Barton, Simon. *Conquerors, Brides and Concubines. Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberia*. **Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Penn, 2015. ISBN 978-0-8122-4675-9.**

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As its title indicates, this book, which is divided into four chapters, seeks to provide an overview of "the diverse political, social and cultural functions that interfaith marriage alliances and other sexual encounters fulfilled within the overall dynamic of Christian-Muslim relations in the Iberian Peninsula during the medieval period, both within al-Andalus (…) and the expansionist Christian-dominated polities of the North" (4). In this sense, its chronological span reaches from the early eighth century (the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula by the Muslims) to 1492 (the Christian conquest of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada).

Proceeding in a sequential fashion, Chapter 1 ("Sex and Power") deals with al-Andalus and examines the sexual mixing between Muslim lords and Christian women. Such unions were an important mechanism whereby Muslim invaders consolidated their authority over the Peninsula, both through marriage and through concubinage. "Sex was perhaps the ultimate colonizing gesture" (41), an "instrument of domination" (as Pierre Bourdieu puts it) (44) that served different purposes: marriage alliances were a means of pacifying the Peninsula, legitimizing the conquest, and channeling the landed wealth of the Visigothic aristocracy; the *en masse* enslavement of Christian women and their recruitment as concubines to the harems of the Muslim dignitaries was a potent weapon of psychological propaganda. This use of sex was designed in part to destroy solidarity among Christian communities, since women's status rested essentially upon their honor and chastity. At the same time, it also inflicted shame and humiliation on their male coreligionists, who were unable to protect them.

Chapter 2 ("Making Boundaries") analyzes the Christian reaction to these mechanisms of interfaith sexual mixing. From c. 1050 onwards, both secular and ecclesiastical lawgivers had a common purpose: to prevent interfaith sex, and above all intermarriage between Christians and Muslims, or Jews. This widespread anxiety about interfaith sex spread all across Christian Iberia in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, though it could vary substantially from region to region. The "making of boundaries" to prevent social assimilation and, above all, sexual mixing implied a double moral standard, in which "the sexual behavior of … women tends to be policed with particular rigor, and misconduct severely punished. By contrast, sexual relations between group males and female outsiders tend to evince notably less concern" (69) This profound cultural shift was, in part, a consequence of the new balance of power that had arisen in the Peninsula in the two centuries following the collapse of the Umayyad Caliphate, with the incorporation of sizeable communities of Muslims and Jews into areas under Christian rule (70). But, among other factors, it also stemmed from "the universalizing doctrine of ecclesiastical sovereignty that had been promoted by the reformist papacy and its supporters (…) from the second half of the eleventh century" (72). On the other hand, for Muslims and Jews, these boundaries also "constituted a vital mechanism by which the very stability of the multicultural societies of Iberia was preserved" (75).

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Chapter 3 ("Damsels in Distress") analyzes how the focus on Christian women as the perceived victims of interfaith sexual mixing was repeatedly deployed by chroniclers, hagiographers and other literary exponents, from the twelfth century on. Within "an extraordinary range of texts", the subject of "damsels in distress" loomed large in the consciousness of Christian writers in Iberia, just as it did in that of numerous lawgivers during the same period. Christian women, as the perceived victims of interfaith sexual mixing, and as a potent image of the vulnerable "damsel in distress", sought to elicit pity and indignation in the hearts of their coreligionists in the Peninsula, "in order to foster solidarity among their intended audience" (108). The legend of the "Tribute of the Hundred Maidens" deeply reflected this anxiety, and was to prove as "spectacularly effective – in cultural as well as fiscal terms – and so remarkably long-lasting" (108). In fact, the forgery of the *Privilegio del Voto* within the Santiago de Compostela program of self-affirmation in Christendom—a fiscal privilege pretentiously given by Ramiro I to the Church (and only abolished in 1834)—is explained as the result of the victory at the Battle of Clavijo, with the miraculous assistance of St. James, by which the king suppressed the humiliating tribute of the hundred maidens, which until then was to be paid to the Islamic powers.

But not all the narratives were configured in this way. Chapter 4 ("Lust and Love in the Iberian Frontier") deals with a wide range of literary texts that related the details of interfaith sexual liaisons. In some, it was the Christian women themselves who were the protagonists, seeking out their own Muslim sexual partners. This was the case, for example, with the legend of "the treacherous Countess" (*la condesa traidora*). In other instances, Muslim women surrendered their bodies to Christian men and might even have converted to Christianity. Though there is nothing in common with the protagonists and narratives analyzed (except that the sexual partners were of another faith), a common ideological thread runs through them all, reminding us of "the symbolic importance of the relationship between sex, power and cultural identity" (142). The transgressive sexuality of the liaisons of Christian women with Muslim men undermined the patriarchal society and threatened the "very independence of Christian rule"; on the contrary, the relations that took place between Muslim women who converted and Christian men, implied a symbolic submission to a new power – a "conquest-by-seduction" as Sharon Kinoshita defined it (142).

The introduction starts with the present day, with a reference to the feast day of St. Froilán, which is still celebrated today in the city of León on the Sunday before October 5. This popular festival known as "Las Cantaderas" commemorates exactly the suppression of the supposed "Tribute of the Hundred Maidens" (1), analyzed in Chapter 3. The symbolic importance of this tribute, both in the past and in the present, is also underlined in the translation of the forged charter of the "Privilegio del Voto" in the Appendix (153-63). The conclusion, which perfectly complements both the purposes and the structure of the introduction, also closes with a reference to the present, in the summary analysis of the festivals of *Moros y Cristianos* and the phenomena of Maurophilia and Maurophobia, which still shape the identity and outlook of Spaniards today (149-51).

As in other works by Simon Barton, the methodology is exemplary and his mastery of both the sources and the bibliography is impeccable. The theoretical framework is a solid one, calling upon anthropology and sociology, and adopting a postcolonial approach to the subject. Moreover, the author offers an original view of medieval Iberian society by studying the relationship between sex and power, in a broad analysis that encompasses the whole of Iberia, and, let us not be afraid to point this out, also the Portuguese kingdom, which is so often ignored by some historians of the Iberian Peninsula. The multiple and complex ways in which interfaith sexuality, power, and group identity intersected with one another (from the Muslim exogamy to the sexual boundaries established by the Christian powers, and changeable throughout the medieval period) are historically contextualized in a dynamic perspective. As the author puts it, "sexual contact was undoubtedly the one that carried the greatest ideological "charge" and stirred up the highest level of anxiety" (143).

Chapter 1, devoted to Al-Andalus, challenges the theory of Pierre Guichard about the "Eastern" patterns of kinship maintained by Arabs and Berbers, according to which patrilineal descent and endogamous marriages remained the norm (23-25). Simon Barton, in keeping with other authors, considers that Muslims did indeed mix with Christian women, as he argues throughout this chapter, which contrasts with the post-Guichard approach to the Al-Andalus, which is currently deeply marked by the concept of the "Easternization" of the Iberian structures.

Nevertheless, one question still remains to be asked about Muslim reality, such as it is presented in this book. In fact, the analysis proposed by the author in Chapter 1 is based on a limited conception of Al-Andalus that, in general, is restricted to the end of the Umayyad Caliphate. The next chapters are totally dedicated to the Christian territories, although they do consider their interaction with Muslim ones. Did the level of anxiety over sexual interfaith mixing not arise later in those societies, as a reaction to the Christian attitude? How did the Almoravids and Almohads, and above all the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, respond to this issue?

It is understandable that the different characteristics of written sources and, above all, the lack of bibliography about this matter, may have prevented the author from extending his comparisons into all of these domains, which, it must be recognized, are quite complex to fully master. Even so, *Conquerors, Brides and Concubines* is a fascinating book (for social scientists just as much as for common readers) and represents an invaluable contribution to Iberian historiography, introducing new perspectives for research and, above all, challenging us to continue the pursuit of our own investigations within the theoretical framework proposed by its author.