



Thomas Devaney, *Enemies in the Plaza: Urban Spectacle and the End of Spanish Frontier Culture, 1460–1492*, University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, PA, 2015. 246 pp.

Thomas Devaney's thoroughly researched and elegantly written book offers stimulating insights into the cultural encounter between Christians, Jews and Muslims in late medieval Spain. The focus lies on fifteenth-century spectacles within the urban spaces in the Castilian borderland region close to the Islamic Kingdom of Granada. These cities, in particular Jaén, Córdoba and Murcia, were characterized by their mixed population of Christians, recent *conversos* as well as notable minorities of Jews and Muslims. Devaney defines the incongruous attitudes of the Christian majority to their Non-Christian neighbours, fellow citizens and trade partners tellingly as 'amiable enmity' (p. 9). Jews and Muslims were important as economic partners and sometimes admired for their culture. They were needed, however, also to establish and to maintain a Christian identity, therefore marked as outsiders, feared as religious enemies and suspected of undermining the Christian dominance. According to Devaney, the space close to the Granadan frontier cannot be defined as a 'third space' in the sense of Homi Bhabha.¹ In contrast, he describes the borderland as a space where individuals of all religious affiliations lacked physical security due to the 'long-standing pattern of semibelligerency' (p. 13). As a result, the common daily interactions between Christians, Muslims and Jews did not lead to cultural hybridity. The urban spectacles that included inter alia religious processions, public festivals and tournaments organized by the elites shed light on the complex interactions between these groups, reaching from peaceful relations that can be seen as signs of the so-called *convivencia* to open hostility against Non-Christians especially towards the end of the century.

¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge: London, New York 1994.

The book is divided into two parts. In the first, more general section that comprises two chapters, Devaney delineates the forms, functions and reception of urban spectacles and emphasises the ritualized character of the performances. Since knowledge on spectacles is only preserved in written narratives, he moreover reflects on the purposes of the authors who often worked in commission of the elite and consequently inscribed a specific reading. Though ritualized and hierarchic in their organization, spectacles bear multiple meanings and could be interpreted differently by participants and audiences. One reason for that is the design of streets, of public places and of buildings as well as of the temporal structures that were built for specific events. The author explores therefore the interaction between the spectacles and the 'rhetorical architecture' (p. 22) of the particular cities.

The second part consists of three chapters built around case studies. Analysing the spectacles organized by Miguel Lucas de Iranzo in Jaén in the 1460s, Devaney shows that the noble magnate did not exclusively promote negative images of Muslims and Jews. Despite the general rhetoric of holy war and due to several military campaigns against Granada organized by him, the various references to Muslim culture within festivals rather had an inclusive approach. They accentuated the positive benefits of conversion and ensured the audiences that the existing and important commercial and personal interreligious relations could exist even after a final Christian victory. The accidental or deliberate insult of a statue of the Virgin Mary during a religious procession in Córdoba in 1473, however, exemplified the highly fragile status not only of religious minorities, but also of converts. The event led to significant anti-convert riots that were based on popular suspicions that proselytes secretly followed their old rites. There were also resentments against the converts' social and economic success. Putting the event in the city's political context it becomes clear that such resentments were used by parts of the elites for their own purposes (this was for instance also the case in Jaén where Miguel Lucas was eventually assassinated by noble rivals in the course of riots following the events in Córdoba). The last chapter illuminates the already diminished role of Jewish and Muslim minorities in Murcia during the 1480s. The spectacles served to commemorate the war campaigns ultimately leading to the conquest of Granada in 1492. Non-Christians were forced to participate in the Corpus Christi procession in order to symbolize that the enemies of the true faith were irrevocably defeated and had no place in the Christian society anymore.

Devaney's close examination of public festivals reveals a growing Christian intolerance in late medieval Castilian borderlands. However, to understand this as the end of some previous Golden Age of *convivenzia* would be misleading. The book, in contrast, argues that highly diverse attitudes

against Non-Christians were in place simultaneously, to a degree resulting from the multifaceted interplay between interreligious groups, between a Christian majority (that itself was not homogeneous but divided in 'old' and recently converted Christians) and several Non-Christian minorities as well as between elites and popular classes.² The elites used the spectacles to strengthen their own status, to establish identities and to distract the people. However, a full control both of the performance and of the message could not be achieved. Devaney's case studies outline that the effects of rituals were limited, that processions could easily become catalysts of conflicts.³ It would be interesting to see, as Devaney discusses in his conclusions by looking at the example of Cyprus, if there are similar findings in other borderland regions respectively in the Mediterranean as a 'shared cultural space' of the monotheistic religions.⁴ Even when Devaney rejects the idea to describe the borderland region as a 'third space', it would also be interesting to study if and how the particular constellation in the cities of South Castile affected on spectacles in other parts of Castile or if there was some interrelation to public events in Muslim Granada. Over the last years, research has tried to adjust post-colonial concepts of trans-cultural exchange and entanglement with its manifold processes of integration and disintegration on the Middle Ages in order to explore further the complex dynamics of medieval societies and to dissolve images of cultures as entities with distinct borders.⁵ Devaney's refreshing work is a most welcome contribution in this ongoing debate.

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² For somewhat similar findings regarding the city of Seville see also Wiebke Deimann, *Christen, Juden und Muslime im mittelalterlichen Sevilla. Religiöse Minderheiten unter muslimischer und christlicher Dominanz (12. bis 14. Jahrhundert)* (Geschichte und Kultur der Iberischen Welt 9), LIT: Münster etc. 2012.

³ Cf. also the recent publication *Grenzen des Rituals: Wirkreichweiten – Geltungsbereiche – Forschungsperspektiven*, Andreas Büttner, Andreas Schmidt, Paul Töbelmann (eds), (Norm und Struktur 42), Böhlau: Köln 2014.

⁴ For the term and cross-cultural exchange in the Mediterranean see the overview of Sonja Brentjes, Alexander Fidora, Matthias M. Tischler, 'Towards a New Approach to Medieval Cross-Cultural Exchanges', *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 1 (2014), 9–50.

⁵ Cf. with further references *Integration und Desintegration von Kulturen im europäischen Mittelalter*, Michael Borgolte, Julia Dücker, Marcel Müllerburg, Bernd Schneidmüller (eds), (Europa im Mittelalter 18), Akademie Verlag: Berlin 2011; Margit Mersch, 'Transkulturalität, Verflechtung, Hybridisierung – "neue" epistemologische Modelle in der Mittelalterforschung', in Wolfram Drews and Christian Scholl (eds) *Transkulturelle Verflechtungsprozesse in der Vormoderne*, (Das Mittelalter Beihefte 3), De Gruyter: Berlin 2016, 239–251.