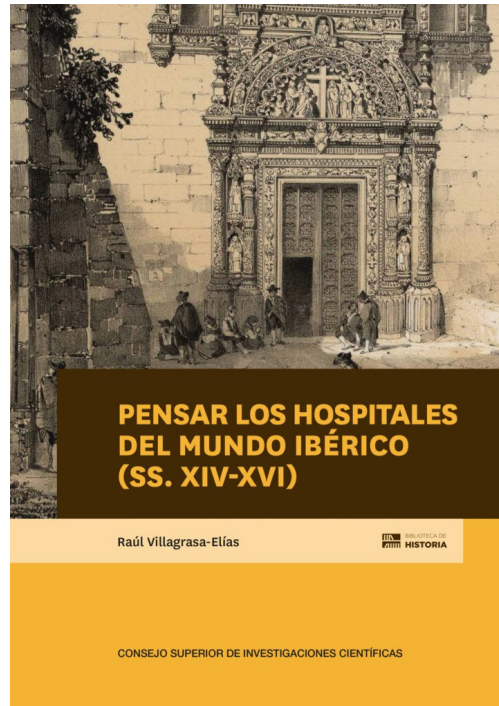


**Villagrasa-Elías, Raúl. *Pensar los hospitales del mundo ibérico (ss. XIV-XVI)*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2025. 280 pgs. ISBN: 978-84-00-11522-7.**

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In *Pensar los hospitales del mundo ibérico*, Raúl Villagrasa-Elías offers a rigorous conceptual and historical re-evaluation of the hospital institution during the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Moving beyond traditional localist "chronicle-style" histories, the author constructs a comparative framework that connects the Crowns of Aragon and Castile with the broader Mediterranean context. The work's primary contribution is the proposal of four articulating concepts: hospital networks, hospital reforms, hospital models, and the newly coined hospital renaissance.

The author explicitly draws inspiration from the paleographer Armando Petrucci, seeking to define technical terminology that avoids the pitfalls of historical anachronism. Villagrasa-Elías argues that the "hospital" of the 15th century was not a direct ancestor of the modern clinical space but rather a multi-functional "public locus" rooted in the Christian concepts of *hospitalitas* (hospitality) and *charitas* (charity).

The methodology is notably multidisciplinary, integrating:

- Lexicometry: Using databases like CORDE and CICA to track the evolution of the term "General Hospital."
- Digital Humanities: Leveraging the Rethos project to georeference hospital density.
- Diplomats: Analyzing bureaucratic "written culture" as a transformative technology for institutional management.

### Hospital Networks (Retia Hospitalium)

Villagrasa-Elías first challenges the idea that pre-modern hospitals were isolated entities. By analyzing the "hospital field" of regions like the Cinca Valley and the rural surroundings of Madrid, he demonstrates a high density of specialized centers (leprosería, centers for the redeemed, foundling homes). The review of the *Relaciones Topográficas* of Philip II reveals that even small rural villages maintained active hospitals, creating a geographic mesh that facilitated the movement of pilgrims and the "transport of the infirm" between hierarchical nodes.

### The Myth of the "General Hospital" and Reform

One of the most provocative sections of the book is the deconstruction of the "General Hospital" as a historiographical phantom. Through rigorous search of 15th-century corpora, the author proves that the term was practically non-existent before 1450. He argues that "Reform" was not necessarily synonymous with the physical fusion of buildings—as seen in the famous case of the *Hospital de la Santa Creu* in Barcelona (1401)—but rather a qualitative in management, characterized mainly by:

- The professionalization of medical staff.
- The stabilization of financial rents.
- The intensive use of accounting and registries.

### Circulation of Models

The book tracks the "vanguard" of hospital design and administration from Italy (Siena, Florence, Milan) to the Iberian Peninsula. Villagrasa-Elías identifies a "Mediterranean bridge" where administrative ordinances—such as those of *Santa Maria Nuova* in Florence—served as blueprints for institutions as far-flung as the *Hospital de Todos os Santos* in Lisbon or the foundation of the *Mendoza* family in Toledo. This "Transfer of Knowledge" proves that the Iberian world was not a peripheral recipient but an active participant in a European-wide institutional renewal.

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The book also contains three main appendixes that provide supporting data for the author's research on Iberian hospitals between the 14th and 16th centuries:

- **Appendix I (Ordenanzas hospitalarias):** A chronological list of edited hospital ordinances, rules, and constitutions from the Iberian kingdoms, spanning from the 13th to the 16th centuries.
- **Appendix II (Selección de diplomas):** A curated selection of historical diplomas and documents. These are presented as "diplomatic files" that include metadata and, notably, QR codes and URLs linking to full transcriptions in the *Scripta manent* project database.
- **Appendix III (Modelos hospitalarios):** A summary of various hospital models identified in and around the Iberian kingdoms, illustrating the cultural and administrative transfers discussed in Chapter III.

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The strength of this excellent work lies in its ability to bridge the gap between the medieval and modern periods. By refusing to treat the year 1500 as a hard barrier, Villagrasa-Elías illustrates how noble lineages (such as the Fernández de Velasco, frequently used in this monograph) and municipal councils applied "modern" administrative techniques long before the centralized state

intervention typically associated with the late 16th century. The author notes that his study focuses exclusively on Christian institutions, acknowledging that the inclusion of Jewish *heqdeix* or Muslim *maristans* would have provided a more nuanced layer of social complexity. He suggests that, were primary sources more accessible, a deeper comparative analysis could reveal how these minority communities interacted with the emerging "public" hospital network.

Raúl Villagrasa Elías has produced an essential volume for historians of medicine, social assistance, and the Renaissance. *Pensar los hospitales* succeeds in shifting the scholarly focus from the "stones" of the building to the "scripts" of the administrators. It is a definitive call to view the hospital not just as a refuge for the poor, but as a central pillar of the pre-modern "Public Good" (*bonum commune*). It would be highly desirable to have a detailed monograph that would map out similarly all the hospitals in existence in the entire Iberian Peninsula in the XIV-XVI centuries.