
Arnau de Vilanova a Lleida. La 'Confessio Ilerdensis'. Estudi, edició i traducció

Jaume Mensa i Valls

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SERGI GRAU

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

sergi.grau@uab.cat

Arnau de Vilanova (Arnaldus de Villa Nova) was one of the most important physicians in the Middle Ages, with an exceptional body of medical literature in Latin that encompassed the vast majority of literary medical genres of his time. Yet he also promoted a reform of Christianity which led him into heated theological arguments with some Dominicans. His *Confessio Ilerdensis de spurcitiis pseudoreligiosorum* falls within this religious polemic. It is a text that Arnau read in Lleida in 1303 to outline his theses on “false preachers” and to list their vices so they could be identified.

In this book, one of the leading experts on Arnau de Vilanova, the professor of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona Jaume Mensa, presents a study of the *Confessio Ilerdensis*, an edition of the Latin text and its translation into Catalan. The literary genre of the confession encompasses texts that are based on a public reading before a religious or civil authority in order to attest to something. This confession was read by Arnau de Vilanova in Lleida in 1303 (probably on Saturday 6 October) before the archbishop of Tarragona and the bishops who had gathered in a provincial council – which we are only aware of by the reference in the text, given that council sources left no record of it. In it, he discusses the evils, vices and perversities of false preachers with the goal of confessing his thoughts to ensure that no one could misrepresent them.

Having outlined the motives and background, the content of the work is divided into two parts. The first one shares the 22 evils that identify false apostles or preachers and reveal their perversity. These vices include such varied acts as wandering through the streets and in the courts of the powerful, fleecing and stripping the poor and onlookers of their goods, boasting about their earnings, striving for great honours and dignities, tricking widows with deceits, visiting the ill out of self-interest instead of charity and lying by saying that they can absolve the deceased from purgatory. He then notes a more doctrinal set of perversions that can be identified in the theological discussion.

After this section dedicated to false preachers, a second part begins in which Arnau confesses or outlines a series of theses focused on the pastor or bishop of a diocese. Arnau had previously claimed that the pastor or bishop was responsible for evangelical preaching in any diocese, and that it was their job to ensure that preachers only suggest to people what serves for edification in Christ. He also stressed that all Catholics who confess their faith in Christ but do not actually imitate him show that they have false faith. This is why Arnau so forcefully stressed deeds, not just words. The work concludes with a plea to the archbishop to record his confession in his curia and to the notary so that an official affidavit could be made of it.

When Arnau read his *Confessio*, he had been engaged in the theological polemic with some Dominicans for a few years. As the editor notes, the importance of this treatise lies in the fact that it signals a turning point in Arnau's defence strategy in his polemic against the theologians, because here he was raising his grievances to the highest Church echelons. Mensa highlights the fact that the body of this work has to do with either the theses upheld by Bernat de Puigcercós or the actions of the bishop of Girona, Bernat de Vilamarí, even though Arnau avoided getting personal or mentioning them directly.

The conflict was nothing new and had been simmering for a while. This *Confessio* is preceded by a text he wrote shortly before, the *Denuntiationes Gerundenses*, targeted at the bishop of Girona. In this text, Arnau exhorted the bishop to report the complaint that Arnau himself had submitted against the Dominican Bernat de Puigcercós over the polemic that pitted them against each other, and he asked the bishop to summon him to an audience in the Holy See in Rome. He had also threatened that if the bishop did not act properly (as Arnau thought he should), he would be forced to turn to the archbishop of Tarragona. And so he did. Shortly thereafter, Arnau read the *Confessio* when the archbishop of Tarragona was in Lleida, which explains why he read it in this city, as well as the tone he used not only when listing the vices of the false preachers but also when attributing responsibility to the bishop for evangelical preaching.

The edition includes a biographical introduction of Arnau de Vilanova which discusses his controversial place of origin, his project to reform Christianity and his relationship with Lleida. It also includes a painstaking study of the work that provides a synthesis of all the materials previously published in articles, an essential study that clarifies the context, the likely date of the reading, the ideas expressed in it, the biblical citations and the manuscripts that convey the work. Next, it provides a critical edition based on the oldest Latin text that is faithful to the original (the *Vat. lat.* 3824 codex, which contains all the works on religious topics written by Arnau before the summer of 1305) and provides translations of them into Catalan so that they can reach a larger audience. It should also be noted that Arnau de Vilanova translated part of the text of his *Confessio* into Catalan and included it in another work written in Catalan, the *Confessió de Barcelona*. This Catalan text is also included in the notes of the Catalan translation of this volume.

This work is unquestionably an essential contribution to understanding a religious polemic against the Dominicans in which Arnau de Vilanova was enmeshed, and indeed the work becomes fully meaningful within this context. Moreover, Catalan translations of Arnau de Vilanova's works are extremely essential to spread his thinking, given that much of the research on Arnau is often limited to scholarly spheres, which is why certain myths about him that have little to do with reality still circulate today. The publication of treatises like this one is an important way to share his thinking and contextualise his work for the public at large without sacrificing academic rigour.