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MEDIEVAL WOMEN IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS: CRITIQUE AND RECOMMENDATIONS¹

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Abstract

In this paper we review the ways in which medieval women are presented in educational materials. First we survey the contents of four elementary school textbooks from the main publishers in the Basque Country, where we find an underrepresentation of women, the presence of stereotypes and the absence of topics directly related to women's history. The originality of such data presented here lies in the fact that they refer to a skewed presentation of women within a single period of history: the Middle Ages. This leads us to reference the main historiographic lines of medievalism and, based on them, to define the desired objectives as regards teaching about medieval women. Based upon these references, we outline a series of teaching proposals to transfer that knowledge to classrooms

HISTORY TEACHING • WOMEN • MIDDLE AGES • TEXTBOOKS

LAS MUJERES MEDIEVALES EN LOS LIBROS DE PRIMARIA: CRÍTICA Y PROPUESTAS

Resumen

En este trabajo revisamos el tratamiento didáctico de las mujeres medievales. Primero sondeamos los contenidos de cuatro libros de texto de Primaria de las principales editoriales del País Vasco, detectando una infrarrepresentación de las mujeres, la presencia de estereotipos y la ausencia de temáticas relacionadas directamente con su historia. La novedad de esos datos radica en que demarcan las carencias a solventar en un periodo concreto: la Edad Media. Ello nos sirve para recurrir a las principales líneas historiográficas del medievalismo y, a partir de ellas, identificar los objetivos a los que debiera responder una enseñanza de las mujeres medievales desde una perspectiva propia. Con esos referentes, esbozamos una serie de propuestas didácticas para transferir esos saberes al aula.

ENSEÑANZA DE LA HISTORIA • MUJERES • EDAD MEDIA • LIBROS DE TEXTO

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AS MULHERES MEDIEVAIS NOS LIVROS DE ENSINO FUNDAMENTAL: CRÍTICA E PROPOSTAS

Resumo

Neste trabalho revisamos o tratamento didático sobre as mulheres medievais. Em primeiro lugar, analisamos o conteúdo de quatro livros didáticos de ensino fundamental das principais editoras do País Basco, detectando uma sub-representação das mulheres, a presença de estereótipos e a ausência de questões diretamente relacionadas à sua história. A novidade desses dados radica na demarcação das deficiências a serem resolvidas em um período específico: a Idade Média. Isso nos serve para recorrer às principais linhas historiográficas do medievalismo e, a partir delas, identificar os objetivos do ensino sobre as mulheres medievais a partir de uma perspectiva própria. Com esses referenciais, esboçamos uma série de propostas didáticas para transferir esses conhecimentos para a sala de aula.

ENSINO DE HISTÓRIA • MULHERES • IDADE MÉDIA • LIVROS DIDÁTICOS

FEMMES MEDIEVALES DANS LES MANUELS SCOLAIRES: CRITIQUES ET PROPOSITIONS

Résumé

Dans ce travail on révisé le traitement didactique des femmes médiévales. Premièrement, on analyse le contenu de quatre manuels scolaires des principaux éditeurs du Pays Basque où on détecte une sous-représentation des femmes, la présence de stéréotypes et l'absence de questions directement liées à leur histoire. La nouveauté de ces données réside dans la démarcation des lacunes à résoudre dans une période spécifique : le Moyen Âge. Les principales lignes historiographiques du médiévalisme permettent d'identifier les objectifs de l'enseignement a propos des femmes médiévales à partir d'une perspective propre. Avec ces références on esquisse une série de propositions didactiques pour transférer ces connaissances à la salle de classe.

ENSEIGNEMENT D'HISTOIRE • FEMMES • MOYEN AGE • MANUELS SCOLAIRES

RESearch conducted during the past 20 years has indicated marked deficiencies

in the presentation of women in school textbooks. This situation seems to be the product of a teaching model that, as a result of long-standing tradition, mainly teaches content related to political and institutional history, which in reality translates into an androcentric historical narrative. We are here proposing a reflection on this state of affairs, taking as our focus of study the medieval period. Is an exclusive focus on political events really conducive to understanding the Middle Ages? Could it really be that the women who lived during those times had no historical role worthy of reflection and study in elementary school classrooms?

In order to answer these questions, we have designed a study that includes the following three components: 1) an analysis of the materials used in formal education (mainly textbooks); 2) the design of teaching approaches; and 3) the practical application and evaluation of these approaches in schools. The geographical frame of reference of this study is the Basque Country,² where Decree 236/2015 of December 22nd, which established the Basic Education curriculum, mandates in its article 17.b. “the integration of knowledge of women and their social and historical contribution to humanity, revising and, if necessary, correcting the content that is currently being taught” (p. 21). This study approaches the first two phases in the research sequence. First, we analyze the degree of presence of medieval women in the primary school textbooks of the Basque Country’s main publishing houses. Then, based on the historiographical results, we propose a number of didactic approaches for introducing the history of medieval women into our nation’s classrooms.

Medieval women: teaching approaches, textbooks, and historiography

In recent years, a number of different laws have called for the integration of contents related to the history of women into the classroom. The basis of this initiative is twofold: equality between the sexes and pure educational value (De Ignacio, 2019). However it could well be said that the spirit of these guidelines has been betrayed, given that no changes have been made to the official primary education curricula that would help achieve this purpose. These official curricula continue to give pride of place to political and institutional histories, while casting aside more socially oriented aspects of history. In this way, women and their contributions during different historical periods are often relegated to oblivion (Crocco, 2009; Sant & Pagès, 2011; Sánchez & Miralles, 2014).

As a consequence, we have a situation in which textbooks – the most frequently utilized classroom resource – offer historical narratives that display a clearly androcentric bias. In fact, studies conducted over the last ten years that have focused on this issue have confirmed the scant presence of women in textbooks, whether individually or collectively, both in the written text of these materials and in the iconography displayed within them. This is a reality as regards textbooks used at both the primary (López-Navajas, 2014; Sáenz Del Castillo, 2015; Gómez Carrasco & Tenza, 2014) and secondary (Pérez Urraza et al., 1937/2015; Bel Martínez, 2016; Ortega, 2017) levels of education.

Pagès and Sant (2012) have proposed a qualitative classification of textbook sections according to the extent to which they integrate women’s history: 1) “history without women” or androcentric

2 One of the 17 “autonomous communities” which constitute the political and administrative units of Spain.

history, referring to the kinds of narratives in which women are invisible; 2) “history and women” or contributive history, characterized by the citing of some contribution on the part of women to a history defined by men; 3) “history of women,” which deals with the right to vote and other landmark events of the struggle for women’s liberation; 4) “history for women,” which occurs when small sections are included that highlight “the role of women” in order to fulfill a certain quota and, finally; 5) “history from women,” which happens when a textbook vindicates a uniquely feminine perspective of history. In their study, Pagès and Sant (2012) classify the content of eight textbooks used in secondary education. The majority of the material in these textbooks falls within the intermediate categories 2, 3, and 4. Only one textbook is given an overall rating of 1 (i.e., the category signifying the lowest level of integration) while only a single book contains a number of exercises that can be classified under number 5 (i.e., the category signifying the highest level of integration).

These results are consistent with the criticism of women in school materials that had previously been offered by Fernández Valencia (2004), who indicated that books often provide either a “contributory” narrative in citing queens and other individual remarkable women, or highlight the role of certain exceptional women within “a man’s world.” At the same time, this author noted instances in which women are almost entirely absent, such as in texts on Ancient Greece, where there is little beyond mention of the fact that women were unable to participate in the life of the *polis*, without any further exploration of this phenomenon. Finally, this same author points out that, even though books incorporate the struggle for female suffrage, they hardly ever include topics that are more intimately related to the history of women, such as reproduction and child-rearing, social spaces traditionally occupied by women (e.g., water springs, stoves, markets, convents); female social networks or trades; or female-oriented knowledge.

For this reason, the functions and spaces traditionally associated with women constitute environments that are not recognized as either important or meaningful in textbooks, and this results in something of an underestimation of the contribution of women to historical developments. Such a phenomenon in turn leads students to acquire a view of women who “have left no noteworthy impact over the long course of human history” (Fernández Valencia, 2004, p. 11). In other words, students form impressions of the past in which women are entirely removed from the chain of historical causality (Sant & Pagès, 2011).

Some studies have suggested that, in addition to the reduced presence of women, and of topics associated with their history, in textbooks, the latter are responsible for conveying a stereotypical view of their role. Thus, it seems that women are assiduously represented as involved in occupations that are traditionally associated with the “feminine” sphere, such as nursing babies, cooking, and “household tasks.” And it seems that, on the contrary, there are fewer more diverse references regarding their historical roles. One might therefore speak of an unquestioning acceptance of gender stereotypes in the textbooks (Vaíllo, 2016).

The way women are portrayed in textbooks can therefore be criticized from two different standpoints. First, there is the underestimation and lack of recognition of their spheres of activity. And, secondly, there is the perpetuation of traditional gender stereotypes. Both of these features, in addition to representing an inaccurate interpretation of the past, also involve the transmission of discriminatory attitudes to students, given that the latter are not given access to varied historical female figures with whom to identify, and who could serve as psychological anchors (López Navajas, 2014; Ortega, 2017). The integration of women and their history into textbooks is by no means a trivial matter, given that they are considered depositories of a legitimate trove of knowledge, and given that they are required study material in history classes. Such a selection reflects hegemonic patriarchal values, and thus provides students a concrete set of ideas regarding the society in which they live, while also playing a determining role in students’ future actions within that society, as well as in the construction of

their personal biographies. In the face of all this, it would seem fitting to rethink what it is that we are teaching and why we are teaching it, given that this didactic activity is taking place within a society afflicted by a marked degree of gender inequality (Fernández Valencia, 2015).

The history taught in our schools has not found a way to incorporate and convey the latest contributions of historiography – contributions that have succeeded in making women visible, and in showcasing their contributions, activities, and distinctive social spaces. It is for very good reason that, since its beginnings in the 1970s, the history of women has constituted a fruitful line of research within Spain, and has resulted in a considerable production of scientific work. One sees evidence of this in the publication of a number of handbooks, some of them now considered classics, such as those of Duby and Perrot (1991), Garrido (1997), and Morant (2005).

Within this context, medieval studies has become one of the most highly developed areas (Segura, 2016). During the 1980s, which saw a surge of research activity, the study of the legal situation of medieval women was a topic that piqued considerable interest, and led to the subsequent publication of more general studies (Arauz, 2007). These studies helped highlight the legal limitations on women's activity during the Middle Ages, such as the Roman notion of *imbecillitas sexus*, as well as the requirement to obtain the husband's leave. At the same time, these studies made it clear that, despite those restrictions, women had the authority to sign contracts, participate in trials, represent third parties as executors or guardians, take oaths, and take part in legal investigations. Women's sphere of action expanded or contracted as a function of a number of different factors, such as age, marital status, the position they held within the internal hierarchy of families, whether they owned land, and the socioeconomic stratum to which they belonged. Thus, the legal authority of handmaidens and widows was not equal, nor was that of ordinary women compared to that of influential and honourable nobles.

The female world of work has been another widely studied subject up to recent years (Del Val, 2008; García-Herrero, 2009; López-Beltrán, 2010). The usual list of what are considered women's work has been widely discussed: bakers, peddlers, spinners, seamstresses, midwives, wet nurses, maids, etc. In addition, the social spaces associated with the world of women's work have been made visible: the home, the spring, the market, the stove, the windmill, the river, the weigh house, etc. Also receiving attention has been women's contributions to the workshops and artisan industries that appeared on the urban landscape. In these latter endeavors, female family members of the master and female salaried employees were treated like second-class manual labor, and worked under an ambiguous system of labor laws that made their integration into the hierarchy of guilds unviable. Finally, other female occupations have also come to light, such as that of merchants who engaged in long-distance business affairs, and who participated in the arming and loading of merchant ships that set sail for various northern European ports and the Mediterranean.

The analysis of aspects of women's life cycles, and of their position within the family, have also drawn the attention of a number of historians: arranged marriages and wedding ceremonies (López-Cordón & Carbonell, 1997); the ways pregnancy was endured and attended (García-Herrero, 1989); and spousal abuse (Fuente & Morán, 2011). Similarly, women's social roles have also constituted an important line of investigation. Particularly noteworthy in this connection are the results of studies of patronage (García-Perez, 2006), convent networks (Coelho, 2006) and religious houses, and their social impact (Graña, 2013), given that such institutions have highlighted the importance that women had within spaces of spirituality, sociability, creation, and freedom.

During the past decade, the lines of investigation have become diversified. Many studies have recognized anti-establishment focal points that, with differing *raison d'être*, invested certain women with authority, thus putting paid to the notion that medieval women generally held an inferior social position. Even taking into account the legal limitations to which women were subject, primary sources reveal ambivalent female personalities who, while in many cases far removed from institutional power,

possessed channels for exerting their influence and representing their status (Del Val & Segura, 2011). In line with these findings, the term “queenship” has emerged. It has come to constitute a theoretical model which has made it possible to bring to the fore the authority of queens in the direct exercise of their formal power, in their influence by means of informal channels and also in their social performance of the power (Pelaz & Del Val, 2015).

Another of the most noteworthy lines of investigation concerns the *Querelle des femmes*. This was a movement that arose during the Middle Ages, and that continued until the eighteenth century. The *Querelle* was an intellectual debate that proceeded in fits and starts, and that arose in a number of European countries. The terms refers to a debate among educated persons regarding the misogyny that was regnant during the era, and also regarding the dignity of women, and their capacity for reason. One of the most notable figures that emerged at the beginning of this debate was Christine de Pisan, the author of *The City of Women* (1405). However, many different authors – both men and women – subsequently left a record of where they stood as regards this controversy (Vargas, 2016).

Research design

This study constitutes part of a larger investigation that seeks to evaluate the way women’s history is presented in scholastic materials. The purpose of this study is to identify gaps and to help fill these in through offering proposals, and then implementing and evaluating the validity of said proposals in various schools. The focus here is on an analysis of the Middle Ages within the geographical area of the Basque Country. The first phase of this research is being approached with the following two objectives in mind:

1. Determining the way in which medieval women are portrayed in primary education textbooks.
2. Identifying the different topics that might be addressed, and the resources that are available for drafting proposals that would be conducive to the integration of women’s history into classroom curricula.

In order to attain each one of these objectives, we have created distinct analytical instruments. As regards the first objective – evaluating the portrayal of medieval women in primary education textbooks – we have created a template with five different variables (Chart 1) adapted from the indicators proposed by Subirats (1993) for the purpose of measuring the degree of sexism in textbooks.

CHART 1
VARIABLES FOR THE ANALYSIS OF TEXTBOOKS

VARIABLE	DEFINITION
1. General topics of the teaching units.	Compendium of the primary topics that are addressed in each unit, including subjects to which at least half a page is devoted, whether in text or illustrations.
2. Number of men and women in text and illustrations.	Recording of male and female historical figures cited by name in the text, and in the exercises for each unit; count of the number of persons of each sex represented in illustrations.
3. Type of function attributed to each sex in the illustrations.	Categorization of the functions of historical figures in the illustrations as a) political; b) cultural; c) work; d) biological; or e) passive role.
4. Presence of gender stereotypes in text or illustrations.	Classification on the basis of a comparison with historiographical postulates.
5. Sexist bias in language	Identification of non-inclusive expressions.

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

The sample in this study comprises four teaching units (abbreviated “TU” below) on the Middle Ages designed for students in the fifth grade of primary education. Selection of the sample

was determined mainly by convenience: the criterion was that the textbooks were published by the most prolific publishing companies in the Basque Country during the past decade. These publishing companies are as follows: Ibaizabal-Edelvives (TU1), Sm-Ikasmina (TU2), and Zubia-Santillana (TU3). We have deemed it fitting to include a second sample from the first publishing company (labelled as TU4), that is a gamified project, for the purposes of contrasting more traditionally oriented units with more innovative ones.

As regards the second of our objectives, we have indicated in Chart 2 the main lines of inquiry that have been developed in Spanish historiography regarding medieval women. These historiographical lines have served as a reference point for locating teaching resources that might facilitate the transfer of historiographical results into the classroom. For this reason, they have been formulated as objectives to which the teaching proposals need to correspond.

CHART 2
HISTORIOGRAPHICAL LINES AND TEACHING OBJECTIVES

Historiographical lines	Teaching objectives
Women: Limitations and powers	Examining the limitations of women, and also making clear the diversity of women's roles – not necessarily limited to that of a passive-submissive party-, by displaying a full appreciation of the role of the local noblewomen who governed their manors.
Women's work environment	Evaluating the work contribution of women in its varied aspects: household responsibilities, the work conducted in guild workshops, and work in trades that were predominantly female, but independent of parental influence.
<i>Querelle des femmes</i>	Fostering a debate about the discourse concerning the supposed natural inferiority of women and the movement that challenged this notion, known as the <i>Querelle des femmes</i> , drawing on contemporary texts in order to encourage critical thinking regarding the equality of men and women.
Women's life cycles	Teaching of specific information regarding the life of women during the Middle Ages, such as the significance of their head coverings, and their connection with marriage, as well as their connection with women's life cycles.
Areas of female social roles	Making visible some aspects of women's social roles, such as the making of offerings and the singing of dirges at funerals, with a view to appreciating the importance of these activities during the Middle Ages.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The material used to extract teaching resources is a doctoral thesis dedicated to the study of women in the Lower Middle Ages in the Basque Country (Castrillo, 2016). A general study that provides a horizontal analysis of the situation of women in the family throughout the course of their life cycles, as well as their capacity for legal action, the spaces they occupied and the ways they socialized, and their participation in the world of work. In addition to their suitability in terms of meeting the objectives set forth in Chart 2 above, the selection of resources has taken into account the degree to which materials could be adapted to school use, their digital accessibility, and the potential meaning that they hold for students.

Results

Representation of medieval women in primary education textbooks

First, results will be presented for each of the variables studied regarding this particular objective. Those results related to the tracks comprising the teaching units (Table 3) have a high degree of representation of twelve main topics – six of which are shared by the four teaching units utilized: 2) *Arrival of the Germanic peoples, and the rise and fall of the Visigothic Kingdom*; 4) *Al-Andalus: city and culture*; 5) *Rise and expansion of the Christian kingdoms*; 6) *Feudal societies: hierarchical levels and fiefdoms*; 7) *The medieval city: markets, handicrafts, and guilds*; and 8) *Romanesque and Gothic art*. The

subjects 1) *Periodization of history*; and 9) *The Way of St. James* are approached in TU1, TU2, and TU3, while the subject 3) *Formation and political development of Al-Andalus*, is addressed in TU1 and TU2. The subject 10) *Construction of cathedrals*; and 11) *Language, diet, and dress*; and 12.) *The situation of women* are only addressed in TU3.

CHART 3
MAIN TOPICS OF THE TEACHING UNITS

No.	Topics	TU1	TU2	TU3	TU4
1	Periodization of history	x	x		x
2	Arrival of the Germanic peoples, and rise and fall of the Visigothic kingdom	x	x	x	x
3	Formation and political development of Al-Andalus	x	x		
4	Al-Andalus: City and culture	x	x	x	x
5	Rise and expansion of the Christian kingdoms, reconquest, and repopulation	x	x	x	x
6	Feudal society: Hierarchical levels and fiefdoms	x	x	x	x
7	The medieval city: markets, handicrafts, and guilds	x	x	x	x
8	Romanesque and Gothic Art	x	x	x	x
9	The Way of St. James	x	x	x	
10	Construction of cathedrals			x	
11	Language, diet, and dress			x	
12	Situation of women			x	

Source: Authors' elaboration.

As regards the historical figures cited by name throughout the text and in the exercises (Table 4), there are a total of 29 men, some of them repeated in the different units. The following men are among those prominently mentioned: the Visigothic kings Leovigild and Recared; the Muslim kings Abd-ar-Rahman I and III; the French King Charlemagne; the Navarrese King Iñigo Arista; and the Castilian King Alfonso X (“the Wise”). Also appearing are very learned men such as the Andalusian physician Averroes and the Christian monk Fray Luis de León. In contrast, the only woman cited by name is Isabella of Castile, who appears in two of the textbooks (being mentioned in her own right in TU2, and mentioned as one of the Catholic monarchs in TU2).

CHART 4
HISTORICAL FIGURES CITED BY NAME IN TEXTBOOKS AND EXERCISES

TU1	Men	Abd-ar-Rahman I, Abd-ar-Rahman III, Alfonso the Wise, Leovigild, Mohammed, Pelagius, Recared, Receswinth.
	Women	-
TU2	Men	Alfonso VIII, Al-Idrisi, Almanzor, Averroes, Fray Luis de León, James I of Aragon, Maimonides, Sancho the Great.
	Women	Isabella “the Catholic” (as one of the “Catholic monarchs”).
TU3	Men	Abd-ar-Rahman I, Abd-ar-Rahman III, Pelagius, Ferdinand, Mohammed.
	Women	Isabella “the Catholic”.
TU4	Men	Alfonso I, Alfonso III, Charlemagne, García Ramírez, García Aznar, Iñigo Arista, Leovigild, Roderick, Roland, Sancho the Great, Sancho IV, Sancho VI, Sancho VII.
	Women	-

Source: Authors' elaboration.

A total of 202 historical figures were identified in illustrations of the four teaching units that were analyzed (Table 1). Of these, 81.6% (n=165) are men, and 13.9% (n=28) are women, while 4.5% are of indeterminate sex. Broken down by book, the percentages of women represented are as follows: 13.2% in TU1, 20.5% in TU2, 14.3% in TU3, and 7.3% in TU4.

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF HISTORICAL FIGURES IN ILLUSTRATIONS

	Men		Women		Unknown		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
TU1	32	84.2	5	13.2	1	2.6	38	100
TU2	27	69.2	8	20.5	4	10.3	39	100
TU3	71	84.5	12	14.3	1	1.2	84	100
TU4	35	85.4	3	7.3	3	7.3	41	100
Total	165	81.6	28	13.9	9	4.5	202	100

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The roles of the persons depicted in the illustrations in the four units are sexually differentiated (Table 2). In some 41.2% of instances (n=68) men are portrayed as exercising a political role, and in another 34.5% (n=57) men are depicted as being involved in performing work, and in 17% (n=28) are seen as involved in cultural pursuits. A total of 7.3% of men portrayed (n=12) exercise a passive role, and none are seen in a biological role. As for the women in the illustrations, the most common function is related to work (57.1%; n=16), followed by a passive role (28.6%; n=8), political (7.1%; n=2) and cultural and biological, with 3.6% each (n=1).

TABLE 2
FUNCTIONS OF HISTORICAL FIGURES IN ILLUSTRATIONS

Function	Men	%	Women	%
Political	68	41.2	2	7.1
Work	57	34.5	16	57.1
Cultural	28	17	1	3.6
Biological	0	0	1	3.6
Passive	12	7.3	8	28.6
Total	165	100	28	100

Source: Authors' elaboration.

A more detailed analysis gives a clearer picture of the gender stereotypes – or complete absence – evident in the portrayal of women. On the one hand, the tendency is to depict women as removed from any exercise of power. In terms of the hierarchy of medieval society, women appear only among the common people, with an absence of queens, noblewomen, and female merchants (TU1 and TU4). Furthermore, in scenes depicting rites of homage, it is only men who appear (TU2). Women also are nowhere to be seen in images that reflect aspects of the cultural life of the Middle Ages, such as in depictions of the Way of St. James pilgrimage (TU3). Women are also not seen in representations of medieval workshops (TU3) or the construction of cathedrals (TU2), and this absence seems to reflect the application of current gender stereotypes to the medieval world of work.

Both absence and stereotypes are also to be found in the written text. As regards absence, one example is an exercise in TU2 which assigns a research project on important figures of the Spanish Middle Ages. The options offered include Averroes, Al-Idrisi, and Alfonso VIII: no women are listed. As concerns gender stereotypes, a notable example is a section in TU3 that is dedicated to the situation of medieval women, which is part of a supplemental activity. The discourse in the text refers exclusively to the limitations suffered by women at different levels of the medieval hierarchy, and the subordinate role they had with respect to men holding the same social status. As regards nobles, the text makes mention of the fact that educated noblewomen “were only able to concern themselves with affairs of the household and childcare, and were not able to engage in the same activities as their male

counterparts.” As regards peasant women, it is mentioned that, in contradistinction to male peasants, they were not able to own plots of land”. In reference to female artisans in the urban centers, the text says that “women were forbidden to work in any trade other than the workshop of their husbands”.

Finally, as regards sexist language, it should be pointed out that the textbooks analyzed in the present study were written in Basque, which is a language that to a large extent shuns the use of gender markers. This is the case in references to peasants, workers, Muslims, historians, etc, and even in references to monarchs, where the Basque term used is *errege-erreginak* (“kings and queens”). Despite this, one finds references in the texts to kings and queens that utilize only the masculine for (i.e., *erregeak*) (TU1). In addition, there are references to feudal lords that utilize the masculine nouns *jaun* and *jauntxo*, with no reference to female feudal lords, and dispensing with the customary gender friendly Basque usage of *jaun-andreak* (TU1 and TU3). Similarly, one finds references to monks only (*monjeek*) and not to nuns – as if only monks ran medieval monasteries and embraced the vocation of a cloistered life (TU3).

Proposals for bringing medieval women’s history into the classroom

Women with limitations vs. women with power

The results related to the second objective are presented at this point. Firstly, it needs to be stressed that women’s capacity for legal action during the Middle Ages was limited. This was due to a number of reasons: the requirement to obtain the husband’s leave, frequent exclusion from the institutional world, etc. On the other hand, a reductionist view also needs to be avoided, and thus, it would seem appropriate to provide examples of women who were influential and powerful in their communities: nobles, abbesses, merchants, etc. Research on such women should be done in order to reconstruct their biographies. In order to foster significant learning, teachers can take as their point of departure the traces that these women have left behind in today’s world: names of streets, monuments, tower-houses, graves, chapels, coats of arms, etc. One example is María Díaz de Haro, a noblewoman who owned and ruled in Bizkaia in the fourteenth century; and the street that reminds her in Bilbao or the monument erected in her honour in Portugalete (Image 1), as she was the founder of the town. Another example is María de Mendoza, owner of the tower of Mártioda, from which she governed the the Alava manor Los Huetos in the fifteenth century. Who were these women? What did they do to deserve a monument? What is special about the lives that they led?

IMAGE 1

MONUMENT TO MARÍA DÍAZ DE HARO, AND THE MARÍA DE MENDOZA TOWER



Source: Monumento a María Díaz de Haro [photo], by Zarateman (2018), (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portugalete_-_Monumento_a_Mar%C3%ADA_D%C3%ADaz_de_Haro,_%27La_Buena%27_1.jp) CC BY-SA 3.0 y Torre de María de Mendoza [photo], by Basotxerri, 2018, Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mendoza_-_Torre_de_Mendoza_-_BT_-_02.jpg#filelinks) CC BY-SA 3.0.

The world of women's work

Another topic that should be brought into the classroom is women's work contributions in a variety of areas: as regards domestic tasks (e.g., going daily to the spring for water, going to the washing place to wash clothes, baking bread in ovens); their role within artisans' workshops, guilds, and family businesses (e.g., shoemakers, butchers); and the trades in which women engaged beyond the scope of their families (e.g., bakers, peddlers, midwives, seamstresses). On the basis of engravings such as those of Christoph Weiditz (Image 2) or lists of trades (Chart 5), students could be assigned reports that include the main kinds of work performed by women: sectors and kinds of work or trades, professional categories, an indication of the importance of the work, etc. Part of such an assignment could include a comparison with current trades, for the purpose of highlighting both how hard working conditions were during the Middle Ages and the changes or continuities in work assignments according to gender.

IMAGE 2
WOMEN'S WORK DURING THE MIDDLE AGES



Source: Weiditz (1530).

CHART 5
TYPICAL FEMALE TRADES IN BASQUE SOURCES (14TH AND 15TH CENTURIES)

Bakers	Responsible for everything involved in the preparation of bread: purchasing the flour, kneading, baking, and selling the final product.
Ovenkeepers	Managed establishments containing an oven, which sometimes employed several female workers, and where other women would come to bake their bread.
Millers	Managed mills located outside cities and villages where people brought their grain to be ground. The millers also transported the grain from the weigh house to the mill and back.
Carriers	Transported sacks of grains from individual dwellings to the official weigher.
Street peddlers	Retail sellers of products of daily use: produce, fruit, eggs, candles, etc.
Fishmongers	Sold fish provided them by fishermen at local markets or on the streets.
Cloth brokers	Served as intermediaries in the sale of cloth.
Merchants	Dedicated to large-scale sales, and participated in the supply and loading of ships.
Tavernkeepers and innkeepers	Ran taverns and inns where food and drink was sold, and where lodging was offered.
Chandlers	Made candles with wax or hemp, utilizing molds.
Spinners	Spinned linen or wool into balls, using spindles or distaffs for this purpose.
Weavers	Wove linen or wool utilizing looms.
Seamstresses	Sewed all kinds of clothes.
Drapers	Sold cloth.
"Cushion makers"	Manufactured cushions and quilts filled with feathers.
Maids	Dedicated to domestic work, in many instances living in the homes of their "masters" and "mistresses."
Washerwomen	Washed people's clothes.

(to be continued)

(continuation)

Wet nurses	Suckled orphans, abandoned children, or children whose mothers could not provide sufficient milk.
Hospital keepers	Provided health care in establishments offering assistance to the poor, sick, pilgrims, etc.
Beedles-“seroras”	Lay women responsible for the upkeep of churches and shrines.
Lay sisters	Lay women who lived in small communities, who were dedicated to religion, and who offered spiritual succor to the community.
Burial assistants	Provided all necessary arrangements for funerals and offerings.
Seat conveyors	Transported chairs or stools from houses to the church so that ladies of the house could sit down during mass.
Midwives	Assisted women who were giving birth. Possessed knowledge of obstetrics.
Day laborers (agriculture)	Hired on a day-to-day basis to work the fields, glean, prune vines, gather apples, etc.
Day laborers (construction)	Participated in the construction of walls and roofs, in the paving of streets, etc.
Auditors	Responsible for determining weights and measures.
Hawkers	Announced events on the streets.
Boatwomen	Possessed small boats for transporting persons or products from one riverbank to another.
Headdress attendants	Tied the head coverings of other women.
Artists	Artists who painted or sculpted.

Source: Authors’ elaboration, on the basis of Castrillo (2016).

The querelle des femmes

The movement advocating for women’s rights that arose between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries could serve as an *entrée* for students to investigate the discourse of supposed female inferiority to which a good many medieval and modern thinkers have given expression. Contemporary texts can be used for the purpose of organizing debates in the classroom, and teachers can draw connections between that topic and contemporary issues concerning gender discrimination. The poem *Emazteen Fabore* (“In Defense of Women”), by the Basque writer Bernart de Etxepare, included in his 1545 book *Linguae Vasconum Primitiae* (Chart 6), is one suitable source, given that it confronts misogynistic attitudes and highlights the virtues of women, including the value of the care they provide, their hard work, etc.

CHART 6 EXCERPTS OF THE POEM “EMAZTEEN FABORE”

If many men speak ill of ladies, in referring to them frivolously and dishonestly, 'twould be best for them to keep silent; women can do no wrong save with men.

Few wise men might speak ill of women. 'Twould be more honest to speak well of them. Why, then, must they speak ill of women when all of us, great and small, have been born of them?

'Tis a foolish bit of bravado to speak ill of women, all are lumped together when one of their kind is disparaged. I'd much prefer such people to keep quiet. 'Tis a great pity such people were nursed by a woman!

. . . Where there is no woman, I see nothing good; Neither man nor home are tidy. At home, disorder is the order of the day; I would not wish for a paradise wanting of women.

I have never heard of a woman striking a man first, rather, it is always the man who strikes the first blow. Wickedness always comes from men. Why, then, should women be blamed? . . .

Source: Etxepare (1545, as cited in Castrillo, 2016, p. 461, own translation)³.

3 In the original: “Muchos hombres murmuran de las mujeres,/mentándolas ligera y deshonestamente./Más les valiera estar callados,/la mujer no obra mal si no es por el hombre.

Pocos cuerdos habrá que hablen mal de las mujeres,/más honesto es hablar bien de ellas./¿Por qué han de ser criticadas?/Grandes y pequeños, todos nacemos de ellas.

Culpar a las mujeres es flaca valentía,/igualarlas a todas por criticar a una./Mejor si se callara quien así se comporta,/no merece que le hubiesen dado de mamar.

Women's life cycles

The way in which women experienced and coped with their life cycles is another topic that could productively be brought into the classroom. One way that this might be done would be to discuss the arranged marriages that were agreed upon between families in the absence of any mutual love existing between the future bride and groom. The headdress, one of the most distinctive aspects of a medieval woman's attire, is also a suitable item for introducing the subject, for it constituted a public sign of a woman's civil status, given that only married women wore it, while virgins and handmaidens did not. Here once again, teachers might usefully analyze the engravings of Christoph Weiditz (Image 3), and use them as a basis for creating costumes for the purpose of staging a short and simple play whose plot concerns a secret marriage between a young couple in love who have fled from the arranged marriage that has been planned for both of them.

IMAGE 3

BASQUE SINGLE AND MARRIED WOMEN



Source: Weiditz (1530).

Women's social functions: the funeral dirge

In order to complete the picture, it seems fitting for teachers to discuss some of the fields of action of women in both the families and the communities in which they lived. One of the most visible of these was the practice of rendering homage to deceased relatives through funerary offerings, or the singing of dirges. Basque chronicles have conserved some of the verses improvised by women at the funerals of their

... Donde no hay mujer no veo nada que me plazca,/ni el hombre ni la casa están cuidados,/reina el desorden en toda la casa./
No quiero el paraíso, si en él no hay mujeres.

Jamás oí que una mujer atacara primero al hombre,/sino que es el hombre quien ofende a la mujer./La maldad proviene siempre de los hombres,/¿por qué se culpa entonces a la mujer? . . ."

relatives for the purpose of honoring them before the entire community. These songs can be analyzed by groups of students who try to decipher their meaning in order to formulate hypotheses about the reasons that might have underlain this particular female role and tradition. One example that might be used is the dirge for Milia de Lastur, included in the work of the sixteenth century Basque chronicler Esteban de Garibay. The author of the dirge was Milia's sister, who delivered it at her funeral (Chart 7).

CHART 7
DIRGE OF MILIA DE LASTUR

To what is a woman born?
Roasted apples and red wine.
But you, Milia, have a different fate:
A grave in the cold earth, beneath a tombstone.

You must go to Lastur, Milia.
The priest shepherds his flock,
Your dear mother adorns your grave.
That's where you must go, Milia.

A stone has fallen from the sky,
And fallen upon Lastur's new tower,
Severing half of its battlements.
You must go to Lastur, Milia.

My dear Milia de Lastur,
Pedro García has treated us grievously.
He has taken Marina de Arrazola for a wife.
Go then, marry her: She is just like you.

Source: Garibay (1854, as cited in Castrillo, 2016, pp. 380-381, own translation⁴).

Analysis and discussion

In their treatment of the Middle Ages, current textbooks continue to emphasize aspects of the political history of territorial entities. There are no innovations as regards subject matter to be found in new teaching approaches, such as TU4, which offers its content in scaled format. In all instances, the main subjects are the formation of the Visigothic kingdom and Al-Andalus, and the expansion of the Christian kingdoms. The hierarchical medieval society is also dealt with, as is cultural development, the morphology of cities, and art. Only TU3 addresses aspects of social life and daily life, although such material appears in supplementary activities, and in a context related to issues concerning language, diet, and attire – as well as the situation of women.

The fact that this latter type of content has such a paltry presence in textbooks is one of the factors that explains the chasm in the numerical representation of men and women identified by Crocco (2009). This imbalance is without a doubt one of the most incontrovertible findings of our analysis, and is consistent with the results of previous studies (Pérez Urraza et al., 1937/2015; Bel Martínez, 2016). It is therefore no surprise that women are represented in less than 20% of the illustrations in these textbooks. In the case of one publishing company, the percentage is a mere 7.4%. And when it comes to historical figures cited by name, there are a grand total of 29 men and only one woman – Queen Isabella “the Catholic”.

4 In the original: "¿Cuál es la herida de la mujer parida?/Manzana asada y vino tinto./Pero para ti ha sido diferente, Milia:/debajo la fría tierra, encima la losa.
Tienes que ir a Lastur, Milia./El señor padre hace bajar el rebaño,/la señora madre adorna la sepultura./Debes de ir allí, Milia.
Una piedra ha caído del cielo,/ha dado en la torre nueva de Lastur,/les ha quitado la mitad de las almenas/Debes ir a Lastur, Milia.
Mi señora Milia de Lastur,/Pedro García se nos ha portado ruinmente:/ha tomado por esposa a Marina de Arrazola./Cásela,
pues tiene su igual en ella".

Over and above this numerical imbalance, there are many differences in the way the two sexes are represented in terms of the functions associated with each sex in the illustrations. Women are far removed from political and cultural activities, given that only 7.1% of women are associated with the former, and 3.6% with the latter. This dissociation of women from the exercise of power and the creation of culture is once again evident in the use of language. In spite of the fact that the language used in the teaching units is lacking in sexist connotations (this owing to the Basque language that tends to shun gender markers), one finds references to monarchs, lords, and monks in the masculine form only (*erregea*, *jauna*, and *monjeak* respectively). This is something worthy of censure, given that the Basque language allows for the use of inclusive binomial designations in such cases (e.g., *errege-erreginak*, *jaun-andreak*).

There is an absence of women in images associated with power, the top of the medieval hierarchy, and rites of homage. Thus, the textbooks ignore the role of queens, noble ladies, and abbesses who exercised power in their respective kingdoms, fiefdoms, and convents; who appointed their officials, decreed laws, passed judgments – in other words, who acted in the manner of any other feudal lord (Pelaz & Del Val, 2015). Yet historiography provides multiple examples of such women, such as María López de Haro and María de Mendoza. The inclusion of such female figures in classroom instruction would add variety to the representation of women, and would constitute a salutary break with the stereotyping and patterns of discrimination that are so evident in the books analyzed in this paper (López Navajas, 2014; Ortega, 2017).

A similar point can be made as regards the images associated with sociocultural representations. On the one hand, the Way of St. James pilgrimage is depicted as a phenomenon exclusively associated with men – thus ignoring female pilgrims and innkeepers. On the other hand, there is barely a reflection of nuns, which is really an egregious slight, given the importance that convents had during the Middle Ages as centers of both cultural influence and cultural vitality – centers where women enjoyed a high degree of independence (Coelho, 2006). And this is to say nothing of the religious houses, which constituted community spaces of lay spirituality that were an integral part of every town during the Low Middle Ages, and which were not cited in any of the teaching units analyzed here (Graña, 2013).

Also absent in the scholastic materials were other fields of women's sociocultural activity that were important during the Middle Ages. One example is the punctilious homage to dead family members, in the form of offerings and the singing of dirges. These and other activities conducted by women can be introduced into the classroom, thus making them visible highlighting their importance for the saving of the souls of the deceased in what were – it must be remembered – highly devout Christian communities. We can thus see that these spaces and tasks of sociocultural import occupied and enacted by women were not considered important enough for inclusion in the textbooks. Given this absence, not recovering and teaching this knowledge would simply perpetuate the devaluing of the women who performed those tasks, and of the areas in which women played a vital role, as noted by Fernández Valencia (2004) and Sant and Pagès (2011).

There are other things missing from textbooks, as well as assignments that reflect an unquestioning acceptance of gender stereotypes that was previously criticized by Vaíllo (2016). Within the sphere of work, artisan workshops and the work of constructing cathedrals are represented in illustrations as exclusively male work spaces. This leaves an impression that is at odds with the results of historical research on the subject, which has shown that considerable numbers of women participated in such projects (Del Val, 2008; García-Herrero, 2009; López-Beltrán, 2010). In order to fill this void, it might be fitting to teach what we now know about women's contributions in the sphere of work – a contribution evident in a number of different areas: the household (e.g., going to springs for water every day, going to the washing place, taking bread to communal ovens to be baked); artisan workshops; family businesses; guilds (shoemakers, butchers); and work that women engaged in that was beyond the family sphere (bakers, ovenkeepers, street peddlers, midwives, brokers, seamstresses, etc.).

It truly is difficult to find any content in the textbooks having to do with women's history: the work that they did, the discourse of female inferiority and the *Querelle des femmes*, arranged marriages, women's role in the family and in communities, etc. For this reason, the inclusion of a point dedicated to the situation of women in TU3 is noteworthy. However, the story that is recounted there is far from ideal, since it focuses in a negative manner on the limitations of women in the various strata of the medieval hierarchy, and is subject to legitimate criticism, since it resorts to simplistic clichés, while purveying glaring inaccuracies that are easily exposed by consulting research on any Western European region (Duby & Perrot, 1991; Garrido, 1997; Morant, 2005). As regards noblewomen, the text indicates that, although they were well educated, they were exclusively devoted to raising children, and were unable to do the same things as men. This is an assertion that has been discredited in light of accounts (cited earlier in this paper) of feudal noblewomen who governed the manors over which they exercised authority. The same section in TU3 informs us that peasant women worked hard, and were unable to own plots of land. The second assertion here is simply wrong, as even a cursory examination of contemporary sources reveals the existence of peasant women who owned and administered plots of land as well as cattle, houses, and production facilities. Finally, this section from TU3 indicates that the wives of artisans who lived in urban areas could only exercise the same trade practiced by their husbands. This is a limitation that is difficult to document, and that would appear strange in light of the fact that medieval women who lived in cities exercised a wide range of professions that were independent from the family sphere, as indicated earlier in this study.

In this regard, it seems important to advocate the inclusion in classroom instruction of those discourses that reflect the most current historiography, and which present women as a politically, socially, and culturally heterogeneous group. In addition, ways need to be found for textbooks to include history from women's perspectives that are not presented as perfunctory "adjuncts" to a larger – and supposedly more important male-dominated history (Pagès & Sant, 2012).

Conclusions

We can conclude from the rigid nature of the discourses within the primary textbooks studied here, and from the topics addressed therein, that these materials continue to perpetuate an androcentric vision of the Middle Ages that do not integrate content derived from more recent historiography. If the teaching of history is to include among its objectives that of educating citizens to take a critical view of gender differences, then it is clearly important to make changes in the teaching materials used to this end. In order to attain a proper treatment of medieval history that truly incorporates women's perspectives, it is not enough to merely insert separate sections that suggest a discussion of women's limitations as a supplementary activity. Instead, there needs to be an actual integration of women's perspectives. Such an effort would require dealing with a diverse range of topics in the history of the Middle Ages; increasing the number of women who appear in the text, illustrations, and exercises; increasing the visibility of women's spheres of activity; according these spheres the historical importance that they deserve; and providing a clear sense of the many different ways of being a woman that were possible during those times. Of supreme importance in such an enterprise is moving beyond rigid clichés regarding the limitations and obstacles faced by women, and correcting narratives that offer a reductionist vision in this regard.

Moving forward, two lines of research suggest themselves for building upon the findings discussed in the present study. On the one hand, it is necessary to develop and implement in schools those new teaching methodologies that we have suggested here in order to evaluate their validity, and also to improve and disseminate them. On the other hand, it would seem fitting to increase the size and expand the scope of the analytical sample, which in this paper has been limited to primary textbooks in the Basque Country, to include educational materials used in other phases of education and in other regions. These are the challenges that face us in the future.

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Note on authorship

Janire Castrillo coordinated this article in its entirety, and is responsible for its theoretical framework. She also helped draft the Methodology, Analysis, Results, and Discussion sections. Iratxe Gillate is responsible for the Methodology section, and also contributed to the Results and Discussion sections. Naiara Vicent provided assistance with the theoretical framework of the present study, and also helped analyze the Results. Ursula Luna contributed to the Discussion section, and also helped prepare the final draft of this paper.

Data availability statement

The data underlying the research text are reported in the article.

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