

Carlos Andrés GONZÁLEZ PAZ (ed.), *Women and pilgrimage in medieval Galicia*, Burlington, Ashgate, cop. 2015 (Col. Compostela international studies in pilgrimage history and culture), 174 págs. ISBN 978-1-4724-1070-2

Galicia is a fascinating and multifaceted place, and this book, which explores *Women and Pilgrimage in Medieval Galicia* in a well-organized, well documented, and well-argued manner, does it justice.

The book begins with an introductory chapter that presents its overall aim: to examine the role of women in pilgrimage in Medieval Galicia. The introduction effectively summarizes the topics with which the reader needs to be familiar, deftly avoiding the multitude of related issues that could have easily (but unnecessarily) been addressed, but that ultimately were not. The author should be commended for this, for, as we know, in such contexts, “less is more.”

The main body of the book is divided into ten chapters, each focusing on one well-defined topic. The first chapter, “Woman and the Christian Middle Ages – The Theoretical Horizon,” considers the theoretical aspects of the subject and begins with the assessment that “any discussion of the position of woman during the middle ages is a challenge that is as exciting as it is arduous.” It is an extremely interesting chapter that offers comprehensive background regarding the role of Christian woman in the middle ages and provides an effective foundation for all of the book’s subsequent chapters.

Chapter two continues in the direction outlined in chapter one but focuses in on the specific role of women and pilgrimage in Galicia. In recent years, gender research has attempted to establish whether we can identify a specifically female model of pilgrimage, and this chapter addresses these phenomena by analysing the history of the pilgrimage of women to Compostela. The chapter’s conclusion stresses the importance of this

kind of research by noting that: “Women have spoken little of them throughout history; men have spoken of them even less. The history of pilgrimages needs the incorporation of knowledge related to this double gaze, woman’s contribution to this process” (p. 50).

Chapters three through ten explore different cases of women who made pilgrimages during the middle ages. The third chapter examines the figure of Guncina Gonzalez, who stands out during the first half of the twelfth century for her desire and decision to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Chapter four deals with Maria Balteira, a woman Crusader to Outremer, and explains the obstacles involved in her travels. The chapter also analyses the literary representations of the pilgrimage of Balteira, who was a celebrated woman in medieval Iberian literature. Chapter five analyses the figure of Isabel (1270-1336), Princess of Aragon and Queen of Portugal, who was also known as the “Holy Queen” and whose actions tended to be explained and interpreted as stemming from her deep sense of religion and faith. Isabel’s pilgrimage and character continue to have an influence today.

Chapter six depicts the French noblewomen who engaged in pilgrimage to Compostela in the middle ages. Few women travelled the main pilgrimage routes (only 10% according to a conjecture by the author), and even fewer noblewomen. The chapter concludes with the final developments of the “Camino Frances” and the massive number of women who currently travel the route.

Chapter seven considers Brigitte of Sweden, the only canonized saint of Scandinavia (102/3-1373), and her pilgrimage to Santiago. The chapter’s small glimpse into

the early days of the saintly life of Brigitte of Sweden reveals that the pilgrimage to Santiago not only played a decisive role in constructing her saintly fame but also resulted in a change to her own self. The book's eighth chapter takes a look at "Woman, Pilgrimage and Art on the Road to Santiago." The scholarship focuses on the two types of women arguably most often represented along the road to Santiago: the virgin and the female sinner. According to the author, these are two sides of the same coin, reflecting the many devotional images linked to pilgrimage on the one hand, and the geographical representation of church attitudes towards women during the middle ages on the other hand.

Chapter nine considers women in the collection of nearly 2,000 miniatures illuminating the historiated codices of the "cantigas de Santa Maria" and provides extremely reliable evidence for the study of Castilian society in the second half of the thirteenth century. And the book's tenth and final chapter offers a broad look at "Woman and Feigned Pilgrimages," which is an interesting and effective choice for concluding the book.

Throughout my entire reading of this book, I found myself riveted by the text's flow and clarity. Its fascinating detailed discussions of historical eras and events progress in an engaging manner that makes the reader want to keep on reading.

A few aspects of this book, however, make it extraordinary. First, and most important, is the fact that the author does not limit himself to general observations but rather delves into all the details, simultaneously offering a comprehensive picture and undertaking an in-depth examination of the phenomenon of female pilgrims

In addition, the text is liberally illustrated with figures that help the reader understand the extremely complex picture as it unfolds. And finally, the bibliography and notes for each chapter are extremely detailed, clearly reflecting that the authors have done their homework well.

For all these reasons, I have no doubt that this book will be a valuable resource for students, researchers, and practitioners in the fields of pilgrimage studies, religious studies, sociology, geography, history, cultural studies, and anthropology.

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