

PAMELA A. PATTON. *Art of Estrangement: Redefining Jews in Reconquest Spain*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2012. 220 pp.

The study of medieval and early modern polemical writing has flourished in recent years, receiving attention as a kind of window onto the medieval discourse of identity fashioning and the conceptualization of religious difference. While much work has been done (by scholars such as Heinz Schreckenberg, Jeremy Cohen, and Robert Chazan, among others) in charting the evolution of medieval Christian polemical writing, scholars have only recently begun the work of combining this history with a consideration of similarly polemical iconographic and pictorial evidence. Although such evidence tells us much about the wider circumstances and cultural movements in which polemical writing was produced, its study has often been undertaken only by art historians, being sketchily treated by other scholars working only with textual material.

This important and elegant book by Pamela Patton, professor of art history at Southern Methodist University, attempts to address this lacuna by combining a wide survey of polemical imagery from medieval Iberia with an informed discussion of the trends in late-medieval polemical treatises and argumentation. In bringing these two lines of inquiry together, Patton provides a vital new intervention into the history of religious interaction in medieval Iberia. Offering both a wealth of primary source material (including over eighty image reproductions, most in color, and many not studied before), as well as a learned and careful reading that thoughtfully unpacks the symbolism and context of its examples, Patton's well-written study will surely become a standard resource for future work in the history of religious interaction in the Middle Ages.

Patton begins by noting this imbalance in the study of late medieval religious interaction. Looking at a variety of Christian representations of Jews between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, she argues that "the scrutiny of such imagery can expand and refine, to an extent impossible through study of texts alone, modern understanding of the ways in which Jews figured in the Iberian Christian imagination, and of the ways in which these ideas were expressed and reinforced during the central and late Middle Ages" (6). One of the strengths of her approach is that although she does deal with familiar sources and examples such as the abundant imagery in the *Cantigas de Santa María* of King Alfonso X of Castile (reg. 1252–84), she does not limit her study to these sources, instead bringing them into a productive dialogue with heretofore unknown iconography such as overlooked initials, doodles, marginalia, and sculpted capitals. She links these new and known sources within a suggestive narrative about the evolution of anti-Jewish sentiment both within and beyond the Iberian Peninsula.

After making the case for this approach in her introduction, the second chapter, "*Topos* and Narrative: New Signs and Stories for Iberian Jews," examines the visual motifs used to identify Jews in Christian iconography. Cataloguing familiar markers such as the beard, the pointed cap, the badge, yellow clothing, the blindfold, and the oversized nose, Patton notes that despite the recurrence of these images, their meaning was rarely exactly the same and was not universally polemical. She stresses "the rarity with which specific visual motifs or formulae traditionally considered to be 'anti-Jewish' bore fixed or formulaic meanings . . . their symbolic implications varied along with each work's physical,

conceptual, and ideological context” (23). Even more importantly, she notes that when such images do appear in the Iberian Peninsula, they often are imports from beyond the Pyrenees and may have carried a different significance in the peninsula. While several themes that were common in Europe “found little footing in Spain,” those anti-Jewish arguments that did take root were transformed in important ways by Iberian artists. “When Jewish stereotypes did find expression in Iberian visual culture, it was, above all, on Iberian terms” (65).

Chapter three, “Shaping the Jewish Body in Medieval Iberia,” looks at these “Iberian terms” in more detail, focusing specifically on the iconography of the Jewish body—the beard, the nose, etc.—in its uniquely Iberian context. She discusses a number of stunning and little-known images, such as the initial from a psalm found within the Vic Bible of 1273 (also reproduced as her cover art), or a curious scribal doodle of a Jew found on the fourteenth-century Catalan *Liber Iudeorum*, as well as more familiar material such as the depictions of Jews in Alfonso X’s *Cantigas*, *Lapidario*, and *Libro de ajedrez, dados y tablas*. While showing the variety of representations within Alfonso X’s iconography, she also establishes that the appearance of images identifying Jews in Iberian manuscripts was not immediately indicative of the same negative connotations that such images carried in the rest of Europe. Noting the predominant ambivalence of Iberian iconography, she looks ahead to the fifteenth century and concludes with the surprising argument that such signs “offer less a prefiguration than an outright reversal of the premise behind the Iberian blood laws” (101).

Chapter four, “Jews and Muslims in the Iberian Christian Imagination,” takes up the important question of how anti-Jewish iconography intersects with depictions of Muslims. She offers some interesting new examples here, such as the conflation of Muslims and pagans in a Passion narrative painted in the thirteenth century onto a pine beam (now in the National Museum of Catalan Art), as well as images of baptism and conversion in works such as the *Vidal mayor* and the *Cantigas de Santa María*, and the common use of the hexagram as a symbol of Muslims and Jews in Christian images. While noting correctly that Jews and Muslims became increasingly linked in such evidence, she gives less attention to the important question of how pro-Muslim iconography came to play a role in anti-Jewish argumentation in the late thirteenth and early to mid-fourteenth centuries. In all fairness, this is a very large topic, and one could hardly do justice to the range of issues at stake here in a single chapter. Nevertheless, she might have pushed the analysis of her examples a little further. A more robust and detailed exposition of her own arguments, including comment on the evolution that such images and arguments of conflation underwent between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, could have strengthened her overall narrative about the uniquely Iberian way that anti-Jewish iconography developed in the later Middle Ages.

The fifth and final chapter, “The *Cantigas de Santa María* and the Jews of Castile,” undertakes an extensive and illuminating analysis of the representation of Jews in Alfonso X’s songbooks. While earlier studies have catalogued and described such depictions of both Muslims and Jews in the *Cantigas*, Patton’s nuanced reading exceeds earlier studies in the sophistication of its treatment and the far-reaching implications of its findings. One important conclusion is

the way in which the imagery interacts with and often departs from the text it is meant to represent. Patton here stresses “the freedom with which the king’s artists approached” their material, “diverging whenever needed from the details and structure of the texts that may have been unfamiliar to them in order to develop pictorial versions of the tales reflective of their own visual and ideological frame” (168). Patton successfully uses the *Cantigas* to reinforce the argument that runs through some earlier chapters that visual polemics “matter less for their direct reflection of the social realities of thirteenth-century Castile than for their power to signal the sea change in Christian thinking about Jews as the transformations of the thirteenth century wore on” (169).

While chapters two, three, and five go very deeply into their examples and draw such material together toward a series of interconnected conclusions about the evolution of the Christian representation of Jews in Iberian art, a few small points could have been addressed a little more carefully to make a what is a very good book even better. For example, Patton occasionally falls back a little clumsily onto generalizations about “the medieval viewer” (122) and the probable reaction of “most Iberian Christian viewers” (131). Although she does admit in the conclusion that the themes she analyzes “were not held universally by Christians in Iberia” and that “the phrase ‘Christian Iberia’ has functioned expediently here as a catchall” for what “was anything but a uniform cultural entity” (171), I think such disclaimers come a little too late and it would have helped to stress this caveat at earlier points in the text. Yet while Patton’s rhetoric stumbles in a few places such as these, it succeeds in most others, adroitly distinguishing throughout between the imagery depicted in medieval iconography and the reality of Christian–Jewish interaction and relations. Overall, this book achieves its ultimate goal, that of advocating for a “greater delicacy in assessing and interpreting medieval imagery as it functioned within its broad and often complex cultural frame” (172). Patton’s study is, on most counts, a tour de force of analytical historiography, offering scholars of medieval Iberia and medieval Jewish–Christian relations more generally a wealth of examples, a sharp and original interpretive frame, and a fine model to follow in realizing future work on medieval inter-religious contact and conflict.

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