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Heresy and Inquisition in the lands of the crown of Aragon

by Damian J. Smith (review)

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Reviews

Smith, Damian J. *Crusade, Heresy and Inquisition in the Lands of the Crown of Aragon (c. 1167-1276)*. *The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World* 39. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Damian J. Smith's *Crusade, Heresy and Inquisition in the Lands of the Crown of Aragon* combines archival research with a broad survey of secondary sources to present a nuanced view of the interactions among its three titular forces during the reigns of Alfonso II, Peter II, and James I of Aragon. As Smith notes in his introduction, these topics have been of perennial interest to both historians and scholars in a wide range of other fields, but less attention has been paid to them in the particular Aragonese context (1). Smith's work goes a long way toward filling in this laguna, offering a detailed account of the presence of the Cathars and Waldensians in the Aragonese Crown and of the responses their presence provoked from rival kingdoms and the papacy. This deep contextualization does not, however, prevent Smith from suggesting important implications for broader future work on crusade, heresy, and the early Inquisition.

After an introduction focused on the "three great battles" fought between 1212 and 1214 (Las Navas de Tolosa, 7/16/1212; Bouvines, 7/27/1214; and Muret, 9/12/1213), Smith returns in his first two chapters to the age-old question of the potential trans-Pyrenean political unit whose development is traditionally thought to have been disrupted by the Albigensian Crusade and fatally wounded at the battle of Muret, in which Peter II's forces were defeated by those of Simon de Montfort and the Aragonese monarch himself met his end. As Smith phrases it, "[t]he question is whether given the long-term cultural, linguistic, economic and demographic unity of the lands of the two sides of the Pyrenees they could have or would have formed into a state had it not been for the disaster at Muret" (26). This counterfactual proves a surprisingly productive foundation for Smith's study of crusade and heresy, as Peter II and his son, James I, saw their

attention torn between the conflict surrounding the Cathars in Languedoc and crusading ambitions (for example, James I's conquests of Majorca and Valencia) in the south. Both areas of conflict required significant and delicate diplomacy with the Church, a point Smith covers particularly well. Smith also covers in some detail the diplomacy among the various Christian factions in Aragon and Languedoc, revealing how the apparently doctrinal questions raised by heresy were woven into conflicts of a much less theological nature.

Smith's study of heresy proper, and the Church's reaction to it, begins in chapter three with an examination of certain key events in the early development of heretical movements, such as the arbitration of Lombers (1165) and the possibly apocryphal council of Saint-Félix de Caraman (1167). At the former, a disputation between important figures in the local Catholic hierarchy and their ostensibly heretical critics, Smith remarks on the relative power held by the "heretics":

What is even more remarkable is that the opponents of the Church, who wished to be called Good Men, supported by the knights of Lombers, were able to engage in open debate with the higher clergy, obliging them to frame their arguments from the New Testament as the heretics would not accept the Old, refusing to answer on matters concerning their faith, criticizing the luxuriant lifestyle of the bishops and priests, declaring the unfortunate Bishop Gaucelm of Lodève himself to be a heretic, and making a semi-orthodox profession of faith but then refusing to swear to it. (77)

Such preconditions to disputation would later be adopted by the Church itself, as at the famous Barcelona Disputation of 1263, in which rabbinic sources were attacked while the New Testament was off-limits (Chazan 50-2). Smith's discussion of this event and others like it, such as the "stage-managed" public debate held at Pamiers in 1207 between the Waldensians, led by Durán de Huesca, and representatives of the Church – at which Durán likely agreed beforehand to seek reconciliation with the Church at debate's end (152) – contributes to broader ongoing discussions of both intra- and inter-confessional disputation from the twelfth century on.

At this point, Smith undertakes a survey of the documentary evidence of heretical activity in the various lands of the Crown of Aragon, never losing sight of the jurisdictional and territorial conflicts that sprang up around such activity. Chapter three closes with an attempt to elucidate just what some of these heretics might have believed; as Smith points out, heretical beliefs are often only described in texts condemning them, such as Lucas of Túy's *De altera*



vita fideique controversiis adversus Albigensium errores (ca. 1235-6), published by Juan de Mariana in 1612. Smith urges caution in the analysis of such texts, noting that the beliefs outlined by Lucas (for example, a Manichean belief in two gods and the denial of the Incarnation and Passion as historical events) were “considered to be common among those considered heretics at that time” and may not have reflected the dominant beliefs among Aragon’s heretics (134-5).

This historiographical pitfall is ably avoided by Smith in chapter four, largely devoted to the aforementioned Aragonese Waldensian leader Durán de Huesca (1160-1224). Two of Durán’s texts are analyzed: the *Liber Antiheresis* (dating from the late twelfth century and only tentatively attributed to Durán) and the *Liber contra Manicheos* (ca. 1223). These texts, as presented by Smith, portray a leader preoccupied with orthodoxy and reconciliation with the Church but still skeptical of Church hierarchy: the Waldensians of the *Liber Antiheresis*, for example, “respect the Catholic hierarchy and obey their orders, even when they are issued by unworthy prelates. But if anything the hierarchy ordered conflicted with the words of their own high pontiff, who was the son of God, then they would have to dissent since ‘it is fitting to obey God rather than man’” (146). In tracing Durán’s thought and career, Smith also portrays a Church not entirely resistant to lay preaching and other expressions of popular piety, but still very concerned with enforcing doctrinal orthodoxy. These forays into the history of ideas, grounded as they are in diplomatic and other documentary evidence, are among the book’s strongest contributions.

Smith’s fifth and final chapter focuses more closely on the operation of the Inquisition in Aragon and on the Aragonese Crown’s own legislation against heresy. Both of these currents are tied together in the figure of Ramon de Penyafort (1180-1275), a Dominican canon lawyer and confessor to James I (but never an inquisitor), whose taxonomy of heresy, drafted at a council at Tarragona in 1242, provides a detailed portrait of the Church’s perception of heresy (196-8). Once again, Smith shows how a variety of institutional factions (the Crown, the towns, the local Church hierarchy and the papacy, the emergent preaching orders) negotiated their own power struggles through the question of heresy and its repression. In the Aragonese case, Smith concludes that the Crown (in the person of James I) and the Dominicans negotiated most successfully:

In his later years then, James had re-established the crown’s position at the forefront in the prosecution of heresy, a position it was to hold for a very long time. The role of the episcopate had gradually decreased but that of the

Friars Preacher did not. . . . Kings would sometimes have other aims than the Dominicans, and the Dominicans, of course, did not have the prosecution of heresy as their sole purpose for being by any means. Between them, they had thought out methods for controlling orthodoxy dramatically more complex than anything that had been attempted before. (209)

Smith's account of these complex methods of control and of the interactions among those who sought to carry them out in Aragon is, characteristically, quite carefully realized; it will add nuance and rigor to arguments about medieval religious persecution in history and other disciplines.

Crusade, Heresy and Inquisition in the Lands of the Crown of Aragon is, perhaps, not an ideal entry point into the broad questions of heresy and its opponents in the late Middle Ages. Smith always provides some background for the historical points he discusses in the most detail, but he does assume, throughout the book, a readership with some prior knowledge of medieval Aragon, of the Cathars and Waldensians, and of the medieval Church. His book is an excellent complement to David Nirenberg's widely read *Communities of Violence* – which argued that conflict between Christians and Jews in medieval Aragon was in fact a key site of internecine conflict among towns and cities, the Crown, and the Church – and to the continuing debates inspired by Nirenberg's work. Smith shows that just as the Inquisition was first set in motion to combat heresy and only later turned its attention to the Jews and Muslims, the repression of heresy was itself perhaps a precursor to inter-confessional conflict as a site in which different Christian factions jockeyed for power.

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Works Cited

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| <p>Chazan, Robert. <i>Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and its Aftermath</i>. Berkeley: U of California P, 1992.</p> | <p>Nirenberg, David. <i>Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages</i>. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996.</p> |
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