

James D'Emilio (ed.).  
*Culture and Society in Medieval  
Galicia: A Cultural Crossroads at  
the Edge of Europe.*

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11 maps and 1 table. ISBN 9789004269149

Readers would be forgiven if they approached this volume with a certain amount of trepidation. The work is substantial, in terms both of its sheer size and the weight of its scholarship, encompassing as it does over one thousand pages and comprising no fewer than 23 articles. The index alone occupies an astonishing 114 pages! Yet the faint-hearted should persist, for the book provides an exemplary point of departure for those wishing to explore the social and cultural history of medieval Galicia.

For far too long, Galicia has been “off the map” as far as most European medievalists have been concerned. Just as the Iberian Peninsula as a whole has often found it difficult to engage the attention of so-called “mainstream” historians north of the Pyrenees, otherwise fixated by a supposed European “core region”, so too Galicia has frequently been dismissed by Spanish scholars as a peripheral area, a veritable *finis terrae*, whose society, economy and culture were in many respects archaic, and whose involvement in the major dynamic processes of medieval Iberian development – such as the expansionary campaigns that were waged by the various Christian realms during the Later Middle Ages – was largely negligible. The one element that was thought to have woken Galicia up from its torpor, so to speak, was the pilgrim road to the holy city of Santiago de Compostela, which was believed to have acted as a sort of cultural “super-highway”, facilitating the spread of “European” attitudes and fashions to the conservative, westernmost reaches of the Peninsula. And there have been modern Galician nationalist intellectuals, too, who have enthusiastically embraced the idea that the *gallegos* were a people apart, in some senses utterly disconnected from the other ethnicities and cultures of Iberia. It was with the aim of challenging head-on these tired, reductive attitudes that James D'Emilio set about creating the present work. In order to do so, he recruited a large team of experts, seeking to offer “medievalists, Hispanists, and students of

regional cultures and societies a wide-ranging and interdisciplinary set of studies that introduce the history, culture, and society of Galicia from late antiquity through the thirteenth century, as well as recent scholarship on medieval Galicia, to an English-speaking audience" (xii).

The book is divided into seven principal parts. Part 1, "The Paradox of Galicia: A Cultural Crossroads at the Edge of Europe", comprises a single, overarching essay by Dr D'Emilio, in which he reviews traditional scholarly approaches to Galician history and highlights some of their concerns and shortcomings. This is a wide-ranging and deeply-thought historiographical review, encompassing over one hundred pages, which can be warmly recommended to non-specialists coming to Galician history for the first time.

Part 2, "The Suevic Kingdom: Between Roman Gallaecia and Modern Myth", comprises four articles which examine the shadowy realm that occupied the political vacuum in the north-west of the Peninsula in the aftermath of the collapse of Roman rule. Michael Kulikowski's "The Suevi in Gallaecia: An Introduction" subjects the existing sources – textual, archaeological and numismatic – to critical scrutiny and emphasises the extent to which the Suevic kingdom was shaped by its Roman legacy. The same theme is debated in depth by P. C. Díaz and Luis R. Menéndez-Bueyes, "Gallaecia in Late Antiquity: The Suevic Kingdom and the Rise of Local Powers", Fernando López Sánchez, "The Suevic Kingdom: Why Gallaecia?", and Purificación Ubric, "The Church in the Suevic Kingdom (411-585 AD)". The French historian Lucien Musset memorably declared that "in historical terms nothing very important would have been changed had the Sueves of Spain never existed." Meanwhile, Galician nationalists have hailed it as "the first Kingdom of Galicia". Such distorting perspectives on the past are skilfully avoided here. The articles remind us that a focus on Galician distinctiveness overlooks the extent to which the region was fully enmeshed within the political, economic, cultural and religious networks of the Roman and post-Roman worlds. There was nothing peripheral or introspective about the territory of Gallaecia which the Sueves came to control.

Part 3 addresses Early Medieval Galicia and consists of three papers: Amancio Isla, "The Aristocracy and the Monarchy in Northwest Iberia between the Eighth and the Eleventh Century"; James D'Emilio, "The Charter of Theodenandus: Writing, Ecclesiastical Culture, and Monastic Reform in Tenth-Century Galicia"; and Jeffrey A. Bowman, "From Galicia to the Rhone: Legal Practice in Northern Spain around the Year 1000". The papers highlight the significance of Galicia within the embryonic Astur-Leonese kingdom. Isla's article discusses the extent to which the local aristocracy reinforced its reservoirs of power through close collaboration with the monarchy, although in the late tenth century, when the region came under intense military pressure from al-Andalus, conflict between the two would intensify. D'Emilio takes a single charter, redacted by the scribe Theodenandus at

the monastery of Calvor, to shed light on the monastic culture of the period. Bowman embraces the comparative historical approach championed by the late Pierre Bonnassie, by discussing legal practices in tenth- and early-eleventh century Galicia and Catalonia. Taken together, the three papers emphasise to the reader that far from being an exceptional, introspective backwater, early medieval Galicia was a dynamic part of the emerging Astur-Leonese kingdom and had much in common with other developing regions of non-Carolingian Europe.

In Part 4, the place of Galicia within the burgeoning medieval kingdom of Castile-León during the Central Middle Ages is addressed by three articles: Ermelindo Portela, "The Making of Galicia in Feudal Spain (1065-1157)"; Emma Falque, "Galicia and the Galicians in the Latin Chronicles of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries"; and Francisco Javier Pérez Rodríguez, "The Kingdom of Galicia and the Monarchy of Castile-León in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries". While it is true that the territory that now encompasses modern Galicia was sundered from ancient Gallaecia by the emergence of the Kingdom of Portugal in the early twelfth century, and that an independent Galician kingdom under García I (1065-71) proved notably short-lived, Galicia was by no means marginalised during this period. Under Fernando II (1157-88) and Alonso IX (1188-1230), in particular, the region remained at the heart of politics. And Pérez Rodríguez argues that even during the period of the "great leap forward" to the Guadalquivir valley during the reign of Fernando III (1230-52), when the royal court visited the region only rarely, Galician interests were by no means as neglected as has often been supposed.

In Part 5, the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela and its extraordinary cultural legacy take centre-stage, with no fewer than eight studies: Thomas Deswarte, "St James in Galicia (c. 500-1300): Rivalries in Heaven and on Earth"; Adeline Rucquoi, "Compostela: A Cultural Center from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century"; John Williams († 2015), "The Tomb of St. James: Coming to Terms with History and Tradition"; Henrik Karge, "The European Architecture of Church Reform in Galicia: The Romanesque Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela"; Manuel Castiñeiras, "The Topography of Images in Santiago Cathedral: Monks, Pilgrims, Bishops, and the Road to Paradise"; Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras, "Dreams of Kings and Buildings: Visual and Literary Culture in Galicia (1157-1230)"; Ana Suárez González, "Cistercian Scriptoria in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: A Starting Point"; and Melissa R. Katz, "A Convent for *La Sabia*: Violante of Aragón and the *Clarisas* of Allariz". As they shift their focus from text to image to stone, the articles make plain the extent to which the cult of St James and the pilgrimage to Compostela encouraged Galicia to engage with the wider world and embrace some of the most dynamic currents of international culture at that time. Yet, at the same time, they remind us that Compostela was by no means a passive recipient of external artistic impulses, but rather a magnet for foreign talent and "a prolific laboratory for innovative ideas that might be fully realized at far-off sites" (467).

In Part 6, three studies briefly address the language and literary culture of Galicia. Roger Wright, "Galician Before 1250", argues that Galician only became a distinct form of Romance from the late thirteenth century. Galicia's rich literary tradition is addressed by William D. Paden's "On the Music of Galician-Portuguese Secular Lyric: Sources, Genres, Performance", in which he compares the poetic output of Martín Codax and King Dinis of Portugal and questions the traditional division of the *cancioneiros* between *cantigas de amigo* and *cantigas de amor*. For her part, Amélia P. Hutchinson, "Making Poetry, Making Waves: The Galician-Portuguese Sea Lyric" highlights the significance of the various *cantigas* which reference the sea or maritime life more broadly.

Part 7 comprises a single article by Ramón Villares, "The Middle Ages in the Construction of Galician National Identity", which assesses the influence of medieval Galicia on modern Galician political and cultural discourse. This is followed by an Epilogue, in which James D'Emilio maps out some "Future Directions in the Study of Galicia". Among other things, he urges scholars of Galician history to engage in more systematic dialogue with historians of other countries and regions, not least with Portugal, and extols the comparative approach to historical study. He also encourages the scholarly community to collaborate more widely in the publication – through digital media – of an ever wider range of shared textual and artistic sources, which would help to lay the foundation for "a new history of medieval Galicia" (956).

Even in such a long book, it is hardly surprising that there are a number of gaps. It is striking, for example, that economic matters or the role of Galician women receive only limited attention, while the papers devoted to Galicia's rich literary heritage, for all their merits, cannot hope to do the topic full justice, given the limits on space. For all that, this wide-ranging and engaging collection of essays undoubtedly achieves its wider purpose. The reader is reminded, time and again, through a multiplicity of case studies, that despite Galicia's geographical situation on the periphery of Europe, it was certainly no backwater, but a dynamic region of political, cultural and economic exchange throughout the medieval period.

As anyone who has had the responsibility of putting together a collection of essays can confirm, the role of editor can be a desperately frustrating one. However, it is impossible to overestimate the sheer size of the editorial task that James D'Emilio took on when he embarked on this project, whose roots lay in a number of sessions that were held at the 41<sup>st</sup> International Congress on Medieval Studies (Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo) back in 2006. Enlisting the co-operation of such a large international team of contributors and keeping the project on track over a period of several years has been a major achievement in itself. To complicate matters even further, Dr D'Emilio nobly took it upon himself to translate several of the contributions into English. Compiling the index, which is itself an outstanding research tool for those approaching Galician history for the first time, must have

been time-consuming in the extreme. Scholars and students of Medieval Iberia, particularly in the English-speaking world, should therefore all salute this remarkable editorial feat. As Dr D'Emilio himself states, his objective was to bring into being “a book that exceeds the sum of its parts and leads readers to still larger troves of sources and scholarship” (xiii). In this respect, he and his collaborators have emphatically succeeded; this is a volume whose influence will be felt for many years to come. Galicia is now firmly “on the map”, where it belongs.

Simon Barton