

UCLA

UCLA Historical Journal

Title

Lucy K. Pick. *Conflict and Coexistence. Archbishop Rodrigo and the Muslims and Jews of Medieval Spain*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2004. Pp. xx. 239. \$70.00

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/32z918c9>

Journal

UCLA Historical Journal, 21(0)

Author

Molina, Jorge Ortuño

Publication Date

2006

Copyright Information

Copyright 2006 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

we define our age negatively, through dissociation from that distant past and those forgotten peoples (catastrophism).

It is a provocative argument, diligently and passionately argued, but in the end Lemuria itself is not sufficient to bear the burden of proof of such a theory. In part this is because the argument is broad and highly philosophical, thus naturally difficult to prove. In part this is because the argument does not explain western culture's fascination with imagined lost worlds at least from the time of early Greeks, if not much earlier, among peoples who did not identify themselves as modern, or separate from their ancestors. In addition, Ramaswamy attempts to separate belief in Lemuria and in mythic places in general from the phenomenon of religious belief, although she is clearly grappling with very large questions of the nature of human imagination, creativity, and the fulfillment of spiritual need. Yet if the peoples of ninth-century Europe or Greece 700BCE were drawn to imagine lost continents, strange peoples, and fantastic kingdoms (just to give two western examples—though belief in lost worlds is part of many cultures), perhaps there is a deeper human longing to imagine and believe in mythical geographies that cannot be tied to the condition of modernity. That said, however, Ramaswamy offers a powerful and challenging argument that demands engagement. *The Lost Land of Lemuria* is a compelling analysis of cross-cultural intellectual exchange and one example of a fertile merger of scientific theory, politics, and folklore between East and West.

Laura York

University of California, Los Angeles

Lucy K. Pick. *Conflict and Coexistence. Archbishop Rodrigo and the Muslims and Jews of Medieval Spain*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2004. Pp. xx, 239. \$70.00

Anglo-American historians, traditionally interested in France, England, and Italian history, have been paying growing attention to the history of medieval Iberia. This interest, to a large extent, reflects the social, religious, and ethnic diversity found in medieval Spain. There, different religions intermingled, Islam, Christianity and Judaism; patterns of social organization differed from those of other parts of the medieval West, e.g. no serfdom in Castile); and each religious community evolved in close relation with other ethnic groups. Iberian topics are fashionable in our multicultural society, and we look to the past for answers to questions about identity, assimilation, and the acceptance

of diversity. Along these lines, the present book focuses on the coexistence of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities in thirteenth century Spain, a period often seen in the Iberian Peninsula as the golden century for relative harmony between the three cultures, the so-called *convivencia*.

In spite of the great number of pages written on coexistence in Iberia, recent scholarship has not exhausted the variety of perspectives from which to approach and study topics such as identity and acculturation. Pick's book is a very good example of the lasting power and interest in these themes. She contributes novel approaches to the topic and further debunks myths about Spanish history. Pick views religion as the most significant key for our understanding of how religious diversity worked in medieval Spain. Religion defined the self-perception that each individual group, as well as regulating and limiting influences from contact with other religious communities. Since relations between the three religions during the Reconquest have been often analyzed from a negative point of view — that is, that scholars have sought to outline the causes that led to ruptures in the peaceful relations between Christian, Muslims, and Jews — this teleological approach always leads to the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula.

Pick adroitly focuses on the theoretical framework that enabled coexistence within Christian society. In doing so, she also examines the cultural mechanism underlying Christian territorial expansion at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Using the archbishop of Toledo Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada's works (*De Rebus Hispanie*, *Dialogus Libri Vite* and the *Auto de los Reyes Magos*, the latter presumably ascribed to the archbishop or written under his sponsorship) as a lens through which to examine these topics, Pick explores the ideological (and religious) underpinnings of expansion and coexistence. Jiménez de Rada, primate of Spain, was an active political player in the kingdom of Castile's policy-making and a distinguished and influential author. His work serves as a paradigmatic example of ideological shifts in the Iberian Peninsula. Because of Jiménez de Rada's importance, Pick's choice of him as the focus of her study is most appropriate since his role within the realm and his intellectual influence transcended his ecclesiastic role. Pick argues that the archbishop understood the coexistence of Christians with non-Christians as part of a divine plan and resulting from mankind's sins. Although the desirable ideal of a unity of faith would never return, it could be partly restored under the expansion of the Christian faith and the submission of other religions to its rules, or, to be more specific, to the Church's rules. Jiménez de Rada's foundational principle provided for Christian supremacy, but it did not impose conversion on Jews and Muslims, since it postulated religious diversity as an element of Creation. This diversity however forced Christians to disclose the truth and successes of the Church of Christ as opposed to the

errors of interpretation of Muslims and Jews. In that way, the faith of the Christian people is strengthened, providing Christians with a safe identity. The latter guaranteed the coexistence with other minorities without Christians being tempted to convert to one of these minority religions. Therefore, for the archbishop coexistence had basically a theological justification. Religious plurality fitted perfectly with the social reality of the peninsula precisely at a time when such an idea was being questioned in the rest of the Europe by a Roman church firmly committed to the creation of a homogenous Christian society.

The combination of history and theology in the work of Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada serves as the locomotive for an ideological project. But this ideological project is a description of a social and political reality as well since all ideology rests upon real events. Thus, one way of understanding mentality is also to understand society's historical structures. Pick notes her intention of not examining Jiménez de Rada's works as that of a mere idealist. As she states, the purpose of her work is "to describe a process in which theory and practice worked together and defined each other in a dialogical, mutually reinforcing way in Rodrigo's thought and actions". That is why the author also mines Toledo's municipal and cathedral documentation to show the complexity of this polyhedral society. This is a society that cannot be reduced to narrow interpretations (such as a fanatical, intransigent society or one with clear wishes for a national identity), but rather it must be seen as a society in which coexistence and conflict were inseparable.

Pick excels in the section in which she provides a close textual reading of Jiménez de Rada's works. The strength of her book lies solidly in her thorough understanding of the archbishop's ideas. Her efforts are validated by the soundness of her conclusions, though the same cannot always be said of her analyzes of other sources (sales contracts, private transactions, wills, and the like). Some of her conclusions there do not rise to the level of sophistication and insight that she demonstrates in her readings of Jiménez de Rada's works; nor can her conclusions in dealing with these sources be supported by other materials such as chronicles, *fueros*, privileges, and other non-literary sources. This uneven understanding of the different primary material does not detract at all from her accomplishments and from the many and excellent contributions she makes in this book.

Conflict and Coexistence excels in its accessibility and Pick's elegant writing. Its six chapters (plus an introduction and epilogue) are organized thematically. After an introduction, the second chapter (Conquest and Settlement) traces the role of the archbishop in the great conquests of the thirteenth century. Pick shows the role of the clergy as the corner stone of the crusade movement in Spain. That is adroitly linked to Jiménez de Rada's

ideas of an expanding Christianity in the peninsula through conquest, and thus by effective territorial control, insuring that coexistence of different religious groups must always be under Christianity. Pick develops very interesting notions as to the true intention of the archbishop of Toledo. Far from trying to unite the entire Peninsula under the kingdom of Castile (which has been the traditional position in Spanish historiography), she argues that Jiménez de Rada wished to impose the hegemony of the Toledan see on the rest of the Peninsula, fulfilling the vision of Toledo as the true heir of the Christian Visigothic tradition. This presupposed respect for a plurality of independent Hispanic kingdoms since all of them would be under the religious jurisdiction of Toledo. For the author, the performance of Rodrigo was extremely innovative since he sought the conquest and occupation of Muslim territory, and not just profitable raids and tribute. Nevertheless, one may find abundant arguments in the recent historiography that partly contradict the author's thesis. For example, the work that has been done on the conquest and settlement of territory after Alfonso VI, or on the role of the military orders as instruments for the occupation and consolidation of the new gained lands. On the other hand, medieval military tactics (that the author sees as a mere desire for booty) are now understood as phases of greater campaigns bent in the destruction of economic resources as a prelude to the occupation of frontier castles and cities. This was the case of Toledo in 1085. The idea that there was an absence of real settlement previous to Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada is not consistent with the analysis of the archbishop's own chronicle and with the study of documents of sale and exchanges of properties during Jiménez de Rada's time.

The third chapter ("A Theology of Unity") provides an exhaustive study of Jiménez de Rada's theology. The author traces the sources that could have influenced the archbishop's cosmological vision and offers a glimpse at cultural activity in Europe and the Peninsula, showing Jiménez de Rada's knowledge of French cultural trends. Pick, for example, shows how Alan of Lille's ideas about unity and plurality were deployed by the archbishop to justify coexistence. Far more significant, Pick questions traditional views on the role of the Iberian Peninsula in the translation and diffusion of classic works. Translations and transmission can be placed, as Pick argues, under the overarching idea of religious unity. All true knowledge (even Classic and Muslim knowledge) derives from God. Thus, it is to be used and assimilated into the Christian society as part of divine creation. Intellectual knowledge therefore is also part of the rewards gained by military effort and similar to other useful things taken from Muslims and Jews.

Throughout chapter four ("Rodrigo and the Jews of Toledo") the author focus on one of Jiménez de Rada's work that a priori may be considered as an attack on coexistence. The archbishop's *Dialogus Libre Vite* is inscribed in the

fecund tradition of anti-Jewish treatises in the thirteenth century. Nonetheless, Pick, through an exhaustive study of the structure of the book, shows quite convincingly that Jiménez de Rada's aim was not to attack the Jews but to demonstrate the truth of Christian faith and contrast this with Jewish's errors in interpreting the scriptures. In this way, Jiménez de Rada's book served to reinforce Christian identity. It was not an attack against coexistence, and following Karl Morrison's ideas about conversion, Pick rejects completely the idea that the archbishop's polemical book was a disguised attempt at converting the Jews.

In chapter five, "Polemic and Performance. The *Dialogus* and the *Auto de los Reyes Magos*," provides a close reading of the *Auto*. She states that this book was written to demonstrate the truth of Christianity and (mixing the history of the Peninsula and its contemporary situation with the fight against the Muslims and with theological interpretation) encourage self-definition and self-confidence within the Christian community. Meanwhile, the *Auto* serves again to attack the Jews for their erroneous interpretation of the scriptures. In the last chapter, the author concludes that a considerable part of the ideas about unity and plurality, articulated in the archbishop of Toledo's works, reappeared in the works of such well-known figures as, for example, Alfonso X the Wise, showing Jiménez de Rada's influence beyond his own time.

Pick's focus on coexistence is, in fact, an analysis of the acculturation processes. Although the present book contributes novel ideas to our understanding of coexistence between diverse cultures in Medieval Spain, it also gives the impression, through its single focus on Jiménez de Rada's work, that the keys to coexistence within the Christian Iberian world were defined and established by the archbishop. Nonetheless, this book, by placing Jiménez de Rada's ideology in its cultural context, helps us understand the mentality of the period and contemporary views on coexistence and how the Christian community defined itself culturally. Pick shows how the polemical literature against the Jews helped stabilize relations and made coexistence possible between the two religious communities. But if the concept of coexistence in Medieval Spain must be explained in a wider context, one must take into account that Jiménez de Rada's work paralleled Christian hegemony in the Peninsula. Thus, the archbishop's ideas can be seen as part of an overall Christian attempt at self-definition. Coexistence existed before Jiménez de Rada, and it would exist after the archbishop, though in diverse ways depending on social and political contexts. In that sense, the acculturation process in the thirteenth century marked a new phase in which Christian society became more rigid, better defined, and, therefore, more distrustful of the acceptance of other religious communities. The theological principles were only one part of a system that regulated the complex relations

between diverse religious groups. That is the manner in which Pick describes the archbishop's ambiguous performance: "History would be far easier to write, although much less interesting, if all archbishops were either noble reformers or power-hungry opportunists, 'tolerant liberals' or 'fanatical anti-Semites'... Rodrigo's textual and actual relations with the Jews show that he possessed a complicated mixture of attitudes, interests, and perspectives in which positive and negative views of non-Christians crossed the lines of both theory and practice." I do not disagree with Pick's valuable assessment, but I would like to note that the phenomenon of coexistence in the Iberian Peninsula cannot be understood exclusively through the idea that Christian society had implicitly accepted tolerance thanks to a theological conception. It was just another mechanism to regulate the common existence of the three religious communities.

Jorge Ortuño Molina
University of California, Los Angeles

G.R. Evans *Breaking the Bounds : An Inaugural Lecture Given in the University of Cambridge, 16 February 2004*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2004. Pp. 48. \$11.99

Gillian Evans' pamphlet, *Breaking the Bounds* was originally delivered as an inaugural lecture for her acceptance of the professorship of Medieval Theology and Intellectual History at the University of Cambridge. Evans calls for interdisciplinary studies in higher education in England, and particularly in the field of medieval studies. She wishes to say a lot in her one hour lecture. She begins her lecture, however, by a discourse on medieval university education and its interdisciplinary nature. Her argument is that to understand the texts produced by men educated with that broad knowledge of established texts of the medieval university, one must have a similar education. The medieval focus on an established canon, although she never uses that loaded word, allowed one to take joy and pride in learning and writing by synthesizing the wisdom of authority while adding one's own voice. As a published pamphlet, *Breaking the Bounds* is not without wit, although it meanders a bit, and the anecdotes and asides that made for a lively lecture are sometimes distracting when the text is read. It has the typical provincial Oxbridge preoccupations, and its larger plea for interdisciplinary studies may be lost in local concerns and in its focus on medieval studies in particular. Indeed, Evans really fails to make a convincing case for interdisciplinary