



*Reginae Iberiae. El Poder Regio
Femenino en los Reinos
Medievales Peninsulares*

**Miguel García Fernández and
Silvia Cernadas Martínez (eds.)**
Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de
Santiago de Compostela, 2015

Review by: Lledó Ruiz Domingo

Reginae Iberiae: El Poder Regio Femenino en Los Reinos Medievales Peninsulares. Edited by Miguel García-Fernández and Silvia Cernadas Martínez. Santiago: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 2015. ISBN 978-84-16183-88-3. 323 pp. € 14,25.

“It is clear that these *Reginae Iberiae* were not merely decorative figures but rather, whilst still fulfilling their expected role in medieval society, were able to build around them networks and forms of social and political participation, which led to them having a notable impact on the biological, social and political reproduction of the dynasties that reigned the Christian kingdoms of the Medieval Iberian Peninsula” (9).

Reginae Iberia is a collection of some of the papers presented at the International Congress on Queens and Infantas in Medieval Iberian Kingdoms, held in Santiago de Compostela in May 2014. The volume contains twelve chapters, which, despite focusing on very different topics, all serve to emphasise a shared central idea. In selecting these chapters, the editors aimed to present a range of new and complementary readings on the Iberian monarchy, while also highlighting the leading role of women at the heart of these houses, and challenging the perception that they served purely decorative or reproductive purposes.

The twelve chapters represent an interdisciplinary range of analyses with sources as diverse as chronicles, documentation, tombs, sigils, and many others. The contributions in this volume are arranged into four different groups. The first group focuses on the role of queens and infantas in the royal court, and re-examines their role and relationships within this context. The second group highlights the leading role played by these women in the spiritual and religious world at the time, while the third analyses their role based on artistic representations. Finally, the fourth studies the link between these women and the literary world, analysing both their role as patrons of written works, and their representations within medieval literature.

The first group of chapters aims to re-analyse all of the literature that has been produced about these women within the environment of the medieval court. The book's first chapter, by Janna Bianchini, re-evaluates the importance of the infantas of Castile and León, despite the system of appanage. Bianchini uses various important female figures, such as Elvira Alfonso, to demonstrate how these infantas, even after marrying into other Iberian kingdoms, managed to retain the rights that they had previously inherited through their own royal lineage. Similarly, Bianchini highlights the importance of these women within the royal court of Castile and León at that

time, and the strong bonds formed between the noble women of this court. Diana Pelaz's chapter continues the theme of re-examining the role of Iberian queens and infantas by focusing on the household of the Queen of Castile in the Late Middle Ages. Pelaz also emphasises the importance of the relationships between the Queen and the female members of the court, highlighting how many of these relationships had significant outcomes, to the extent that links of kinship were established within the court through marriages devised by the Queen herself, as seen in the case of Maria of Aragon. Among others in this section, the chapter by Víctor Muñoz, which re-examines the figure of Leonor of Albuquerque as the widowed Queen of Aragon, is of great interest. Muñoz establishes a set of criteria in order to define and re-assess the role of the Queen, which in the case of Leonor, centered around wealth and stately dominance. Therefore, by reconsidering the role of the widowed Queen as a dominant feudal power in Castile, Muñoz broadens the perception of what a widowed queen could achieve.

The chapters in the second section analyse the spirituality and religious patronage of Iberian queens and infantas, which is one of the most documented themes in the analysis of medieval women. This section includes a chapter by Gabriel Ensenyat about religion in the royal family of Mallorca, which establishes an intriguing comparison with the faith within the royal family of Aragon. Juan Antonio Prieto's chapter addresses another key theme in this section by dealing with the patronage of infantas and the environment of the royal court of Castile; a place where these women became patrons by founding convents on their estates. In many cases, these convents became monuments to the memory of these Castilian women, as the patrons would often choose to be buried there.

The third section explores the different forms of artistic representations of Iberian queens and infantas. In addition to Joana Ramôa's chapter on the burial sites of Portuguese queens, Maria de Rosário B. Morujao analyses the seals of Portuguese queens which, as the author herself points out, have only recently been taken into account in the study of the Portuguese monarchy, despite the tradition of diplomatic studies in this field. This chapter highlights the importance of the differences between these seals, as they were adapted to the characteristics of each of their owners.

The fourth and final section includes chapters that focus on written culture and literature. It includes interesting contributions, such as the amusingly titled chapter, "Juego de tronos" [Game of Thrones] by Francisco José Díaz Marcilla. This chapter analyses the image of infantas in medieval literature (chronicles or poems), and also the relationship between these infantas and the literary groups who wrote about them, both in the Portuguese and the Castilian world of the fifteenth century. The final chapter,

by Helena Carvajal, focuses on female patronage of books, and the importance of this in the diffusion of certain literary trends in the Kingdom of Aragon.

To conclude, *Reginae Iberiae* chronologically covers a long period of history, taking an interdisciplinary approach, and drawing on a diverse range of sources. It highlights the significance of the role of royal women—both queens and infantas—and their relationships both with other women in court, and with the cultural and ecclesiastical worlds. It provides a valuable contribution to the contextualisation, definition, and conceptualisation of the role and activities of these women in the kingdoms of the Medieval Iberian Peninsula.

LLEDÓ RUIZ DOMINGO

Universitat de València