

AN ECOLOGICAL HISTORY IN THE MIDDLE AGES? THEORETICAL BASES AND SOURCES

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the possibilities offered of building a History, in this case of the Middle Ages, that considers the relations people have had with the natural spaces and the urban environment where their lives have developed. I defend the need for a History of those concerns that are nowadays considered ecological. To this end, I weigh up the possibilities of the documentary sources, present the theoretical bases, show a working method and methodology and evaluate the bibliographical sources. The eco-feminists approaches are emphasised, indicating the possibilities offered by the difference in the relations between women and men with the environment they live in.

KEY WORDS

Relations Women-Men, Urban spaces, Nature.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Virorum ac mulierum ratio, Vrbes, Natura.

1. Introduction

Since the late 1970s, my main dedication has been to women's history, though I have always maintained other lines of research in which I have sought and noted the importance of women in any historical process. It was the late nineties when I started to emphasise the differences in the relationships that men and women have held and maintained throughout the history with nature, with natural spaces and the modified areas. Moreover, that was when the translation of studies and research began into an emerging trend within Women's Studies, Eco-feminism. My interest in this made me think about the possibility and need to build an ecological history and show the possible concern in medieval societies for the environment in which the activities of men and women took place. This would be done to assess whether these relationships were similar or had differences, and especially if there was an awareness of the deterioration of nature and the consequences this might have on people. I believe that this thought, in its possible existence, is the basis for the construction of an ecological history.

In this paper I will try to show the contents of ecological history that should not be confused with agrarian history or the economic history of rural areas. To build an ecological history requires a theoretical basis and methodology, different from other historical constructions, but there may undoubtedly be contributions from consolidated methodologies. Similarly, the sources, that are normal for any historical development, should be subjected to a special treatment. These will be the contents of this article, together with an approximate state of the art with reference to the ecological history in medieval Spain.

I wish to state that my readings are mostly linked to eco-feminism, because while there is much literature from philosophy, theology and politics on this issue, less has been written from history and very little referring to the Middle Ages. Through these readings and my research, I have reflected on the possibilities of this new line to try to define the content and methodology that differentiate ecological history within history and set it up as an emerging way of scientific research, providing a new vision of the past and the relations of individuals with each other and the places where they lived. All this is within the guidelines of the social history, which thus provide an analysis of historical events from a new and unfamiliar perspective.

I start my discussion with an assessment of the sources and literature and then move on to propose some theoretical bases. These are the tools for building a working method and a methodology for ecological history. I dedicate a paragraph to eco-feminist history and end with very tentative conclusions given the incipient nature of the development of this type of history, especially as proposals for myself and those who want to follow this path. It is, without doubt, a provisional working hypothesis and open to new contributions.

2. Documentation

There are no specific sources for ecological history, but rather we need to find useful information in the well-known and traditional sources. All of these should be subjected to rigorous review to assess the content of the information properly, contextualize the situation and seek the root causes behind the data used. We must also take into account the difficulties of finding these. Therefore, given the methodological characteristics of this work, I will make an assessment of the ones I have used in other studies¹ and the specific problems they have caused. I will also propose some general considerations and a list of all documents I have searched or think need to be searched for information.

I want to emphasize that there are no sources on the relations between people and the environment in which they lived and information is scattered across many different types of sources. My work on this matter is based on written sources, some published, others unpublished or that I have published. The written sources are those I have always worked with and which I know how to manage and analyse technically. However, it is complicated to find information on this subject, because it was not a major concern, so it was not usually reflected in a document. Nevertheless, despite the absence of environmental concerns, there are some scattered reports that, dealt with properly and jointly, can provide a good route for research.

In principle, any document, provided it is subject to the proper criticism, can supply something of greater or lesser importance that can be used for any historical development. The study of the sources referred to a monastic domain, the workings of a council or the repopulation of a city, can store information related to ecological approaches, but we must find this among the full set of conventional data that have customarily been used. The difficulty is not greater than that of any other research, although the quantitative results may be poor, but significant new contributions can be found.

There is another difficulty in this subject. There is a no specific corpus of documentary sources nor is there a section in the archives where the documents pertaining to these issues are sorted, as there are in other avenues of research. We must use all kinds of documentation to find something that may refer to the relations between people and the physical environment in which they lived and worked.

I will follow the traditional assessment of sources, but will leave the reference to written documents in last place, because they are the only ones I used in my research in this field. Therefore, in principle I will list the sources that should be used especially to assess their potential, hitherto unpublished in these studies and in the majority, as it is usual to use written sources and, to a lesser extent, material remains.

1. Segura, Cristina. "Las mujeres y la naturaleza en la legislación visigoda". *Gerión. Necesidad, sabiduría y verdad: el legado de Juan Casajero*, Extra (2007): 489-503; Segura, Cristina. "La tala como arma de guerra en la Frontera", *VI Estudios de Frontera. Población y poblamiento. Homenaje a Manuel González Jiménez*. Jaén: Diputación Provincial de Jaén, 2007: 717-724; Segura, Cristina. "Rastros de un pensamiento ecológico en Al-Andalus?", *Al Andalus. Espaço de mudança. Homenagem a Juan Zozaya Stabel-Hanssen*, Susana Gómez Martínez, coord. Mértola: Campo Arqueológico de Mértola, 2006: 29-34.



3. Iconographic and archaeological sources

Iconographic sources have always seemed to me not to be sufficiently valued and not used to their full potential. The visual messages that people who lived in the Middle Ages have left, through paintings, sculptures, constructions, and even everyday objects, have very rarely been taken into account.

The capitals, tombs, doorways of churches or some friezes such as wonderful and little known calendar carved on a wall of the church in a village in the north of Guadalajara, close to Cantalojas, with each month of the year represented by the typical farm work done in that month and many other reliefs where men and women appear doing farm work, caring for livestock or fighting wild animals. Similar information is also available in different types of painting. Thanks to the iconographic sources the spaces where various activities were done can be analyzed and an attempt made to deduce the relations between the people and the physical environment in which they lived, although it is difficult because it only represents the moment when an act was perpetuated.

At present, sculpture is not a widely used source in historical studies. It is possible that in the future a method of analysis may be established that can provide results or some kind of work may be found with more explicit messages than those hitherto known. The same is true with respect to the paintings. They are very abundant and increased in number as the Middle Ages went by.

The miniatures of the codices, the Books of Hours, the murals in churches or palaces, the tables and charts, have numerous scenes of people in various circumstances, in real or idealised landscapes. Through these illustrations, the distribution of places between men and women can be seen, their different activities, in domestic and the natural, spontaneous or humanized spaces. I believe that until now, as I have mentioned, there are great difficulties to perceive the relationship with the physical environment and the perception people had of this. However, the usefulness of iconographic sources in general, both sculpture and painting, cannot be judged fairly until they are used more commonly than now.

I think that archaeology can be of more use. It must be emphasized that I do not mean conventional archaeology, as the remains of a city, a building, a hydraulic system or the household can provide scant information on this topic. However, the relationship these artefacts have with the environment in which they developed can always be evaluated. If they meant an aggression in the area where they settled or, conversely, are perfectly suited to it. To appreciate all this, sufficient knowledge and tools are needed to perceive the messages that can be derived. Without doubt, the experts in archaeology will capture and establish working hypotheses on the impact these had on the environment they developed in.

In contrast, I believe that archaeology of the landscape is critical, and is beginning to give excellent results on the conservation, modification or degradation of natural landscapes. These include the decline in the forest, the expansion of cultivated fields, the abandoning of and/or commitment to certain products, the introduction of irrigation systems with the changes these entail for the environment, or the

construction of a city and the infrastructure necessary for the conurbation to work. All this can be analyzed and evaluated by archaeology, which needs a mastery of special techniques and tools, which unfortunately we paper-based historians do not have. But this situation does not prevent me from assessing the significance of these study skills for progress in fields where there is no written information or this is inadequate.

All the above can be good ways of working which will provide results on the physical environment in the Middle Ages. This information, in some cases, are a simple endorsement of what the written documents have provided, but it also offers information from the past that we now do not have, since it has not been reflected in written texts, but has left its mark on the landscape and land use. It corresponds to archaeology, and it has a broad field, to evaluate the quality of human intervention in modifying the natural environments.

4. Written sources

I have followed a traditional pattern in assessing the sources, which seems appropriate, because it marks a logical path to gaining an understanding of a process. The order of reference to different types of sources does not imply any hierarchy. I think all are equally important and each person has his or her option, and the ideal is to compare information from various sources.

The legal sources are the first step in any historical analysis, thus marking the legal framework that the legislator, representing the dominant power, seeks to impose on society. Therefore we need to understand and assess whether there is legislation on the treatment that people must give to the natural environment that surrounds them. We must also look in the sources of the application of the law to see how it was enforced. In this type of normative sources not only should the secular legal texts be taken into account, but also religious ones, for example the provisions by council and synod.

In the economic documentation there is a great deal of information about the working of businesses. I use this term to refer to current holdings, such as lordly and monastic domains, ecclesiastical, council or private possessions. Certainly, the data on agricultural development should contain information about the demands that people made on nature. The development of workshops of artisans or trading activities also marked in some way, each in a different way, the space surrounding each business, which is reflected in the written texts.

In all this documentation the insinuations must be used, I stress the word "insinuations" at environmental issues that may occur. This type of documentation is very valuable since it refers to the social reality in which people lived, and therefore when the data is usable, it is of unquestionable effectiveness. Also, purchase and sale contracts, letters of dowries, wills, inventories of goods, donations and alms are documents with a large economic content and also implement the law and some



have religious content. Some kind of environmental concern can be traced from all of this information.

Equally useful are the texts of the chronicles of reigns, cities and events. All these contain references to the places where the events took place and to questions related to these. Reading the chronicles can give results, as I noted in my work quoted above on the use of logging as a weapon of war, the economic consequences of environmental degradation and that Hernando del Pulgar referred to in the Chronicle on the Catholic Monarchs.²

I think that religious texts should also be used. Above I referred to council canons, now I wish to mention that the letters of religiosity, penitentials, lives of saints, martyrdom or any pious text contains some information on the official belief of the church about nature and the consideration this should be given by the people. It is interesting to note the scant regard the Christian religion has for nature and therefore its rejection of ecological thinking, as has been rigorously studied by the great theologian Anne Primavesi,³ so religious texts can provide a dominant thought far from respect for natural areas. Do not forget the news that may have been kept, about prayers about droughts or asking for protection against any weather event, which provides information.

Finally, I will defend the importance of literary sources. One must start from the basis that they create fictional events that are often set in a real place.⁴ The treatment given to the physical space in which the action takes place is usually not fiction, but rather recreates the reality to a great extent, and also expresses the dominant thought at the time the text was written. Therefore, with the critical and necessary restrictions, the literary texts should not be forgotten when doing history, not that of exceptional events, but of daily events done by many people, whose name has not entered into history. The ecological history largely escapes the exceptional and is based on the normal, hence the need to take the literary sources into account.

5. Bibliography

It is difficult to try present a state of affairs about the existing literature, which is very scarce. Therefore I limit myself to a first approach to the bibliographic evaluation. In most cases, the basic general works refer to the current situation, although they contain some useful information from the past. I believe they are valid as they offer methods and techniques to analyze the subject in the present that can be used for

2. Segura, Cristina. "La tala como arma...": 717-724.

3. Primavesi, Anne. *Del Apocalipsis al Génesis. Ecología, Feminismo, Cristianismo*. Barcelona: Herder, 1995.

4. Segura, Cristina. "Las fuentes literarias en la Historia de las mujeres", *Feminismo y misoginia en la literatura española. Fuentes literarias para la Historia de las mujeres*, Cristina Segura, coord. Madrid: Narcea, 2001: 13-18.

research into the past and seem useful for contextualising the problem in the Middle Ages and as a theoretical reference.

Coupled with the difficulty of the lack of own sources mentioned above, there is little literature derived from the little concern for this area in the medieval research in general. To a large extent, this lack is due to more to the difficulties in the subject than to a lack of concern about it from a social and even scientific level. In other more consolidated type of research, there is bibliography that acts as a support, offering methodology or models to apply. In this case, the bibliography is very scant, current knowledge is very superficial, and therefore any contribution is novel, useful, and especially risky because there are not many reference points in Spanish medievalism. Its interest lies in the novelty and, more importantly, in that it can be the beginning of a new way of making history.

My intention is to draw attention to this, like many others, unattended issue. At this time, in which the current paradigm of history is being questioned and subjects are being identified that should be considered as new avenues of research, I believe we must initiate new topics for a new history more in line with current social and political concerns. I think the history of relations between people and both the rural and urban environments a very valid line of inquiry and one destined to have a good future, after overcoming the usual difficulties that arise when starting any new line of research.

There are few general works in Castilian.⁵ The literature specific to the Middle Ages is not very abundant, although there is not satisfactory enough, although it must be appreciated because it represents the beginning of knowledge in this important topic.⁶ Most of the works cited are group works whose origin have been a scientific meeting and a prior environmental concern. The interest is to raise a new issue of importance, which is quite commendable and should be welcomed. The limited development of this question so far in Spain, which is worse in the case of the Middle Ages, is the driving force of these encounters whose aim is to open new fields of research. I think the lack of methodology and methods of work, along with a shortage of reference literature, are the reason for holding these meetings so that the discussion and interest in the subject arises from them and, consequently, its scientific development. One of the frequent theoretical problems appears in them, namely the linkage to the rural. Undoubtedly a dominated nature involves

5. Deleage, Jean Paul. *Historia de la Ecología. Una ciencia del hombre y de la naturaleza*. Barcelona: Icaria, 1993; Fariña Tojo, José. *La ciudad y el medio natural*. Madrid: Akal, 1998; González Molina, Manuel. *Historia y medio ambiente*. Madrid: Eudema, 1993; López Bonillo, Diego. *El medio ambiente*. Madrid: Cátedra, 1994; Sotelo Navalpotro, José Antonio. *Desarrollo y Medio Ambiente en España*. Madrid: Fundación Infodal, 2000; Tricart, Jean. *La ecogeografía y la ordenación del medio natural*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1982.

6. Pérez Embid, Javier, ed. *La Andalucía Medieval. Actas de las I Jornadas de Historia Rural y Medio Ambiente*. Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2003; Brawłowski, Elio. *El ambiente en la Edad Media*. Buenos Aires: Pro Ciencia-Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, 1997; *II Encuentro sobre Historia y Medio Ambiente. Preactas*. Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2001; Coladerlle, Michael, ed. *L'homme et la nature au Moyen Age. V Congreso Internacional de Arqueología Medieval*. Paris: 1996; Clemente Ramos, Julián, ed. *El medio natural en la España medieval. Actas del I Congreso sobre Ecohistoria e Historia Medieval*. Cáceres: Universidad de Extremadura, 2001.



the deterioration of the spontaneous, but crops do not always mean environmental degradation, and the urban centres are possibly more polluting.

The publication of the minutes of these meetings is useful, because attempts to open a new path in the field of knowledge become known. They are collective works in which established historians recognised for their research on other areas raised and their work presents opportunities for research. There are also texts that appear to be the first research by young people and their work, while well intentioned, does not always meet requirements. Most of the authors involved have very different thoughts about what the physical environment is and about how the history of the relations of people with it should be approached.

All these contributions show interest in this new subject, but most are merely contributory and often do not consider the need to develop an appropriate methodology. This leads to many of them tackling the problem from an approach related to the economic history of the rural environment. The results are very uneven, as history of the rural economy has already been studied and inputs in this case are often repetitive. In other cases it is an approach that detracts from the subject, since it implicitly accepts that history of the environmental refers particularly to the relationships between people living in rural areas with their surroundings, both with the spontaneous and modified nature. In very rare cases is there reference to the relations of people living in the urban environment and to its possible deterioration.

At the end I include a brief general basic bibliography that can be related to ecological history. The content of these texts is irregular and together with very valuable and essential works there are other totally circumstantial ones. However, given the paucity of literature on the subject, they are all of greater or lesser interest, as a tool that can be of use to anyone interested. However, the most valuable, coherent, articulate contribution that has already given excellent results comes from eco-feminism. Below I only include basic works with theoretical contributions representative of the various approaches within eco-feminism.⁷

6. Theoretical bases

Social history in this country now has an established trajectory, although there are still those who ignore it. A quick look at its output shows that there is enough work to know how people lived in many ways. However, the results are not com-

7. Agra Romero, M^o Xosé, coord. *Ecología y feminismo*. Granada: Comares, 1998; Holland-Cunz, Barbara. *Ecofeminismos*. Madrid: Cátedra, 1996; Merchant, Carolyn. *Ecological Revolutions, Nature, Gender and Science in New England*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989; Mies, Maria; Shiva, Vandana. *Ecofeminismo. Teoría crítica y perspectivas*. Barcelona: Icaria, 1997; Puleo, Alicia H.; Segura, Cristina; Cavana, María Luisa, eds. *Mujeres y Ecología. Historia, Pensamiento y Sociedad*. Madrid: Almudayna, 2004; Primavesi, Anne. *Del Apocalipsis al Génesis. Ecología. Feminismo. Cristianismo*. Barcelona: Herder, 1995; Shiva, Vandana. *Mujer ecología y supervivencia*. Madrid: Horas y Horas, 1995.



parable in all subjects. History is made of the political vicissitudes of the economy, society, the mentality of the marginalized or women, but there are some aspects of social reality that are still very murky. This is possibly due to a lack of concern about them, not the lack of documentary sources that encourage research on the least known such as the relationship between people and the physical environment.

The result of my interest in this was the application for project of the Sectorial Plan for the Study of Women and Gender in the III National R & D Plan under the title "Actions and Attitudes of Women towards the Environment. Historical Perspectives and Future Projections" that I was awarded in 1999 with number 52/99 for four years. To a large extent, this paper is indebted to this project, although during the period it lasted, I focused only on the relationships of women with the space where they lived, in the sources, men also appeared more frequently than women. I then used the information on men to compare the different attitudes of both sexes. Then a new research field opened up for me.

The result of this project was some publications that are cited throughout this work. There was also three scientific meetings in the Universidad Complutense of Madrid: "Encounters I: Women and Urban Spaces" (2000), "Women and Ecology Symposium: Historical-Philosophical Perspective" (2001)⁸ and "Women and Spaces urban. History and Current Reality" (2002).⁹ All three were held in the Faculty of Geography and History at the university. These readings and research served as the basis for the research work that I presented for my evaluation as cathedraic (2006). Since then I have not stopped thinking about the problems of history of the environment or ecological history, including the establishment of a nomenclature that is still not properly defined. I have published some of that work¹⁰ with modifications for their new destination, all culminating in a book. This text is undoubtedly in debt to the introductory part of it and its fundamental aim is to encourage only consolidate this new way of interpreting the history of the past. This is not a new story, the story is only one, but a new way to interpret it to make a thing of the past is so far not known.

Marc Bloch defined history as "the science of men in time".¹¹ It should be noted that this definition is prior to 1944, when Bloch was shot by the Nazis. Despite the time that has passed, I still seems the best of the proposals. However, I always very respectfully make a criticism because in the early twentieth century, Bloch could not foresee a part of history not yet developed. From my appreciation of the master, I would qualify his definition. No word in it is superfluous, all are essential, but I think other concepts would enrich, qualify and especially update it. These two words are women and space.

8. Published as Puleo, Alicia H.; Segura, Cristina; Cavana, María Luisa, eds. *Mujeres y Ecología. Historia...*

9. Most of the contributions were published in Segura Grañó, Cristina, coord. *Mujeres y Espacios Urbanos. Homenaje a Christine de Pizan en el VI centenario de la 1ª edición de "La ciudad de las damas", 1405-2005*. Madrid: Asociación Cultural Almudayna, 2007.

10. Mentioned in note 1.

11. Bloch, Marc. *Introducción a la Historia*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1974.



Though the term “men” can be interpreted as synonymous with humanity, and it may include men and women, as Bloch explains. But I believe that it is precisely the need to clarify, to show that men are not always interpreted as a synonym for humanity, it must be emphasized that there is not a single historical subject, men, but women are also social subjects since their social reality is different from the other group.

The term “space” was evaluated by Bloch to add to his definition, but he ended up rejecting it, given the harsh criticism of geographical determinism. Liberal thinking could not defend that a person, given the place where he or she was born or lived, could only live a certain way, without the possibility of changing their original situation. Thus, Bloch did not include space in his definition. At the beginning of this century, geographical determinism has been qualified and it cannot be denied that people develop a specific activity depending on where they live, which affects their lives to some extent, although they always have the possibility of escaping from these conditions, albeit in a small boat.

Undoubtedly, people hold certain relationships with the other people they live with and history has been largely devoted to research into them. However, and equally as defining for their social reality, they have relations with the space where they conduct their activities. The relationships with the environment in which they live are not stable, nor are the ones established with people and they are modified as needed. They can be good or bad, of acceptance or rejection, attention or disregard, care or aggression. We must also not forget that any human activity in relation to their habitat, not only affects it when it occurs, but has implications for the future. Only recently have the actions of people over time begun to demonstrate negative consequences they are having for the Earth, which for me is everything on, or surrounding, the planet, be they persons, animals, plants, deserts, ice or sea, that is Gaia. Moreover, it should also not be forgotten that this important issue does not concern the various individuals, companies or governments to the same degree.

7. History of Ecology / Ecological History

The concern about the relationship of people with the space they live in has been called ecological thinking. A new science of ecology has emerged from this new thinking that has an important social and political content, together with serious economic consequences for capitalist societies, since it denounces the exploitation planet earth subject has been to. I think that there is no need to emphasise this more here, but this does not mean that the issue is resolved. However, I want to emphasize that damage to the environment is not exclusive to contemporary times. The current situation has been reached by a progression of derived actions that have intensified with the advance of technology. I find it interesting and useful, as well as novel, to do the history of this process and I consider it a way of making a history of social and political topicality. History should not be reduced to a desktop



activity that is not involved in the social reality in which it develops and does not meet the social demands of the moment. History must give answers, undoubtedly scientific, but which help to give a better understanding of the problems of the past and present, to improve the future.

Terminology is a problem when you wish to create a list on this new line of research. It is necessary to define the terms used because they can respond to different contents. Does ecology examine the relationships of people with nature? Or with the physical environment? Or with the countryside? With the city? What should we call the history that deals with these relationships? Is the physical environment the same as the natural environment? The answers to these questions are complicated and throughout this article I will try to give some. As a starting point I want to clarify that the natural and physical environment have the same meaning. It is the spontaneous nature without human modification. Instead, I believe environment is the result of the action of people on the natural environment, leading to its modification. This action need not always be harmful to nature. However, throughout history, in many cases, it has been so gradually, through technological development, which has been inversely proportional to the deterioration of the natural environment.

I do not think it necessary to stress the difference between the history of ecology and ecological history, as it is obvious. The first is very short as ecology is less than a century old. The history of ecology discusses the development of this science, which is not my task now, but I am involved in the construction of an ecological history, which can be viewed as a new way of doing history. The subject of ecological history should be the relationships of people with the environment in which their lives have evolved over time. The social subject is the people who have certain relationships with the spaces in which their activities take place, taking the social reality into account in each case.

Ecological history is not a part of history, but rather history from the analysis of certain problems in society, and must therefore be done with the budget for social history. Human behaviour with the environment in which they lived and which has consequences for this must be valued. The results depend on a number of factors, so it is necessary to apply certain categories of analysis. Narrating the relationship of the medieval peasants who worked the fields is not enough. We need to assess the causes of these relationships, their consequences and impact on nature. The social reality is crucial to establishing that those actions are only justified and understood with this method. The new Social History will be born crippled, if something so important to people's lives is forgotten, something like the ecological criteria which has influenced both the economic development, which has led to many conflicts and now is of priority interest.

Until now, there have been very few voices in the field of history who demanded the inclusion of ecological history in the purported history of the paradigm of the twenty-first century, although some references have begun, such as for the scientific meetings referred to above. The one in Cáceres¹² is related to a project, "Man

12. Clemente Ramos, Julián, ed. *El medio natural en la España medieval...*



and the Environment in History”, funded by the Ministry of Education of the Junta de Extremadura.

The importance of ecological history has also been valued in the *Manifesto of History in Debate*¹³ (2002) that emerged from the first two congresses of this historiographic current and was endorsed at the third, all held in Santiago de Compostela in July 1993, 1999 and 2005. All of these were called by Carlos Barros, a professor of medieval history at the university and the first editor of the manifesto. Among the principles it contains that must define the new history, it defends the need for ecological history or history of the Environment. This was one of the topics for debate in the 2005 congress in as transversal to all the different currents and proposals. This confirmed the need for a scientific statement about methods, methodologies and, above all, content. If the need for it is not claimed then it will be difficult to develop.

8. Analytical categories

Acknowledging the importance of studying the relationship of people with the environment, the need soon arose to qualify if they were all similar, or if there are categories of analysis that mark differences. Historical time is critical, although not understood according to the old divisions of Ancient Times, Middle Ages, etc., but rather especially to the changes in the socio-economic structures. Other references are much more effective in this case, such as pre-industrial or industrial societies. Nor can the situation be considered stable in those societies known as pre-industrial. There were deep changes throughout this period, due mainly to technical advances, but the substantial is permanent. Medieval society must be integrated into this group, but without forgetting that it was predominantly European and incorporated only those political and/or social formations that relationships were maintained with. There are still presently indigenous peoples or communities who have not reached the industrial revolution, and much less the technological revolution. Thus, the accuracy of the analysis of historical time is a priority. Together with this, the space where people lived should be valued, because the physical infrastructure also changes every historical process.

Along with the necessary time and spatial precision, other essential categories of analysis, such as gender and social class, must be applied to any work of history. In the first case, this must be from a dual perspective. We must assess whether the relations between men and women with nature are similar, and, if they are not, analyze the causes of this difference. It is also necessary to ask whether the perception of the environment in which people live is the same or whether there are differences according to gender. We should not forget the different considerations of women and men in classical philosophy and, nowadays, in certain tendencies in

13. “Manifest von ‘Historia a Debate’ (Geschichte zur Discussio)”. *Zeitschrift für Weltgeschichte*, 3 (2002): 113-114.



psychology. While men have been described since Aristotle as the holders of reason, which governs their actions and establishes certain relationships with the mastery of nature, women are seen as closer in their behaviour to feelings induced by the spontaneous nature than to reason. Aristotle's legacy is still very much present in the dominant thinking.

The social class each person belongs to is a basic category for analysis that modifies the individual's relationship with the natural environment. In the case of ecological concern, each person's place of residence should also be applied as a category of analysis, which, to some extent, is related to social class. The attitudes and lifestyles of a person whether they live in the countryside, the woods or the city, are critical. This creates specific needs that must be assessed. We must also take the dominant mentality into account in the medieval Hispanic area. Here there were followers of three religions and the three groups had different concerns about the environment.

Therefore, the proposed categories of analysis (historical time, place of residence, gender, social class and culture) are essential to contextualize the problems that ecological history must stress. We must also banish emotional perceptions of emotional proximity with nature. Women do not have different feelings regarding nature, nor are they closer to it by constitution, as claimed by Greek philosophy. These supposed feelings, or rather female group attitude, derive from the social reality in which women live, which I will go into below.

For all the above, the application of these analytical categories will enhance the development of ecological history, contextualised in the social milieu which led to the events to be analysed. I believe that the ecological approach should be present in any historical analysis, but, as there has been little concern about this knowledge until now, it is good to stress this perspective and carry out studies whose centrepiece is the relationship of people with environment they live in at a particular historical moment, in the country or the city, distinguishing between social class, religion and gender. This will build a knowledge base, to help a better understanding of different societies, past and present. But to accomplish this task we must first make a series of conceptual details, develop working methods, make an assessment of sources and, with all this, establish a methodology.

9. Proposal for Ecological History

The story history, contributory history, positivist history must be overcome in any theme. Describing the possible relationships of people with the physical environment in which they live is contributory history, which can be very valuable for collecting data that it represents, but it is not ecological history. To be so, it requires a theoretical basis that goes beyond the simple story and analyses events from ecological positions. Ecological history is a conception of the world and therefore, of society and economic development, which argues that progress should not be achieved at the expense of environmental degradation, which in the Middle Ages could occur,



although they were unaware of its consequences. A clear example is the consumption of wood needed to build a boat and the ecological disaster of the sinking of a ship, something quite common, because new wood had to be felled in the forests. Only the cost and the defeat if the sinking happened in battle were appreciated.

Ecological history is not the history of agriculture or a history that studies natural resources, the landscape or the forest. It is common to confuse the history of agriculture with ecological history and consider that an ecological approach is only introduced by relating to the rural environment. Valuing agricultural development is not an ecological thought, but rather emphasises issues of economic development. Of course, the use of rural resources is a key issue in ecological history, but not in itself, more for its impact on the environment. The treatment, demands and impacts on nature by agricultural development are of concern to ecological history while yields, census or improvements are the same for economic history. It is possible that one might fall into this confusion in an initial perception, as the most frequent subject is the countryside. Accordingly, I want to emphasise that the study of agricultural production alone is not ecological history. For it to be so, it is necessary to assess the environmental impact it produces.

Another frequent error, closely linked to the previous, is to consider that ecological history should only focus on rural areas. Some special relations also arise in the cities between the urban environment and those living there, who have their own relationships, of abuse or respect, for the environment they live in, to which the appropriate categories of analysis can be applied. Ecological history may be made taking as its subject a feudal order, a forest, a city or even a battle. For example, fire is a weapon of war and, in addition to the economic ruin caused to the people it affects, fire destroys their natural resources and has negative consequences for nature that affect not only the present, but also future societies. King Alfonso X in the *Partidas* ordered that any one starting a fire in a forest should be "thrown into it" as a punishment. It was a harsh punishment, death, demonstrating the importance of the offence then. This doctrine appears in many legal texts and in the Courts of Valladolid in 1258, "*Manda el Rey que non pongan fuego pora quemar los montes e al que lo fallaren faziendo quel echen dentro*".¹⁴ Fire was a weapon of war with a strong environmental impact and was widely used.

The lack of attention to this issue cannot be blamed on a lack of sources. Something similar is alleged whenever work begins on a new line of research. The sources contain many messages that are not always used. The documents, of whatever type, offer many useful data that are not valued because they are not involved directly with the goals of conventional research. One has to return insistently to all the documents whatever these may be. All of them contain small, unused pieces of data that, together with each other or in a particular context, may open new avenues of knowledge. We must read the texts looking for new data. We must ask many varied questions to obtain new answers.

14. "The king orders that fire shall not be made to burn the forests and he who does so shall die by being put into it". (*Cortes de los antiguos reinos de León y Castilla*. Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1861: I, 62).



The information that allows us to reconstruct the relations between people and nature is found by reading the papers, both published and unpublished. This method of work must be accompanied by its own methodological approaches. The collection and presentation of data alone, displayed neatly, only serves to rebuild how these relationships occurred. This in itself is already very valuable, but more progress is required. To date, there are general ideas on which we have to go deeper into and analyse with the appropriate methodology. It is imperative from a theoretical basis, based on the principles of social history and ecological thought, concerned about the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources over time and human intervention in the natural environment.

Above I stated that, although the definition of ecological thinking is very recent, this does not mean that it did not exist previously. However, ecological thinking means an awareness of the deterioration of nature, an overview of this and some policies to prevent this in the long-term. It is very difficult to find this thought stated earlier than the twentieth century, although from the eighteenth century with the Enlightenment, there was concern for nature. But alongside this, in Al-Andalus, from the eleventh century, and the Christian kingdoms in the Peninsula from the thirteenth, there were a number of measures that could appear as a manifestation of an ecological mindset. There are written documents from these times which contain rules to protect the forest, ban hunting and fishing or polluting activities are isolated so they do not disturb people. Even the *Codex Euricianus*¹⁵ has provisions of this type designed to protect the natural environment.

I have analysed the evidence of environmental concern preserved in the medieval Castilian legislation in a study¹⁶ and here I will go more in-depth into the documentary bases on which to develop a history of the Middle Ages concerned about a emphasising thought aimed at protecting nature, which led to rules to achieve this. However, I believe that these laws did not arise through a concern for the environment, but only to create a comfort in the case of urban life and for the protection of private property in rural areas. So far nothing leads me to think of ecological mentality, although it is possible that further research may prove otherwise. There can be no ecological mentality because this demands a number of requirements. First one needs an overview of the problem. If this was the case, the authorities should take long-term measures, not temporary solutions, which is what appears in the medieval documentation. Concern for the future, would show the existence of a mindset which prized the need to protect the environment where people lived. However, given the research to date, I am afraid that the concern was economic.

There could be no global view of the situation because few people left their land or town and could hardly ever receive information that would affect this issue elsewhere. The concerns that may appear in the texts have no long-term projection,

15. Segura, Cristina. "Las mujeres y la naturaleza...": 489-503.

16. Segura, Cristina. "Mujeres y medio ambiente en la Edad Media Castellana", *Oficios y saberes de Mujeres*, Rosa María Cid López, coord. Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2002: 159-188.



but in the very short-term to solve everyday problems. Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that in pre-industrial societies, nature, above all, was feared and does not appear as a protective mother as advocated in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and which was the earliest origin of the current concern about its deterioration. Nature was adverse to people in many situations, with cold, frost, droughts, windstorms, floods, hail, torrential rains and fierce animals for example. People trying to protect themselves from this show a series of practical materials, as well as prayers, spells, and processions to try to make nature benign and supportive.

Nobody thought they had to protect nature, but rather to defend themselves from it. The forest advanced at the expense of the crops if no measures were taken to avoid it. The rivers flooded the ploughed fields if there were torrential rains, frost killed crops or plagues of insects devoured fruit. Despite all this, nature provided water, fruit and firewood for heating and, thus, gave life. We must also bear in mind that in the Middle Ages most land, which included forests, rivers, springs and fields, belonged to the king, the Church or the feudal lord, not the peasants who were in direct contact with it. Their concern was to produce enough crops to meet the feudal obligations and, if possible, obtain a surplus to improve their living conditions.

On the other hand, and it seems important to stress, the farmers' worries were limited to obtaining enough to feed his family. It is very difficult for an ecological mentality to arise in a subsistence society, although in practice, and precisely because of this shortage of everything, water, fruit, cereals or farm animals, there was apparently an ecological attitude. That means that protection was needed for life and this was scarce. However, I consider that taking care to protect what nature provides is not due to ecological concerns, but to the simple need for survival. In practice, in the everyday reality, there are ways to interact with nature, written or legal laws that may suggest that there was an ecological mentality. I do not dare to state this, or to deny it flatly. That is why, I insist, I consider it a good line of research.

A cursory overview of the various medieval social formations can be done with a first approximation to facilitate the analysis of each of these with the natural or urban environment in which people lived. Great care was taken in Islamic society to avoid activities that undermined life in the city. The preserved Hisba treatises¹⁷ contain rules against polluting water or the air with bad smells. These treatises were intended to regulate urban life and establish how life should be organised in the city. They are a magnificent source, presenting provisions that Christians also included into the municipal legislation, with which the concern of the legislature to make life comfortable and enjoyable is apparent.

In the legal norms, both at the higher level and the application of law, there are provisions about forests, crops, water, polluting activities or air purity that can be used to reconstruct legislators' thinking about the environment and to analyse the application of this thinking in everyday reality. In the chronicles or other types of writing, such as literary sources, there are references to the landscape, its appreciation, people's contacts with nature or natural phenomena. Among these, exception-

17. Segura, Cristina. "¿Rastros de un pensamiento ecológico en Al-Andalus?...": 29-34.

al events like disasters, fires, floods, frosts and drought must be highlighted. When all this is examined, it has been done with the criteria of contributory or economic history or as a cause of social processes, but their potential impact on the physical environment has not been evaluated. All these natural phenomena have, above all, a strong environmental impact that has not been valued.

The writings by female authors may contain information related to women's thinking about nature as they supplied their homes and fed their families with what they took from it. It would not be unusual to find actions that lead us to believe that there were ecologists from necessity prior to this doctrine being enunciated. In iconographic sources that illustrate landscapes or farm work, until now very little used, there are a considerable number of women doing the most varied agricultural tasks. Even oral information can be very valuable, because ancestral agricultural practices still remain either in the geographical areas that the feudal society was tailored to or in twentieth-century societies with little technological development, which would certainly have elements in common with techniques known in medieval times, not to mention people of the so-called Third World who still live in ways that have similar difficulties to those in the Middle Ages.

10. Eco-feminist history

In conclusion, it is necessary to brief refer briefly to eco-feminist history. Eco-feminism is an emerging trend, increasingly consolidated within feminist studies and approaches. I augur a great future for eco-feminist history, as it combines two of the most innovative fields in history, women's history and environmental history. Women's history, with more than a century of life, has a solid theoretical and documentary basis, something that ecological history must aspire to. The beginnings of women's history, compared with conventional history, have provided a strong renovating impetus to accommodate non-traditional approaches. Is still a history in construction, because it always seeks the advance of knowledge and theory. Ecological history in this country is almost newborn and this has been outside the Middle Ages where there have been the biggest advances.

There are several trends in eco-feminism that influence the conception of eco-feminist history.¹⁸ There is an essentialist eco-feminism that identifies nature and women and establishes greater proximity between the two than between nature and man. Women and nature give life and nurture and, in theory, are protective. Greek philosophy matched nature, feelings, disorder and women, compared with polis, reason, order, and men. Therefore, the feminism of equality is very reticent about some eco-feminists approaches that, to an extreme degree, identify women and nature.

18. Segura, Cristina. "Historia ecofeminista", *Mujeres y Ecología. Historia...*: 35-56.



Socialist eco-feminism believes that men and women have different relationships to nature. Men have maintained a relationship of exploitation, as they have used natural resources to achieve these gains. Barbara Holland-Cunz¹⁹ qualifies that the destruction of nature through its use is expanding in the public non-feminine space. Women, however, maintain a home for the daily supply of the family, and have done so throughout history and still do in the Third World. I add another common point to these approaches between nature and women, which is the exploitation, of both one and the other, by the male group, benefiting from the resources and capital gains generated by unpaid household work²⁰ that nature also provides free. In the same vein, Carolyn Merchant²¹ says that women and nature are in a similar level of replenishment, and that both are products of historical processes.

The theologian, Anne Primavesi,²² proposes an important route of analysis. It focuses on the treatment that women and nature are given in the Bible. From Genesis, the position of man, the first being created in the image and likeness of God, is superior to nature, created beforehand and which God placed at Adam's disposal, like Eve, the woman, created after and as an appendix to the man. Adam is like the divinity, while neither the nature nor Eve are. This is the argument that justifies men acting with free will towards both, without being accountable to anyone. From this biblical analysis, Primavesi deduces the poor relations Christian religions have with nature and hence their strong rejection of pantheism.

In its origins, agriculture was a modification, not an assault, on nature by the women who were gatherers picked whatever was at hand. They wished to give their families the best nutrition but did not speculate on the fruits that nature offered. They began settling to stay with their crops and keeping small children them with, while the men were still nomadic hunters although they began to return to where the women were. This led to the process of settlement where men and women began to work fields collectively.

Individual ownership of the land under cultivation soon began together with a tendency to produce more than necessary for sustenance, to achieve a wealth from the sale or exchange of the surplus. Women were no longer involved in this process, but rather this was driven by men. In addition, the patriarchal society established, that within domestic responsibilities that concerned women, there was the supply of everything needed to maintain the family, such as water, food, fire, and care of the home, that is the reproduction of the family unit. All of these tasks, being domestic and women's obligations, received no financial compensation. Similarly nature also provided free and cyclical gifts. Nature does not rest over the entire cycle, making seeds germinate, plants flower and fruit ripen. When these were harvested, the process re-started. Women's lives ran a similar cycle and a similar measurement of

19. Holland-Cunz, Barbara. *Ecofeminismos...*

20. Segura, Cristina. "Actividades remuneradas y no remuneradas de las mujeres en la Edad Media", *Rentas, producción y consumo en España en la Baja Edad Media*. Saragossa: Universidad de Zaragoza, 2001: 109-120.

21. Merchant, Carolyn. *Ecological Revolutions...*

22. Primavesi, Anne. *Del Apocalipsis al Génesis...*



time. Women and nature did not rest, day or night, nor was there a period of the year when their obligations ceased. Every day both had to start tasks they did not finish.²³

The realities stated show a great similarity between nature and women. However, I would like to insist on a chronological precision, that I am referring to strongly patriarchalised pre-industrial societies, in which women and nature supply the family without any material compensation.²⁴ It is the duty of one and the other. In comparison, men make a profit for their own benefit from the fruits of nature and women's work. Here there is a strong economic element, which negates any accusation of essentialism in the similarity between women and nature. The same can be argued about the periodicity of natural processes and women's lives. In both cases such there are cycles that are invariably met and that produce wealth. In the case of women, this is the children, who increase the family assets. In the case of nature, it is the annual harvest. And finally, I would like to point out briefly, as I have studied it in more detail elsewhere,²⁵ women's work has no fixed schedule, unlike men's tasks. They serve continuously, everything that is needed for family welfare, a task that never ends. Women's activities are not suited to the economic division of time into working time and leisure, with a rest day each week. Women's work never ends and at any time of day or night it has to be taken care off. Nature does not a set timetable, although it grows in cycles, but it is always producing, even in winter, as are women.

II. Absolutely provisional conclusions

Everything expressed so far manifests the possibilities of a history that takes into account the relationships of people with the environment in which they lived. This would be a history in which these relationships are valued, and also the consequences they had for the future. I also think it is necessary to contextualize these relationships in the social realities of each era and in relation to the dominant thinking at any given time, expressed through laws and rules of coexistence. But it is also essential using unconventional papers, to try to perceive what the thoughts, feelings and sentiments of the anonymous men and women were. This is a difficult and complicated task but it can attempt a rapprochement thanks to a suitable treatment of all the sources that may contribute. The results are very gratifying since they open a new line of research that is going down a little travelled path. It will provide a history that until now has not been done. An unknown history, it will provide important knowledge about people's lives, of anonymous men and

23. Segura, Cristina. "La tela de Penélope. El tiempo de las mujeres en la Edad Media". *Arenal*, 8/1 (2001): 39-54.

24. Segura, Cristina. "Actividades remuneradas y no remuneradas...": 109-120.

25. Segura, Cristina. "Definición/indefinición de los espacios femeninos atendiendo al tiempo y a los tiempos de las mujeres", *Actas del III Congreso de Historia de Andalucía. La Mujer*. Córdoba: Publicaciones Obra Social y Cultural Cajatur, 2002: 199-215.



women, whose daily work has built history. It is not a history of major characters and unrepeatable events, but the history of the various social formations that have occurred throughout the ages and which, from this perspective, are until now unknown.

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