

H. SALVADOR MARTÍNEZ. *Berenguela the Great and Her Times (1180-1246)*. Trans. by Odile Cisneros. The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World (Series). Leiden: Brill, 2021. xix + 638 pp. Illustrations, genealogical table.

Berenguela of Castile (here, “the Great”) was the eldest child of King Alfonso VIII of Castilla and his wife Queen Eleanor of England. Over the course of her childhood, Berenguela was also sometimes heir to the Castilian throne: she eventually married her near relative Alfonso IX of León and bore five children; the couple’s eldest son Fernando became, with Berenguela’s assistance, the king of Castilla and then of a unified Castilla-León. As a royal heir, and in the tradition of Iberian documentary practice regarding women’s property rights, Berenguela was thus notably prominent in her father’s, husband’s, and son’s diplomas. There were also marriage contracts, divorce settlements, and papal communiqués. Moreover, she drew the attention of contemporary chroniclers: Lucas de Túy, Juan de Osma, and Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada all knew her. Finally, she took a prominent, personal role in the writings of her grandson, Alfonso X. She was important, and well-known, but only recently have scholars really sought to understand her.

In the early 2000s, H. Salvador Martínez set out to tell the story of this remarkable woman in 892 pages, initially to a Spanish-reading audience, as I was finishing my *Berenguela of Castile and Political Women in the High Middle Ages* (2009), and Janna Bianchini was revising her dissertation on Berenguela’s career as a ruler, *The Queen’s Hand* (2012). In a different approach, Martínez’s work aims to paint a comprehensive biographical portrait of Berenguela, and his commitment to the biography as a “literary artifact” (2) is sustained in this somewhat abridged translation, offering an imaginative – and often, imagined – portrait. His study of the life and times of one of the most significant people of her period represents a huge amount of labor – both in the original scholarship and in Odile Cisneros’ translation. Martínez, with the confidence of an accomplished, senior literary scholar, has not only wrung every detail possible from the sources; he freely reads between the lines to enrich our vision of what Berenguela’s life might have been like.

The primary thesis in this valuable study, apart from establishing Berenguela’s significance, is that she was a “woman of peace,” committed to negotiation and collaboration in solving the many conflicts around her and avoiding war whenever possible – although unafraid of violence when necessary. I appreciated Martínez’s careful reading of the sources, even if I did not always agree with his interpretation. For instance, he sees Berenguela’s prominence in Leonese documentation as a reflection of Alfonso and Berenguela’s determination to stay married in the face of papal

condemnation, whereas it also can be seen as conforming to traditional Leonese and Castilian chancery practice (the absence of Alfonso's first queen, Teresa of Portugal, in Leonese documentation was an anomaly). I was stunned to realize that Fernando referred to Berenguela as the "reigning queen" in a charter issued in 1245, even if I could not be so sure that this was because Berenguela "must have" asked her son for this recognition (542). Martínez offers thick description of the Castilian and Leonese courts, paying close attention to various king's dilemmas and experiences, such as Alfonso VIII's trepidation about marrying his daughter to his cousin. He explains the dramatic developments surrounding the unification of Leon and Castile in 1230, when Berenguela and Teresa of Portugal – "two sensible and loving women of peace" – negotiated the competing claims of their children (501). Martínez compellingly argues that Fernando was the only possible heir to the throne of Leon, not because he was a man, but because it was a matter of "right" (506-07). However, Alfonso IX also made firm promises to his daughters Sancha and Dulce that one of them should inherit. Martínez resists the notion that sexism was involved in the choice of Fernando over Sancha and Dulce but claims that women could not inherit León when there was a potential male heir. By the end of Martínez's account, many of the people surrounding Berenguela have richly painted personalities: Alfonso IX, for example, is developed as a volatile, sensuous man with a "black soul," warped by the absence of his mother who nevertheless was "extraordinarily devoted to his children" (83). Martínez wonders why no one seemed to mourn him, but then speculates that Berenguela *must* have.

The author is not especially interested in understanding Berenguela in the context of medieval women's lives or medieval queenship. Rather, he relies on medieval, antiquarian, and early twentieth-century clerical historiography, seemingly avoiding the large body of scholarship on royal women long extant (including the work of many fine scholars of medieval Spain, such as Georges Martin, Theresa Earenfight, and Peggy Liss). While not every book about a medieval queen must be a gender history, the lack of more recent historiographic context leads Martínez to frequently engage in outdated tropes about medieval people, especially in terms of their emotionality and sentimentality. Berenguela is "charmed" by her first encounter with Santiago de Compostela, she "desperately missed" her younger siblings at her parents' court. The death of her first child, Leonor, ("a beautiful little girl") surprised Berenguela, and so on. Relatedly, Martínez emphasizes Berenguela's role as the mother of a saint. While Fernando III was indeed canonized in 1671, nothing indicates that he was considered a saint in his time (perhaps in comparison to his cousin Louis IX of France), and that such an attribution in any way formed Berenguela's identity.

Finally, Martínez often seeks explanatory factors in genetics, imagining a family predisposition to character, morality, political acumen and so on.

This book is for patient readers who want grand narrative, rich description and detail. Phrases like “A Nordic star in the blue sky of Castile” describing Berenguela’s daughter-in-law Beatriz of Swabia will stay with me for a long time (512). Martínez’s exuberant prose and speculative approach has the flair of fiction without dialogue. The length of the book may discourage intended audiences, and a number of distracting mistakes and translation errors (mostly about the terminology of family relationships) may confuse readers who do not already know Berenguela’s story and the history of her era, even if they do not diminish the power of the research or strength of argument.

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OLGA SENDRA FERRER. *Barcelona: City of Margins*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2022. xii + 272 pp.

In *The Intimate Resistance* (2021), the philosopher Josep Maria Esquirol proposes his readers to reconsider the traditional notion of a limit as a point where capacities have been reached and tension is insurmountable. Instead, Esquirol asks that the limit be thought of as a “neighboring zone”; “the stitched area, the seam, there where hooks bring together two points ... it allows us to continue with the relevant subjects under a new light” (152). In her timely and captivating study, *Barcelona, City of Margins*, Olga Sendra Ferrer challenges the way one understands the production of space and the advent of democracy in late-Francoist Barcelona through a focus on urban limits and a recasting of the marginal subjects in the city’s shantytowns and monobloc developments whose presence broke through the “harmonious façade of the dictatorship’s physical, social, and cultural structures and indicate other possibilities” (7).

The concept of the limit as a “neighboring zone” is replaced in Sendra Ferrer’s study with the margin, a persuasive and highly effective hermeneutic framework the author deploys to indicate exciting new possibilities of meaning in the writing of Francesc Candel (Chapter 2) and the photography of Joan Colom and Isabel Steva Hernández (Colita) – Chapters 3 and 4 –, though Sendra Ferrer’s analysis touches on a number of additional writers and photographers. She also communicates consistently the broader artistic and cultural movements in which the main foci of the chapters were situated. For Sendra Ferrer, the margin is a space in which