

# NECROLOGÍA



Simon Fraser Barton  
(1962-2017)

PROFESSOR SIMON FRASER BARTON

(1962-2017)

Disbelief, sorrow and sadness overwhelmed family, friends, colleagues and students when the tragic and unexpected news of Simon Barton's passing from a sudden stroke at the age of 55 was announced on 15th December 2017. This is an incommensurable loss for our academic community on both professional and personal levels. Simon was one of the most eminent, admired and renowned British scholars working on Medieval Iberian History, but he was also a marvelous person and a loyal friend, as has been testified by numerous tributes offered by those who had the opportunity to know him in person, collaborating, studying, sharing ideas and experiences with him.

Simon's influential scholarship is praised and respected internationally, across a number of research fields: from social, political and cultural history, from Iberian to Mediterranean Studies. His research trajectory bears witness to his intellectual curiosity and compelling desire to continue learning and challenging himself. He engaged with a broad range of subjects, themes and methodological approaches, which took him from early work on power relationships in twelfth-century Iberian society, exploring their multi-layered social and economic influences and implications (*The Aristocracy in Twelfth-Century León and Castile*, 1997) to his most recent study on interfaith sexual relations and their enduring legacy in Spanish political and cultural discourses (*Conquerors, Brides and Concubines. Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberia*, 2015). Summarizing the breath and variety of Simon's academic and professional achievements exhaustively in a few pages is difficult, but an overview of some of the most significant steps in his academic journey helps to measure the impact of his contribution to different areas of Medieval Iberian Studies.

Simon was born in Great Kingshill, Buckinghamshire. He attended the Royal Grammar School in High Wycombe and graduated in History from the University of Aberystwyth (Wales) in 1983. His passion for this subject led him to pursue Postgraduate Studies at the University of York, under the supervision of another distinguished expert in Medieval Iberian History, Professor Richard Fletcher (1944-2005). Simon was very fond of his PhD supervisor, as attested by the deeply-felt words of admiration dedicated to him in a number of his publications. Simon's research at York focused on the roles and functions of the lay aristocracy in twelfth-century León-Castile, that he critically examined to understand the complex dynamics that framed and shaped their social and power relations. Simon completed this project at the University of Cambridge, while holding a Research Fellowship at Robinson College from 1990 to 1993. Awarded a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship and supported by a Leverhulme Trust Study Abroad grant, Simon finalised his first monograph, *The Aristocracy in Twelfth-Century León and Castile*, published by Cambridge University Press in 1997, which won the "Premio del Rey" from the American Historical Association in 1998. This was one among numerous and prestigious prizes and grants that Simon was awarded throughout his entire career for his research projects, including a Leverhulme Trust Major Research Fellowship.

In 1993 Simon joined the University of Exeter, where he worked in the Department of Hispanic Studies, before being granted a Professorship in the Department of History in 2006. In his over 20 years at Exeter, Simon excelled in his research, teaching and administrative duties, which he fulfilled with his usual efficiency, fairness, thoughtfulness and commitment, as both staff and students have profusely acknowledged (see the blog post dedicated to him when he left Exeter in December 2016: <https://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/medievalstudies/2016/12/simon-piece/>). In his leadership roles, including as Co-director (2001-2004) and Director of the *Centre for Medieval Studies* (2010-2012) at Exeter, Simon was effective, supportive and reliable, and always a trustworthy and generous team player.

His academic worth, along with his warm and friendly personality, were appreciated and recognised widely, evidenced by the many invitations he received to join international research projects and networks encompassing Higher Education and research institutions in different countries. General Editor of Liverpool University Press, *Exeter Studies in Medieval Europe* and Co-founder of the *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, Simon was also invited to join the editorial boards of international academic journals, including *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*; *Al-Masāq: Journal of Medieval Mediterranean Studies*; *Hispania*; *Historia Compass*; *Intus-Legere*; *Memoria y Civilización*; *Semata. Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades* and *Studia Historica. Historia Medieval*, as well as book series, including *Outremer: Studies in the Crusades and the Latin East* (Brepols). His expertise and outstanding scholarly profile, coupled with his renowned work ethic and collegial personality gained him wide recognition, as confirmed by his appointment as Counsellor of the Royal Historical Society in 2008 (having been a Member from 1998) and his nomination as President of the Society for the Medieval Mediterranean in 2013, under whose pragmatic, responsible and energetic leadership a series of successful biennial International conferences was organized. In 2014 Simon was invited to join the International Committee of Experts on the Camino de Santiago, promoting public engagement to a British audience.

Simon was an “all-rounder”, but above all he was an outstanding and talented researcher with a powerful gift: his writing was vibrant, persuasive and jargon-free, which allowed him to engage with different audiences, contributing to make medieval Iberian History more accessible, especially for an Anglophone readership. A full list of Simon’s academic publications is provided below. This will give an indication of the range of his research interests and the variety of subjects that he examined and critically re-assessed. An example of his successful dissemination of knowledge was his book, *A History of Spain*, which is a concise and yet comprehensive overview of the history of the Iberian Peninsula from its origins up to the modern day. The book was first published in 2004 and reprinted in 2009. Due to its success, Simon was preparing a revised and enhanced edition at the time of his death. The seeds of this process of opening up specialised research to a wider audience, however, were planted a few years earlier, in 2000, when Simon co-edited *The World of El Cid* (2000) with Richard Fletcher, translating into English some of the most important Castilian chronicles concerning the period which has been historiographically labelled as “Reconquest”. For his ability to explain eloquently and to examine critically complex subjects, Simon frequently acted as a consultant for television and radio productions,

including the BBC 4 documentary *Blood and Gold: The Making of Spain* to which he contributed as a Chief Historical Adviser in 2015.

Either as a colleague or a student, working with Simon was inspirational, thought-provoking and rewarding. He had a word of support and encouragement for everybody, along with constructive feedback and stimulating questions which showed his genuine interest for his interlocutor's ideas and thoughts, while never compromising on academic standards and intellectual rigor. Support for early career scholars was one of his priorities, as demonstrated by his endorsement of prizes and scholarships offered by the Society for the Medieval Mediterranean, including the Postgraduate Conference Organisation Prize that he created a few months before his passing, and which has now been dedicated to his memory. Simon's extensive knowledge, experience and wisdom were never coloured by any sign of pride or arrogance: he had the ability to make everybody around him feel comfortable, offering a friendly smile, a kind word and sometimes a tension-breaking witty joke (always in authentic British style!) Those who had the opportunity to interact with him, in both professional and social contexts, would agree that Simon was a very respectful, gracious and kind colleague: a pleasure to collaborate and share a pint with!

As Simon's first PhD student, I feel honored and privileged to have experienced what an inspiring and excellent scholar, conscientious mentor, exemplary supervisor and caring friend Simon was. His trust in his students' skills, determination and ability to pursue a challenging and simultaneously exciting learning journey, which himself had gone through, gave us the confidence to persist in following our dreams. His advice and teaching contributed to endow us with a positive, but always pragmatic, attitude to face whatever research (and life) would bring.

Simon decided to take up a new challenge in his career, moving to Orlando in December 2016, where he was offered a Professorship at the University of Central Florida. During his brief time there, his professional attitude, availability to his many international collaborators and effectiveness were never compromised, despite the adjustments which were needed in order to combine deadlines across different time zones. The week before his passing, I video-called Simon, who was cheerful and positive, telling me about a postgraduate scholarship which he was about to award. I decided not to wish him Merry Christmas at that point, thinking that I would call him again closer to the day. I never managed to say it, but I am glad I did not leave other words unspoken over the years I knew Simon: I managed to thank him for his endless patience and support, for his enlightening mentoring and for being an anchor for so many of us, students and early career scholars navigating the enchanting and sometimes hazardous waves of academia. I suspect he knew how much we all thought of him, although he would blush if anyone told him openly.

Fond memories of Simon, of his scholarly excellence, of the personal and professional model he embodied will never fade in those who knew him, but his legacy survives more widely through his works, which will continue to inspire generations of scholars, students and curious readers interested in the complex and fascinating history of Medieval Iberia.

You will be profoundly missed.

Antonella Liuzzo Scorpo  
University of Lincoln (UK)

## SIMON BARTON - BIBLIOGRAPHY

## MONOGRAPHS

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## ARTICLES

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#### EDITED VOLUMES

- Barton, Simon; Linehan, Peter (eds.), *Cross, Crescent and Conversion: Studies on Medieval Spain and Christendom in memory of Richard Fletcher*, Leiden, Brill Academic Press, 2008.
- Barton, Simon; Fletcher, Richard (eds.), *The World of El Cid: Chronicles of the Spanish Reconquest*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000.

#### PHD STUDENTS AND DOCTORAL THESIS SUPERVISED BY SIMON BARTON

- Dr. Antonella Liuzzo Scorpo, *The Idea of Friendship in the Literary, Historical and Legal Works of Alfonso X of Castile (1252-1284)*, University of Exeter, 2009.
- Dr. Alwyn R. Harrison, *Andalusi Christianity: the Survival of Indigenous Christian Communities in Muslim Spain*, University of Exeter, 2010.
- Dr. Alun Williams, *Muslim Minorities in the Kingdom of Castille*, University of Exeter, 2013.
- Dr. Daniel Roach, *Narrative Strategy in the Historia Ecclesiastica of Orderic Vitalis*, University of Exeter, 2014.
- Dr. Ryan Schwarzrock, *Conflict and Chronicle in Twelfth-Century León-Castile: a Literary Study of the First Crónica Anónima of Sahagún*, University of Exeter, 2014.
- Dr. Farag Omar, *Structures of Government in Almohad Iberia*, University of Exeter, 2015.
- Asma Alshaiban, *The Depiction of Women in the Historical Work of Ibn Wasil* (in progress).

- Rowena Cockett, *The Experience, Value, and Expression of Emotions in Thirteenth-Century Iberia* (in progress).
- Lorena Fierro Diaz, *A Comparative Study of Queenship and Aristocratic Women's Networks of Power in Twelfth-Century Iberia* (in progress).
- Teresa Tinsley, *Hernando de Baeza and the Making of Catholic Spain* (in progress).
- Teresa Witcombe, *The Intellectual Life of Mauricius Hispanus (1209-1238)* (in progress).

A SELECTION OF OBITUARIES AND TRIBUTES PUBLISHED SINCE DECEMBER 2017 TO COMMEMORATE SIMON BARTON'S LIFE AND LEGACY

- "Al-Masāq", 30/1 (2018), pp. 1-3 (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09503110.2018.1432543>)
- "Boletín" [de la Sociedad Española de Estudios Medievales (SEEM)], 57 (2018), pp. 2-8 (<http://www.medievalistas.es/seem/pdf/boletines/2018/bol57.pdf>)
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- <https://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/medievalstudies/2018/01/in-memory-of-simon-barton-1962-2017/>
- <http://history.cah.ucf.edu/2018/01/23/in-memoriam-dr-simon-barton/>
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- <https://tenthmedieval.wordpress.com/2017/12/30/two-more-greats-gone-simon-barton-and-mark-whittow/>

TRIBUTE EVENTS

- Memorial Service in Honour of Simon Barton*, University of Central Florida, 1 February 2018.
- Simon Barton Postgraduate Prize for Conference Organisation, granted to the event *After the Conquest: Converging Approaches to the Study of the Iberian Reconquista*, Cambridge, 12-14 February 2018.
- Remembering Professor Simon Barton*, University of Exeter, 16th May 2018 (organised by his former and current PhD Students).
- The next International Conference of the Society for the Medieval Mediterranean (Barcelona, 8-11 July 2019) will be dedicated to the memory of Simon Barton.