

Introduction: An Underwater Archaeology of Unbelief

La irreligiosidad en general y en especial la griega es más bien como un naufragio, después del cual solo es posible encontrar un caos de ruinas y fragmentos flotando a la deriva.
Ángel Álvarez de Miranda, 1956.¹

Irreligiosity is a shipwreck. With this analogy, the Spanish historian of religions Ángel Álvarez de Miranda (1915–1957) concluded his 1956 article on irreligious expressions in Polybius. Written soon after defending his dissertation in Madrid, Álvarez de Miranda was among the first Spanish scholars to address unbelief, scepticism, and irreligiosity in antiquity from a comparative perspective. During his stay in Rome under the guidance of Raffaele Pettazzoni, he absorbed the methodological proposals of the so-called “School of Rome”. His goal was to transfer these ideas to the Spanish academic environment—an ambitious task in a country still dominated by National-Catholic ideology under Franco’s dictatorship (1939–1975).² Despite this adverse context, Álvarez de Miranda established the first chair of the history of religions in Spain in 1954. His early death in 1957, however, left the discipline without continuity, and the study of unbelief largely disappeared from Spanish academia until the 1990s.³ Yet his pioneering reflections anticipated many of the questions that any historical study of unbelief must face. This book takes his legacy as its point of departure.

In *La irreligiosidad de Polibio* (1956), Álvarez de Miranda stressed the plurality of irreligious positions. He observed that unbelief cannot be reduced to a single model, either in antiquity or today. His approach to irreligiosity not only led him to reflect on the historical methodology to be applied, but he also established that, to understand irreligiosity in antiquity, it was necessary to reflect on the same phenomenon in contemporary times. Analysing the dynamics of unbelief in our time helps us to reflect

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- 1 In Álvarez de Miranda Vicuña (1956) 60. My translation: “Irreligiosity in general, and especially Greek irreligiosity, is rather like a shipwreck, after which it is only possible to find a chaos of ruins and fragments floating adrift”.
 - 2 Álvarez de Miranda Vicuña (1953). Religious freedom during the Francoist dictatorship was not recognised until the publication of the Organic Law and the modification of paragraph 6 of the *Fuero de los Españoles* (1945) in 1967. The causes of this change in the legislative policies of the state are largely due to the resolutions taken at the Second Vatican Council, particularly the declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*. On this issue, see Blanco Fernández (1999); De Carli (2009); Martínez-Torrón (2001); Moreno Seco (2001). Regarding the life and work of Álvarez de Miranda, see Díez de Velasco Abellán (2007) 19–20 and Soneira-Martínez (2021).
 - 3 See, for instance, the work of Puente Ojea (1997) and its analysis in Soneira-Martínez (2024).