Manuel Riu i Riu (1929-2011). In memoriam*

Doctor Manuel Riu i Riu, Professor of Mediaeval History at the University of Barcelona and member of the History-Archaeology Section of the Institut d’Estudis Catalans, died on the 2nd of January 2011 in Sant Llorenç de Morunys at the age of 81. He was born in Manresa in 1929 to a mother with roots in Sant Llorenç de Morunys.

He studied philosophy and letters with a specialisation in history at the University of Barcelona and graduated in 1951. The person who would most clearly influence his future career, more than Vicens Vives, of whom he was a disciple, was Albert del Castillo, whom he helped from early on in his Chair in Universal Mediaeval History. In 1959, Doctor Castillo, who had been an archaeologist in his youth but one focused on the ancient world, as was traditional, had begun to conduct excavations to study remains from the early Middle Ages. Doctor Riu helped him on these digs, including the greyware pottery workshop and ovens in Casampons (Berga), the 10th century monastery of Sant Pere de Graudescales, the small castle in Viver, the necropolis of slab tombs in Vilafruna (Balsareny), a mediaeval farm in Vilosiu and the village of Jaça (Cerca), Sant Vicenç d’Obiols and the church and necropolis of Santa Creu de Jutglar (Osona). This partnership largely shaped his devotion to a new discipline, mediaeval archaeology, which was just emerging at that time.

His doctoral thesis studied the religious communities in the former bishopric of Urgell from the 13th to the 16th centuries. I remember attending the reading of his thesis, which was a real event for us in 1961. At that time I was his student in a course titled “Mediaeval Sources and Bibliography” targeted at students who wanted to specialise in mediaeval history.

In 1996, he landed the Chair in Mediaeval History at the University of Granada. His sojourn in Granada was extremely profitable because the new specialisation of mediaeval archaeology was spreading around the entire country. He was there only a short time when Dr Castillo’s chair became vacant upon his retirement, and Dr Riu was able to return to the University of Barcelona in 1969. He was to spend the rest of his life there. Between 1970 and 1990, he edited the Índice Histórico Español, the bibliographic journal founded by Vicens Vives which was and still is so useful. Before that, between 1960 and 1966, he had been the secretary of the journal. Later, in 1980, he became the co-founder and co-editor of the University of Barcelona’s journal Acta Historica et Archaeologica Mediaevalia, a position he would retain until 1993. He coordinated some of the journal’s annexes, one devoted to greyware and popular pottery in mediaeval Catalonia, and another examining its fortresses, towers, watchtowers and castles.

If we examine the specialties he cultivated within mediaeval history, we would have to begin with mediaeval archaeology, a new discipline that he spearheaded not only in Catalonia but throughout all of Spain, in which he was a referent. It is the speciality which he introduced into

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In Catalonia, he took charge of the excavations in Cau-
ners, an abandoned mediaeval village in the middle of Les
Gavarres forest; the excavations in Salòs, especially the
monastery of Sant Sebastià del Sull; the digs in Sorba,
where the Martyrium of Saint Eudald was excavated and
studied; as well as the excavations in Sant Miquel de la
Vall (Gavet de la Conca, Pallars Jussà), and the castle of
Mataplanà (Gombrèn, Ripollès), his hometown of Sant
Llorenç de Morunys and other sites, which were later
continued by his disciplines.

In relation to archaeology, he studied urban planning
in the early Middle Ages, burials, castles and country es-
tates, both fortified and not. In several articles, Dr Riu ex-
animated the oldest mediaeval burial sites, which were of-
ten right in front of the house or sometimes even inside
in the case of children. His acceptance speech as a member
of the Royal Academy of Bell-Letters, entitled Some Fu-
neral Customs from the Middle Ages in Catalonia, stands
out as noteworthy. He also published studies on specific
objects found at the excavations and reports on digs or
overviews of the sites excavated. He is the author of nu-
merous syntheses or documents that take stock of medi-
aeval archaeology: one from 1986, entitled Current State
of Mediaeval Archaeology in the Christian Kingdoms on
the Iberian Peninsula, and the 1989 book Mediaeval Ar-
chitecture in Catalonia. As the most prominent person
working in the discipline, he was charged with assessing
mediaeval archaeology’s contributions to the history of
Spain at a congress on historiographic assessments of the
20th century held in Estella in 1998 (Contribution of Me-
dieval Archaeology to the History of Spain), and even lat-
er his book The Beginnings of Mediaeval Archaeology
in Catalonia (2004-2005). Worth special mention is Dr
Riu’s major efforts captured in the work Romanesque
Catalonia. Whenever possible, he tried to back archaeo-
logical studies with documentary support and to situate
them in their historical context, which is why he devoted
several studies to feudalism, and specifically to the fe-
udalisation of the Catalan countryside.

I must also mention an activity on which I worked with
Dr Riu: organising an annual course on mediaeval ar-
chaeology at the CSIC’s Institució Milà i Fontanals in
conjunction with the University of Barcelona. We held
two: one on mediaeval history and another on archaeolo-
ogy. Each lasted one week, and they were targeted particu-
larly to university students. Dr Riu always coordinated
the archaeology course. We held them for 15 years, be-
tween 1983 and 1998, and they were quite a comprehen-
sive overview of the issues and results of the excavations.
All of Dr Riu’s disciples attended these classes, along with
other people who were in charge of a number of excava-
tions. Contributions from archaeological materials in
general were studied, and analyses were conducted of nu-
merous constructions from the archaeological stand-
point: towers, watchtowers and castles, mediaeval homes,
glass and ceramic kilns, mills and forges, churches, mon-
asteries and walls, just to cite some of them. Dr Riu also
scheduled an underwater archaeology course. Various as-
pects of rural and urban archaeology, analysis and resto-
ration methods, death and jobs and games were consid-
ered through archaeology, ending with an assessment of
mediaeval archaeology during the 15 years in which
courses were held.

Once this stage of courses came to an end, in 1999 he
jointly organised a colloquium on “The Catalan Farm dur-
ing the Middle Ages and Modern Age (9th to 18th Centu-
ries)”. Dr Riu, who was the scientific coordinator, wanted it
to be a highly interdisciplinary congress, and he wanted ar-
chaeological, historical, geographic, architectural and an-
thropological aspects of the farm to be studied. He did
manage to gather quite a diverse group of people, including
architects, anthropologists and geographers, but especially
archaeologists and historians specialising in rural history,
and others like myself, with my study on the estates, to par-
icipate in a project about which he was so enthusiastic.
The colloquium was extremely successful, and after it we
published the proceedings in 2001, in fact, a very interest-
ing contribution to scholarship in the field.

As can be seen, mediaeval archaeology would be at the
core of Dr Riu’s activities, but there were also many other
subjects that he studied using written sources: the studies
on monasteries, started in his thesis, were translated in
numerous publications and shared at congresses on mon-
asticism. Also worth noting is his study on adoptionism,
a mediaeval legacy that took root in Catalonia in the early
Middle Ages. He was also interested in the religious
brotherhoods, an interest revealed by the archive of a sec-
cular brotherhood, Mare de Déu dels Colls in Sant Llorenç
de Morunys, documented from the 13th to the 20th cen-
turies. Curiously, one of his earliest studies and his last
one discuss this brotherhood.

For several years, he supervised a research project on
poverty and marginalisation in the Middle Ages, a subject
that was the target of attention in numerous European
countries. His project led to the publication of two vol-
umes which he coordinated, La pobreza y la asistencia a
los pobres en la Edad Media (1980 and 1982), which are
still a benchmark in this field of study.

He was interested in aspects related to rural life, such as
seasonal migration and pastures, as well as an early reapers’
uprising in the 14th century. He studied local life,
 particularly in Sant Llorenç de Morunys but also in Berga
and Manresa. He devoted several studies, some of them in
English as well, to the wool industry, which extended
throughout all of Catalonia, in Sant Llorenç de Morunys
as well, and on the guilds’ regulation of this activity. He
also devoted several studies to roadways, to trade, in both
the early and late Middle Ages, in this case on forbidden
trade with the eastern Mediterranean through licenses
that were found in the diocesan archive; this study was
later continued by one of his disciples. He took an interest
in the history of banking at the end of the Middle Ages in
an article published in both English and Catalan. He was
also fascinated by metrology and devoted several studies to this topic. His efforts to catalogue the parchments in the archive of Santa María del Mar and his contribution to the restoration of the ones that had been burned during the Civil War are noteworthy; he also assembled a diplomatarium of the monastery of Sant Llorenç de Morunys (1981) and another on Vall de Lord (1988).

In recent years, we were conducting a joint project at the IEC to publish the documentation on international treaties and diplomatic negotiations, the first volume of which has already been issued.

Dr Riu’s output was quite extensive, with more than 700 publications. Apart from the ones mentioned above, we should also cite the manuals of mediaeval history both around the world and in Spain, and the anthology of texts studying the Middle Ages written in conjunction with other authors. In addition to several books meant for popular consumption, such as Vida y costumbres en la Edad Media (1959) and Historia del cristianismo (1967), he also published a large number of informative articles in the newspaper Diario de Barcelona, the magazine Destino and numerous other magazines. Surprisingly, he published several books on industrialisation and transport in the contemporary age, some of them in conjunction with Dr Albert del Castillo.

Finally, we cannot fail to mention his studies on a variety of historians in obituaries or commemorative biographical sketches, such as the one on Ferran Soldevila (1994).

His merits were recognised by both his appointment as a member of the Institut d’Estudis Catalans in 1990 and his election as a member of the Acadèmia de Bones Llengües in 1983 and as a corresponding member of the Real Academia de la Historia in 1978. He was also a member of the London-based Society for Medieval Archaeology, the Societat Catalana d’Arqueologia and numerous branch organisations of the Institut d’Estudis Catalans. He served on the Advisory Commission of the Generalitat de Catalunya’s Archaeological Services. In 1998, the 1st Symposium on Mediaeval Archaeology: Tribute to Professor Manuel Riu was held in his honour, the proceedings of which have not yet been published. In 1999-2000, colleagues, friends and disciples organised a tribute to him which was published in the journal Acta Historica et Archaeologica Mediaevalia. In 2003, he received the Cross of Saint George from the Generalitat de Catalunya. He also received other awards: in 2004 the Signum Prize from El Solsonès, and in 2007 the City of Berga Prize for Culture. He 2007 he was named adoptive son of Sant Llorenç de Morunys, and a street in this village was named after him.

Beyond his research, teaching and all the honours he received, Dr Riu was a good-willed, affable person who always tried to lend a hand. Those of us who knew him will always remember him with affection. May he rest in peace.