

Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies

Journal of the Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies

Volume 43

Issue 1 *Digital Humanities*, under the co-editorship of
Andrea R. Davis & Andrew H. Lee

Article 14

2018

Review of Javier Irigoyen-García, 'Moors Dressed as Moors.' Clothing, Social Distinction, and Ethnicity in Early Modern Iberia

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Recommended Citation

Burshatin, Israel (2018) "Review of Javier Irigoyen-García, 'Moors Dressed as Moors.' Clothing, Social Distinction, and Ethnicity in Early Modern Iberia," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 43 : Iss. 1 , Article 14.

<https://doi.org/10.26431/0739-182X.1298>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs/vol43/iss1/14>

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Irigoyen-García, Javier. ‘*Moors Dressed as Moors.*’ *Clothing, Social Distinction, and Ethnicity in Early Modern Iberia*. Toronto Iberic, 26. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. xxiii + 300 pp. + 19 ill.

The bewildering title phrase that appears in quotation marks is aptly chosen, as it illustrates the contingent and shifting optics that rendered things Moorish with often contradictory valences in the century and a half following the conquest of the Nasrid Kingdom Granada in 1492. The present monograph offers a rich and exhaustively researched meditation on the dislocations and puzzling constructs accorded to Moorish otherness at a time when former Iberian Muslims and their descendants became an internal colony at the heart of early modern global empires. The phrase in question, taken from Luis del Mármol Carvajal’s 17th-century history of the Alpujarras rebellion, illustrates not only the arbitrariness of the designation, *moro* — at once a religious tag used in lieu of “secta de Mahoma,” as Islam was commonly called, and a confused bundle of geopolitical spaces that could range from a neighboring village in Andalucía to a North African town, and, as in Mármol’s treatise, farther afield to denote the Ottoman Turks. Irigoyen-García elucidates with an encyclopedic array of sources both the material and symbolic economies behind so-called Moorish attire. While many recent studies on this and related issues in post-Reconquest Iberia endeavor to interrogate the essentialism that characterized a dominant strain of 20th-century scholarship indebted to Ciotot’s coinage of “*Maurophilie littéraire*,” very few, in my view, have elucidated the historical record as fully and, simultaneously, offered insightful (re)readings as conclusively as the present monograph. One old chestnut, in particular, is central to the present study—to what extent was Moorish attire a distinctive sign of ethnic otherness? Was there in fact, such a thing as sartorial Moorishness? Rather, as Irigoyen-García demonstrates, the Moorish-derived equestrian outfits worn by Christian knights, noblemen, and those with upwardly mobile aspirations conveyed the sense of elite status—or, as in the case of striving courtiers, their ambitions for such—while repressing the religious culture in which these exercises in masculine prowess had their origins. In Habsburg Spain, we now learn, male Moorish sartorial style was an enabling vehicle for those claiming Old Christian status; the sporting connotations of *savoir-faire* and equestrian prowess were embraced in towns and at court, but rarely, if at all, in the *aljamas*. And here the study’s generous cultural approach pays off handsomely, as the author provides a highly nuanced account of the role of Moorish equestrian practices as they were adopted by elites (or bounders) who were so enamored of the *juego de cañas* [game of canes] that it became synonymous not with Moorishness, but with an exclusive brotherhood bound by knightly values and aspirations. As Barbara Fuchs recounts in *Exotic Nation: Maurophilia and the Construction of Early Modern Spain* (2008, pp. 98-99), in 1554 the future monarch Philip II traveled to London, accompanied by a

large retinue of superb riders, where they displayed for the benefit of the English court and his royal bride, Mary Tudor, the *ne plus ultra* of masculine gallantry. The groom and his companions put on quite a show of *juegos de caña* power-dressed in colorful and lavishly adorned *marlotas*. Irigoyen-García, who has previously collaborated and studied with Fuchs, turns his attention to the domestic uses and resonance of this peculiarly Iberian appropriation of Moorish inflected masculinity, while also detailing the logic behind the exclusion of male Moriscos from such finery as silk garments, *marlotas*, *sayos vaqueros* or *gineta* mounts that had been associated with the male élites of the then recently conquered Muslim kingdom of Granada. “Moorishness,” he concludes, “was constitutive of aristocratic status in Old Christian society” (87). The author also offers a fresh reading of the “cultural cleansing” (100) that Philip II sought to impose with the Islamophobic decree of 1567, which forbade the use of Arabic and barred male and female Moriscos from wearing Moorish garments (100). The author interrogates not just the decree but its subsequent misreadings in the historiographic tradition of the Alpujarras rebellion. From its earliest descriptions in contemporary accounts, this bloody conflict has traditionally been interpreted as a direct Morisco response to sartorial prohibitions. While there probably were more urgent material motivating factors, this and the other sweeping provisos sought to “white out” the signs of Morisco ethnic distinction. The author is right to point out the gender imbalance at the heart of the sartorial taboos, since the visibility of Moriscas’ bodies and their distinctive garments (*almalafa*, e.g.) was much greater than that of the men, whose attire was unremarkable; in fact, the garb of Morisco male “commoners,” as the author dubs the subaltern colonized population, is largely absent in the large corpus of sources examined, including documents scattered in over a dozen municipal archives.

The monograph addresses two broad questions. In Part One, titled “Morisma nueva de Christianos”: Iberian Christian Moorish Clothing, we encounter derivations and redefinitions of Moorish sartorial practices across diverse cultural locations— the *juego de cañas*, the *comedia* in general and Lope de Vega in particular, historiography, poetry, and prose fiction. In Part Two the perspective shifts from hegemonic appropriations to the repressive policies imposed on Moriscos, which range from “cultural cleansing” to sumptuary regulations, such as those proscribing silk garments (100). The latter represents a blatant effort to reinforce Moriscos’ subordinate and abject condition. An intriguing lesson drawn in this section is that Morisco bodies are subjected to strategies that render them as episodically invisible. As noted, we have only the vaguest sense of what would be male Morisco attire, rather than regional or class-based wardrobe possibilities available to them in such varied locations and climates as Granada, Valencia, Murcia or Toledo. Especially incisive is the close reading accorded to the decree’s restrictive language, which is riddled with inconsistencies regarding the gender of

those affected by the harsh measures, a feature that persists in subsequent historical accounts of the ensuing Alpujarras rebellion.

Irigoyen-Garcia's study amplifies with scholarly rigor our understanding of early modern Iberian cultural politics in ways that resonate with our own cultural locations as scholars at a time of heightened ethnic and national tensions. Although he flags a remarkable gender imbalance in the manner in which Morisco sartorial culture was both depicted and policed by Philip II and his descendants, there is still much left to consider. One such possible path would be the male homosocial dimension of "aristocratic performance" as enacted in the *juego de cañas* (39). If Moorishness is in fact that which is instrumentally repressed in these sporting festivals, is this a uniquely effective form of silencing? Is there no "return of the repressed" in these homosocial festivals of privilege?

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