

The Arts of Intimacy. Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Making of Castilian Culture

By JERRILYNN D. DODDS, MARÍA ROSA MENOCAL and ABIGAIL KRASNER BALBALE, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 416 pp. Price HB £25.00. EAN 978-0300106091.

This is an impressive and revealing book, offering a corrective to Spanish medieval cultural history. It is essential reading for any student of medieval Spanish culture and the processes of cultural transfer and hybridization. Yet it is also a book for the common reader. Superbly illustrated with colour photographs of interiors, façades, frescoes, vistas, art objects, bookplates, textiles, etc., with insets of more detailed explanations of topics under consideration, and appended genealogical tables of royal families and an historical timeline, this study offers rich fare for both the specialist and non-specialist. Political and church history, architecture, funerary monuments, textiles, artefacts, poetry, songs, language: all of these and more are woven into a dense, powerful argument that imbricates a history of two cultures, the Castilian and the Andalusi, Muslim and Jewish. But this study is no ordinary history; it is, as the authors affirm, ‘about that lost memory of Castile, . . . because this memory goes counter to so many received truths’ (p. 2). It runs, then, against the powerful discourses of later centuries and, especially, the more recent accounts promulgated by the Franco regime. The authors attempt to explain ‘Spain’s layered and diverse identity’ (p. 2). As they argue and brilliantly demonstrate, ‘culture doesn’t lie; it survives, slipping beneath the surface of national consciousness, becoming for us the recovered memory of a tangled, vibrant, hybrid world’ (p. 3). Responding to the popular view that a Spanish identity forged by Catholic absolutism has been projected backwards onto the medieval period with the consequent view that Castilians were anti-Muslim, the authors, adopting what is, in effect, a post-structuralist approach (shades of Foucault and Derrida) in their history, argue that the cultural interaction is too often represented as ‘cultural diversity’, in ‘margins’ as opposed to ‘centers’, or in terms of ‘borrowing’ as if groups defined by religion or nationality, even when they occupy the same terrain, are fixed and self-contained. ‘When we allow this to happen, we turn and project these polarities onto the present; they affect our assumptions about the capacity for people to reconcile and live together; they teach us strategic and anticipatory aggression. We hope, instead, to offer here, one attempt at repositioning the popular vision of the ways in which religion, culture, and society can interact. Our goal is to create a willingness to see the different constitutions of societies not as fixed and monolithic but as “between domains, between norms, and between languages”’ (p. 7). The authors’ intention is ‘to bring to a broader audience some of the work of scholars who have turned toward the study of hybridization in medieval Spanish history . . . The historical narrative . . . which we recount . . . is the structure . . . for the palimpsest of cultural history, . . . we hope . . . to reconstitute fragments of different memories of medieval Castilian culture, recollections more intimately implicated in the Arabic and Hebrew cultures to which it has been assumed to have been implacably opposed’ (pp. 6–7). The wide reading

listed in the invaluable bibliographical essay which ends this study is a testament to the authors' achievement in bringing together recent scholarly work.

Toledo had, for the Christian north, a special resonance. For the Castilians, three hundred years after the collapse of the Visigothic realm, Toledo had become the site of a utopian image of a state blessed by collaboration with the church, and a church whose authority extended over the nation-state with the city as its primacy. With the entry of Alfonso VI of Castile into Toledo in 1085 this vision of a reconstituted ideal state seemed possible. But the Toledo of 1085 was very different from the Toledo of the Visigoths as this study demonstrates. But the story here begins on the morning of Columbus' historic voyage in 1492 at Palos where a church portal would remind him of 'an Islamic civilization now vanquished but still at Spain's very heart' (p. 2). The end is also the beginning, and the opening chapter reminds the reader of the beginning: the Visigothic kingdom, the Umayyad invasion, the emirate and caliphate, the latter's collapse, the *taifa* period and the Almoravid and Almohad invasions. In parallel the emergence of the northern Christian kingdoms is outlined and the emergence of Castile as the potent power. Thus ch. 2 starts with the iconic taking of Toledo, symbolic of a link with the Visigoths and strategic in its assertion of control over former Muslim lands. Toledo, under Alfonso and his heirs, is to become a new Cordoba and a new Baghdad where luxury goods, the arts, architecture and courtly behaviour, through contact with the Muslim south, act as 'a persuasive teacher', an 'overwhelming material and intellectual world', but also allow 'a return to the [Visigothic] past' (p. 75). But how to assimilate the multiple cultures of Toledo? Chapter 3 concerns itself with Alfonso's attempts to deal with Muslims, Jews and Mozarabs, the latter, oddly, the most problematical. While Alfonso adopted the Islamic structure of the *dhimma*, only to break it two years later when the main mosque was seized, the authors argue that this process was less a contest between two faiths than a question of multiple faiths and, thus multiple cultures, at work, with the advantage with the conquered societies. Thus ch. 4 deals in detail with the assimilation of Andalusian architectural practice, new forms of poetry and song and new forms bringing 'the vernacular language of the native Christians of old Hispania directly and explicitly into the orbit of the classical Arabic of the Muslims' (p. 158). The role of Archbishop Jiménez de Rada in this complex process is ably argued, showing how he played a double game of supporting the church and yet fostering Islamic learning. The following chapter outlines the processes of cultural transmission; the many libraries from the Caliphate and the *taifas*, especially the Saragossa library, and the necessary conditions for intellectual transfer. 'Only in the aftermath of the 1085 conquest of Toledo did there come into being a large and vigorous Christian kingdom with a body politic that went far beyond the tribal and isolated' (p. 208). Toledo was to become a new Baghdad. As a consequence a new Castilian literature emerged where Alfonso's version of the Arabic *Kalila and Dimna* 'stands at the very inception of Castilian as a written culture'. The final chapter moves to the relationship between Pedro the Cruel and Muhammad of Granada and the Alcázar of Seville and the Alhambra and how the Nasrid palatine style became one with a Castilian identity.

Yet, in the end, the authors insist, 'in the creation of a new Spanish identity in the sixteenth century it was not just Muslims and Jews who were betrayed... The Castilians had betrayed themselves. What difference does it make to remember the Castilian culture that precedes 1492 in a way that more fully takes into account its fundamentally hybrid and multilingual nature? Restoring this memory makes us understand the ways a culture can betray itself, its own history and legacy' (p. 269). And this is the powerful and superbly argued message of this thoroughly readable study.

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Islamic Gardens and Landscapes

By D. FAIRCHILD RUGGLES (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), xii, 262 pp. Price HB £32.50. EAN 978-0812240252.

D. F. Ruggles' *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes* offers material for reflection on some of the challenges currently faced in the study of Islamic art and, within that field, of garden studies. The first challenge is how to define an 'Islamic' artefact (in this case, a garden or landscape). The history of the debate is neatly encompassed by two Dumbarton Oaks symposia organized some thirty years apart. 'The Islamic Garden' (1976) grouped scholars from various backgrounds in an attempt to weave together evidence from the physical remains of Islamic or Islamicate gardens in Spain and South Asia, which had been documented since the early twentieth century (see especially Constance Villiers-Stuart, *Gardens of The Great Mughals* [1913; Delhi, 2007] and Marie-Louise Gothein, *Indische Garten* [1926; available in English as an ebook: <http://www.gardenvisit.com/ebooks>] with a more recently propounded theory about the development of gardens in Iran from the pre-Islamic era to the present day (Donald Wilber, *Persian Gardens and Garden Pavilions* [Washington DC, 1962]). Wilber's aims in weaving a seamless history of Iranian gardens were arguably political as well as scholarly; yet his assumptions still weigh heavily on today's appreciation of the history of gardens in Iran and other Islamic lands. For its part, literary evidence—from the Qur'an as well as Persian poetry, better known at the time than the gardens themselves—strongly suggested a connection with Paradise imagery. The idea was enthusiastically embraced by many in the following years—in the wake of the World of Islam Festival—with a plethora of publications ensuing, some of them scholarly (the best among them remains Elizabeth Moynihan's *Paradise as a Garden in Persia and Mughal India* [1979]), others less so. Some three decades later, a new generation of scholars (including D. F. Ruggles and myself) convened in Washington DC for another symposium, titled 'Near (in the proceedings: Middle) East Garden Traditions: Unity in Diversity' (2007). Besides a concern with the political climate in Washington at the time, the title also reflects current