and running the family economic unit. It is not difficult to imagine the tenant in his environment, together with his family made up of his wife and children, on whose help depended that the small tenancy was able to fulfil the basic needs of maintenance and supply and, thus, ensured the survival of the whole family.³

Although, indeed, the calendars focus preferentially on peasant work, it is also true that they allude to the house, customs, celebrations, and folklore that despite Christianization continue to be closely linked to the astronomical rhythm and the vegetable cycle.⁴

² Manuel A. Castiñeiras, *Os Traballos E Os Días Na Galicia Medieval* (Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 1995) pp. 37-39.

Jacques Le Goff, *La Civilización Del Occidente Medieval* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1999) pp. 153-154.

³ Werner Rösener, *Los Campesinos En La Edad Media* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1990) pp. 89, 141-142.

Robert Fossier, *Peasant Life In Medieval West* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988) pp. 29-33.

⁴ Jacques Le Goff, *El Orden De La Memoria. El Tiempo Como Imaginario* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1991) p. 211.

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