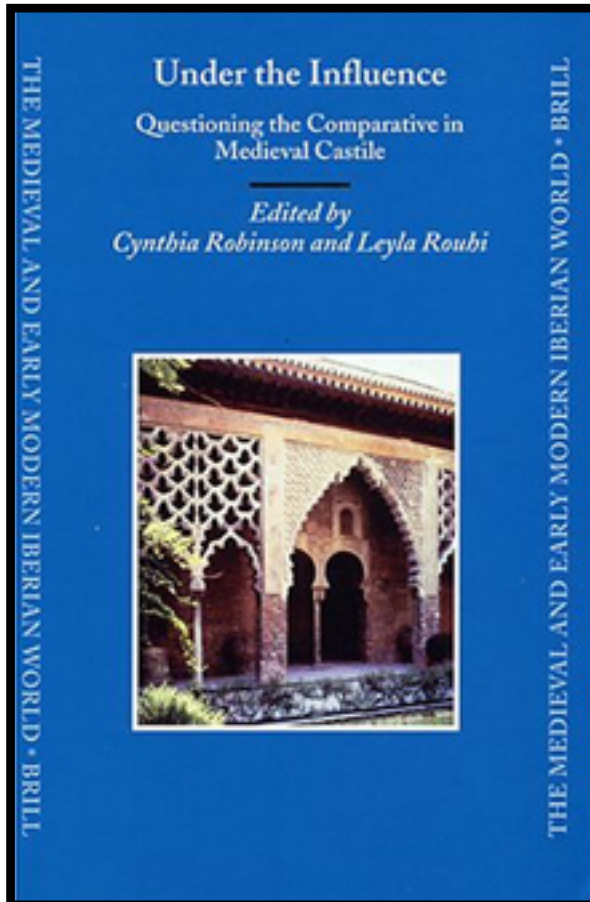


Under the Influence: Questioning the Comparative in Medieval Castile. Eds. Cynthia Robinson and Leyla Rouhi. *The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World.* Leiden: Brill, 2005. 332 pps. ISBN: 90 04 13999 0

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This collection of essays breaks new ground in medieval Spanish Studies—not only by offering new approaches to canonical texts, but also by bringing traditional scholarship and canonical texts into dialogue with critical orientations from a variety of disciplines, including art, economics, architecture and literature. This multi-disciplinary approach to medieval Iberia reflects the collection’s origins. *Under the Influence* was inspired by the topics raised by a group of papers presented at the annual meeting of the College Art Association in Chicago held in 2001. This cross-disciplinary reevaluation of medieval Iberia and of the focus of contemporary scholarship on medieval Spain leads the editors of *Under the Influence* to argue for a reconsideration of the Christian and Castilian as the definitive historical and critical discourses of medieval “Spain.” Such a privileging of the Christian and Castilian necessarily pushes the Jewish and Arabic to the edges, or as the editors of this volume would say, to the bottom. In the introduction Robinson and Rouhi reexamine the use of contemporary theoretical terminology (hybridity, multicultural), as well as vocabulary long used

by traditional Hispanists (*convivencia, moro, mudéjar*) to describe medieval Iberia and Iberian cultural production. The editors propose instead a new vocabulary, (prooftruths, *conveniencia*) as well as new paradigms (“top-bottom”). Robinson and Rouhi have grouped the essays into two clusters according to their subject’s relationship to the Christian-Castilian discourse of power. The first cluster, “Mandate From the Top: The Emperor’s New Clothes,” focuses on Iberian cultural production (architecture, miniatures, translations, epic and textiles) that reveals an official Christian-Castilian discourse of power and construction of state. The second cluster, “Voices from the Bottom: Undressing for Good Love,” features essays that examine the ways in which Iberian fiction was used to expose the slippages in official constructions of power, as well as to inscribe alternative voices into the seemingly closed Christian-Castilian discourse.

The first cluster includes six essays that address how thirteenth-century Castilian discourses of power functioned in the diverse society of medieval Iberia. Leyla Rouhi, “A Fifteenth-Century Salamancan’s Pursuit of Islamic Studies,” uses the case of Juan de Segovia and Yça Gidelli’s

collaboration in the translation of the Quran as emblematic of the problematics of cultural exchange between Muslims and Christians in medieval Europe. Juan de Segovia wanted to produce a trilingual (Arabic, Romance, Latin) translation of the Quran as a means of peaceably converting Muslims, and thus helping to solve what the fifteenth-century Catholic Church perceived as the “problem of Islam.” In 1454 Yça, *faqih* of the “fast diminishing Muslim community of Segovia” (25) came to France for four months to work with Juan on translating the Arabic of the Quran. After returning to Segovia, Yça continued to exchange letters with Juan, and Rouhi culls the Latin translations of their now lost Spanish correspondence for hints at each man’s motives and at their sense of identity. Yça reveals that he is a complicated Iberian subject—a learned Islamic scholar and grammatical expert as well as an Iberian well read in Christian Romance thinkers including Ramon Llull and Enrique de Villena. While Juan comes out of the orthodox Christian tradition (including Crusade and conversion), he is also a native Iberian and has intimate personal knowledge and experiences with Muslim neighbors. Both Yça and Juan reveal that they are complex Iberian subjects—neither capable of being defined simply as Muslim or Christian.

Heather Ecker, “How to Administer a Conquered City,” frames the Reconquest in terminology taken from the social science model of colonial intervention. Ecker examines how Castilians established and modified patterns of settlement in conquered Muslim lands. Among the colonial strategies used by Castilians was the appropriation of neighborhood mosques, the partitioning of land among settlers, the establishment of local legal charters (*fueros*), and the use of Arabized Jews and Mozarabs as administrators in the new colonial government. Neighborhood mosques were made into parish churches, and the surrounding community often continued to be administered as a neighborhood unit. Post-Reconquest Andalusí cities maintained, sometimes for centuries, the same neighborhoods and organizational cells as had existed in the pre-Conquest Islamic city. Ecker’s article shows how official Reconquest policies, often characterized as disruptive and designed to eliminate patterns of Islamic culture and society sometimes adapted and continued the Andalusí urban patterns of settlement.

Francisco Prado-Vilar, “The Gothic Anamorphic Gaze” exposes the disjuncture between the illustrations and the text in the Alfonsine *Cantigas de Santa María*. Prado-Vilar argues that the iconography of the *Cantigas* was designed to appeal to Iberian Others and thus to include them in the discourse of the Alfonsine cultural programme.

Prado-Vilar focuses on the networks of associations created in a series of images of gazing subjects in the *Cantigas*. These images portray Christians and Moors gazing at the Virgin or their children in moments of tragedy. Prado-Vilar argues that the illustrations emphasize the shared humanity of Iberian subjects (Muslims and Christians). The Virgin, the focal point of these illustrations, is represented as assuaging the troubles and pain of all who approach her regardless of ethnic, cultural and/or even religious differences.

María Judith Feliciano, “Muslim Shrouds for Christian Kings?” argues for a reexamination of how and why thirteenth-century Castilian nobility and royalty used Andalusí textiles. Prevailing critical attitudes present the use of Andalusí clothing and cloth among Castilian nobility and royalty as exotic, “incongruous elements of cultural display” (102). Feliciano disagrees, suggesting that the items were very familiar to the Castilian nobility and that the “ethnicity of the makers” had little to no bearing on the function such clothes had as symbols of Castilian power and legitimacy. “Medieval Iberian culture shared an aesthetic system independent of religious meaning” (103) and to understand how Andalusí textiles were used to convey power, we must look instead at how they functioned in the culture of consumption that

had developed around Mediterranean trade routes. Feliciano argues that Castilian nobles, kings and clerics saw these items not as markers of Andalusí religious or ethnic identity, but as textiles of immense value made of luxury items such as gold, silver, silk, and as such functioned as signs of power and prestige, not of cultural appropriation or identity.

The last two essays in the first cluster examine how literary works also functioned to create and legitimate the Christian-Castilian discourse of power. Ana Echevarría, “Eschatology or Biology?” analyzes the role that the Jewish and Latin translators of *Muhammed’s Ladder*, Abraham of Toledo and Bonaventure of Siena, had in transforming Arabic and Latin sources (especially polemic biographies) into a Latin work that would fit into Romance and Latin anti-Islamic literature. Echevarría argues that Abraham brought together Arabic and Latin material on the Prophet’s Night Journey to produce a single cohesive work ready made to demonstrate Muhammed as a false prophet. Echevarría stresses the ideological motivations of both the Jewish and Christian translators of the *Ladder*, as well as the larger religio-political ideologies of the Alfonsine translation project. Turning to the epic, Gregory B. Kaplan, “Friend ‘of’ Foe,” offers a cultural studies reading of the *Poema de Mío Cid*, focusing on how the representation of non-Castilian characters are shaped by contemporary early thirteenth-century socio-political attitudes. Kaplan looks at how and why the characters of Álvar Fáñez and the Infantes de Carrión in the *PMC* may have been used by the author/composer to attract soldiers from both León and Castile to join Alfonso VIII in his thirteenth-century campaign against the Almohads. Central to this study is a reading of the *PMC* as propaganda designed to motivate the members of the Castilian court and other Iberians to lend support against the Moorish south, a process that would eventually lead to the battle of *Las Navas de Tolosa* in 1212.

The second cluster, whose essays have been grouped together because each exposes the ways in which the Others of medieval Iberia (non-Christians) are inscribed within the official discourses of Castilian hegemony, begins with Louise Vasvári’s study of the proverb in the *Libro de buen amor*. In “Non ha mala palabra si non es a mal tenida” Vasvári examines how Juan Ruiz systematically subverts the proverb as part of the *Libro de buen amor*’s larger programme of a humorous relexicalization of canonical authorities. The proverb represents the sapiential wisdom of the oral tradition, and for Vasvári Juan Ruiz’s parodic use of the proverb in the *LBA* is indicative of how vernacular authors active during the transition from an oral to a written culture consciously displayed their mastery of the new medium of writing. Using specific examples of proverbs (“perverbs”) that can only be read as obscene, Vasvári examines how Juan Ruiz strategically uses proverbs as hermeneutic signposts that create complex webs of intertextual associations that extend beyond the frame and function as a type of metaphorical shorthand.

The next three essays examine how the go-between is represented in a series of Iberian fictional works. Cynthia Robinson “Going Between,” compares the manner in which the *ajouz* or matchmaker is presented in the Arabic-Andalusí *Bayad wa Riyad* and the Alfonsine *Libro del Ajedrez*, concluding that it seems “there existed a *visual* typology which accompanied and played alongside the literary one for the depiction of the *alcahueta*” (223-224). The *ajouz* of the courtly Andalusí romance *Bayad wa Riyad* is an important character that fulfills a legitimate function without traces of trickery or scandal. Yet the text’s illustrations which portray her as a somewhat marginal figure—pushed to the edges or accompanied by other important symbols of disreputable behavior such as a wine flask—are at odds with the character’s development in the text. Robinson points out that the illustrations of *BR* have more in common with the image of the *alcahueta* in the Ibero-Romance Alfonsine work the *Libro del Ajedrez* in which the go-between

is marked as Muslim and appears tempting some dark-skinned Muslims playing chess with an attractive young wine-pourer. Based on the architectural scenes of the *BR* illustrations Robinson further suggests that this work was meant to be performed. In Robinson's opinion the similarities in visual representation of the *ajouz* in Arabic and Romance Iberian works can be explained by a pan-Iberian tradition of courtly performance in which the go-between was portrayed as a lascivious Other.

Luis M. Girón-Negrón, "How the Go-Between Cut Her Nose," compares three versions of the story of the shoemaker, the barber and their wives—an Arabic, a Hebrew and a Romance version. His comparison of how different authors from different linguistic, cultural and ethnic groups adapt the same material reveals the differences between those different sites of meaning for each author. This careful analysis of how the authors change and adapt the same tale to their particular traditions and to the linguistic, cultural and political needs of their audience reveal the various factors that determined literary acculturation in the context of medieval Iberia. The Alfonsine Romance translation varies little from the Ibn al-Muqaffa's Arabic original in *Kalila wa Dimna* and has not been altered to Christianize the text. Girón-Negrón argues that this is to be expected given that Alfonsine translations were governed by a desire for "literal accuracy" and the straightforward rendering of the Arabic into Romance. Eleazar's Hebrew translation, however, makes significant changes—the use of rhymed prose, didactic amplifications, addition of Biblical allusions—that create a "complex web of intertextual associations" (254) missing in the Arabic version of Ibn al-Muqaffa. In Girón-Negrón's opinion these changes enhance the text and increase its thematic and formal sophistication.

Gregory Hutcheson, "Garozá's Gaze," analyzes Trotaconventos' trafficking in the "commerce of desire" in which the physical description of both male and female body becomes the basic unit of currency. For Hutcheson, Juan Ruiz inscribes into the episode of Garozá female sexual agency. Garozá is a desiring subject and as such does not fit into the "misogynist discourse of Latin Christendom." Garozá's gaze, channeled by Trotaconventos, is destabilizing for both readers and for the discourses of power in fourteenth-century Castile.

The final essay turns the Iberian and European gaze outward, toward the East. Benjamin Liu, "The Mongol in the Text" addresses the "Tartar question" as proposed by representations of Mongols in medieval European texts. The Mongols/Tartars are ciphers for medieval Europeans—they are the remote Others for Iberians like Ramón Llull, for whom Muslims (*moros*) are familiar historical neighbors. Tartars, on the other hand, were portrayed as ferocious warriors capable of almost inhuman cruelty, but also potential allies against the new threat of Islam represented by the Turks. In Llull's opinion the pagan Mongols should be courted by the Christian monarchs of Europe and should be the focus of missionary zeal. In contrast to the way Mongols were represented in Christian literature, Liu points out that the majority of Mongols came to Europe as slaves. The Mongol's status as pagan Other was an essential justification for this enslavement. Liu's study, like the others in this collection, emphasizes the tension between competing representations of non-Christian Others in official Iberian Christian discourses.

The essays in *Under the Influence* exemplify the richness of medieval Iberia as a cultural, geographical and historical site of contact and interaction. They also show how medieval Spanish studies in the wake of *Queer Iberia* continues to respond and adapt to contemporary theoretical currents in cultural studies, as well as to reevaluate accepted canonical approaches and paradigms.