

2016

Review of Thomas Devaney, *Urban Spectacle and the End of Spanish Frontier Culture, 1460-1492*

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Recommended Citation

Coolidge, Grace (2016) "Review of Thomas Devaney, *Urban Spectacle and the End of Spanish Frontier Culture, 1460-1492*," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 41 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.

<https://doi.org/10.26431/0739-182X.1229>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs/vol41/iss1/9>

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Devaney, Thomas. *Urban Spectacle and the End of Spanish Frontier Culture, 1460–1492*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. 246 pp.

In this well-conceived book, Thomas Devaney examines the role urban spectacles and pageants played on the Granadan frontier in late fifteenth-century Spain. Devaney defines the frontier not as an encounter between civilization and wilderness (as it was in the United States), but a series of peaceful and hostile interactions between the different cultures of Christian Spain and Muslim Granada. He interprets the “borderland region” as having no concrete boundaries, defined by simultaneous war and cultural exchange where different groups came into contact with each other but did not meld (11). In this context, Devaney uses public spectacles to explore how Christians and non-Christians interacted with each other since the ambiguous nature of these spectacles meant that they could be simultaneously subversive and authoritative. Devaney argues that in the 1460s spectacles were contradictory because they were aimed at an audience of frontier dwellers who both fought and traded with Muslims. These earlier spectacles promoted war with Granada, but presented this war as contained enough not to threaten the livelihoods of a population that depended on Muslim trading partners and lived with an uneasy degree of daily *convivencia*. By the 1480s, however, attitudes had hardened towards religious minorities as the Catholic Kings moved closer to a complete conquest of Granada. In consequence, public spectacles also shifted, portraying religious minorities either as threats who must be neutralized or as unwelcome, irrelevant guests. The attempt to sustain the difficult co-existence of the earlier frontier, “amiable enmity” as Devaney terms it, was abandoned in both festivals and daily life. In this view, spectacles both reflected and accelerated public sentiments towards religious minorities in a series of complex interactions that Devaney explores throughout the book.

Devaney begins by analyzing the nature of spectacles through focusing on the interaction between knightly tournaments and their clerical critics. He uses this example to illustrate the complicated interactions between the dominant meanings intended by the sponsors of the festivals and the reactions of actual participants and observers. Devaney argues that these reactions fell within a limited range that can be uncovered even though individual reactions to spectacles and festivals are rarely available. The structure of cities also affected how festivals were staged and perceived. Devaney contrasts the elite perspective on Córdoba which focused on a favorable climate, natural beauty, and imposing monuments with the perspective of people of lower-social status who viewed the city in terms of personal relationships, neighborhoods, and notable events. These differing viewpoints necessarily affected how festivals were both designed and perceived, an issue that Devaney continues to examine as he analyzes specific spectacles in Jaén, Córdoba, and Murcia.

In the 1460s, Jaén was dominated by Miguel Lucas de Iranzo who had been transformed from a farmer’s son to a knight in the service of Henry IV of Castile by a public ceremony on a frontier battlefield. His goal in Jaén was to renew the war with Granada, and he employed an impressive array of spectacles designed to convince the

townspeople that victory over Islam would require the conversion (not destruction) of Muslims and so preserve the town's commercial interests which depended on trade with Muslims. In contrast, by 1473 in Córdoba, the disruption of a Christian procession honoring the Virgin Mary caused a wave of anti-*converso* violence. Devaney argues that these riots were deliberately provoked by the political theater of the festival and then extended past their natural ending by more political theater. By the 1480s in Murcia, festivals had shifted in the wake of the anti-*converso* violence and in anticipation of the conquest of Granada by Ferdinand and Isabella. The message presented was one of victory and a completely Christian society that would banish religious diversity and end the frontier culture. Murcia used elements of its Corpus Christi festivity (focused on the unity of the Christian faith and church) to celebrate the conquests of Malaga in 1487 and Granada in 1492. In this context of complete Christian victory, there was no need for violence against Muslims and Jews who were instead relegated to the end of the processions where they were forced to enact joy at the victories and were otherwise dismissed as irrelevant.

This is a fascinating exploration of both festivals and urban life on the Granadan frontier. While the first section on knightly tournaments remains rather abstract, the second section that explores people and festivals in Jaén, Córdoba, and Murcia is rich, concrete, and compelling. Devaney makes a strong case for the need to study the specific historical circumstances of festivals as well as the more general cultural trends that the spectacles reflect, and his analysis is strongest when he focuses on how individual festivals changed over time in the complex frontier world of "amiable enmity." While Devaney does not quite answer the complicated question of how festivals were perceived by the bystanders, he does provide a compelling analysis of how festivals were intended to play out, what the elite thought the bystanders were thinking, and how these messages changed over time in a crucial moment on the Granadan frontier. This is a valuable book for any scholar who is interested in the complex world of early modern Spanish cities.

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