

Therese Martin. *Queen as King. Politics and Architectural Propaganda in Twelfth-Century Spain.* (The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World; 30.) Brill, 2006. Pp. vii + 292.

The Iberian peninsula spent the better part of the Middle Ages isolated from the religious and artistic trends that swept across the rest of Europe, both because of the geographical barrier provided by the Pyrenees and because of the “reconquista.” Most historians agree that by the twelfth century Spain’s art, architecture, literature, and liturgy had entered into dialogue with that of the rest of Europe. This has not prevented scholars from applying a rather narrow methodological framework to the study of medieval Spain’s artistic patrimony, often concentrated on identifying when and where foreign stylistic “incursions” occurred. Thanks to Therese Martin’s sweeping and accessible study of the royal family of León and its patronage of a series of monuments in their capital city, Spain’s art historical isolation through the early twelfth century has been breached. Informed by the last two decades of feminist scholarship, Martin has shone a very revealing light on a series

of, until now, misunderstood monuments and put in high relief the contributions of Spain’s royal women to the development of its artistic, and political, traditions. Armed with this study, scholars of all regions will be equipped to understand the iconography of rule in eleventh- and twelfth-century Spain.

The title of the book, *Queen as King*, was inspired by the chief protagonist of Martin’s study, Urraca I (d. 1126), Queen of Castile and León. In a charter of 1121 addressed to Archbishop Gelmírez of Santiago, Urraca styled herself “a faithful lady and friend, as a good king (*bonus rex*) to his good archbishop” (178). Distinguishing Urraca as one of the few queens regnant of the Middle Ages, Martin sets out to overturn literally centuries of scholarship, in which Urraca’s role as an artistic patron has been consistently denied because of a bias against female rule that hindered a more measured assessment of her role from within a few decades of her death until almost the present day. In fact, Urraca was but one of as many as four generations of Leonese royal women who used art and architecture to further their political goals.

Using an institution known as the “infantazgo” (31), an endowment

of money, land, and religious foundations that rendered Leonese princesses financially and, to some degree, politically independent from their male relatives, Queen Sancha (consort of Fernando I), her daughter Infanta Urraca (d. 1101), Queen Urraca, and finally her daughter Infanta Sancha (d. 1159), all patronized the double monastery, first known as San Juan Bautista and San Pelayo, and later as San Isidoro. Martin reassesses the documentary evidence for each stage of this program, examining through a feminist lens the biases incorporated into several generations of chroniclers' descriptions of the rule and patronage of the Leonese royal family. A minute reading of the documents implies that San Isidoro was consistently favored by royal women who associated themselves with this prominent double abbey as a means of cementing the loyalty of their Leonese subjects when questions of legitimacy to rule arose. According to Martin, these patrons knowingly quoted recognizable regional styles in architecture and sculpture, and attached to the foundation a palace intended specifically for royal women, thus underpinning their connection to an admired institution.

This is an astoundingly synthetic work. Martin draws on the evidence of chronicles,

inscriptions, manuscript painting, sculptural and architectural style, iconography from sculpture and paintings, archeological remnants, and mason's marks. Even with this wealth of material at her disposal, concrete proof of the patronage of Urraca, especially, remains elusive. Partly this is a result of the formulaic nature of medieval documents. In addition, in an environment so religiously and politically fraught, allegiances and the subtle messages telegraphed by style or iconography could quickly change. Martin attributes the south portal tympanum showing Isaac and Ishmael to the Infanta Urraca, and explains its derogatory depiction of Ishmael on an ass, and his mother Hagar as a lewd woman, as a not-so-veiled dig at Spain's Islamic population during the Reconquest (103-104). She asserts that within a decade, the tympanum's anti-Muslim iconography could have been seen as an evocation of the illegitimacy of Sancho, Urraca's half-brother, his Muslim heritage and thus his unfitness to rule. Yet only a few pages later, Martin elucidates the use of polylobed and horseshoe arches in Queen Urraca's rebuilding of San Isidoro as her attempt to connect her own reign, and that of her father, to the Visigothic past (107). At the same time, she explains that to the majority of Urraca's Leonese

subjects, such arches would have been recognized as a component of Islamic architectural vocabulary (106). In this case, “[t]he allusion to Islam is not a straightforward reference to conquest but to the Muslims as one of the peoples of Spain claimed to be under the rule of the emperor . . .” (107). Such stylistic associations were slippery, and attempting to pin down their interpretation at a single time and place is tricky. Nonetheless, the case Martin makes in the book for Urraca as the linchpin of San Isidoro of León’s most famous art and architecture is compelling.

The book is well edited and produced on the whole, with an extensive bibliography, plans, appendices explaining the capital program and mason’s marks, and an index. One wishes that the color plates had been separated from the black and white figures, both physically and with a separate numeration, rather than inserted as an undifferentiated quire, out of order, in the middle of the figures. A map of the region under discussion and a genealogical tree would also have been helpful. I felt a niggling unease as I read quotes from the *Milagros de San Isidoro*, a sixteenth-century Spanish translation of a text originally written in Latin, the *Liber de miraculis sancti Isidori*, which survives as Biblioteca de

la Real Colegiata de San Isidoro MS 61. Given the havoc wreaked upon Urraca’s reputation by commentators through the sixteenth century, wouldn’t it have been better to trust only the Latin original, or at least explain that the translation had been checked for accuracy against the original?

Finally, I hope that, given her immersion in the feminist literature (as demonstrated by her bibliography and its application in her work so far), Martin will at some point put her observations on the royal women of León in more direct dialogue with what we know from outside the Iberian peninsula. In her final chapter, Martin provides a tantalizingly brief comparison between the Leonese royal women, Melisende of Jerusalem, and Matilda of England, concentrating especially on their artistic patronage. Urraca’s half-sister, Teresa, Queen regnant of Portugal, might also be a good candidate for such a comparison, but I was especially curious about connections between León and France. Urraca’s mother, Costanza of Burgundy, had cultivated both an enduring relationship with Cluny (as would Urraca after her) and, apparently, a taste for French art and architecture. French noblewomen had already established a tradition

of leadership, particularly in artistic patronage, and those from Southern France, where female rule was more accepted, had long intermarried with the Spanish royal houses.

Diane Reilly
Indiana University



Sandy Bardsley. *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England.* (The Middle Ages.) University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. Pp. 214.

The identification and legal persecution of overly vocal and disruptive individuals (usually women), has been taken to be quintessentially a manifestation, like the witch craze and Puritanism, of a “crisis” of order in early modern England. Scholars as distinguished as David Underdown and Martin Ingram have employed the zealous prosecution of scolds as a “poster child” of sorts for the dysfunctionality and anxiety of the early modern English. Marjorie McIntosh’s *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370-1600* (1998) overturned such studies by revealing that concern about, and prosecution of,

scolds was in fact a late medieval development that can be traced back to the early fourteenth century. Sandy Bardsley’s *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England* fills the void in scholarship McIntosh’s book created and demonstrates skillfully why scolding was, in fact, a typically medieval concern.

Venomous Tongues, which claims a broad-ranging focus on “sins of the tongues” rather than just scolding, divides quite naturally into three pairs of chapters. The first two place scolding in the evolving discourse of sins of the tongue. What began as a fashionable subject of sermons, during the fourteenth century was laicized and popularized by alarmist authorities responding to both the economic upheaval associated with the Black Death and the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381. Apprehension about the disruptive potential of peasant voices manifested itself in the courts with the emergence of scold prosecutions. Royal appropriation of jurisdiction over certain types of defamation, the emergence of treason by words, and the criminalization of barratry (bringing false claims against a person), similarly expressed the desire to suppress the voices of the lower ranks, as did the