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Review: Roger Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain*. (Chicago, 1991)

Kenneth Baxter Wolf
Pomona College

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Italy, the heir of the true ancient civilization founded by Noah. One of the many distortions of both forgers was the reshaping of the giants from malevolent foes into noble ancestors. Lemaire's blatant distortion of Annius was very appealing to his French contemporaries, and a host of disciples from the time of Louis XII to Louis XIII promoted a fantastic pseudohistory of French greatness and antiquity that made the new, positive image of ancestral giants an integral part of national identity. This fraudulent and deliberately anti-Italian and antihumanistic pseudohistory, then, is the immediate background for Rabelais's *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*. Stephens contends that Rabelais adopted this framework, including the giants, in order to ridicule and undermine it and to replace it with his own ideal of a reformed evangelical French monarchy that would rest on the humanists' appropriation of both true classical culture and true biblical learning. Rabelais parodied both the themes and the mode of discourse of Lemaire and his disciples. His narrator in the first two books, Alcofrybas, personifies the intellectual nullity of this pseudohistory, and his virtual disappearance from center stage after the early chapters of *Gargantua* reflects Rabelais's repudiation not only of Alcofrybas but also of the blasphemous, antihumanistic, and philologically ridiculous pseudomyths that he personifies. The giants of Rabelais, much more than those of his fraudulent sources, created the popular (but relatively recent) image of the giant as moral hero. Although at times the argumentation is intricate and the documentation dense, this book convincingly relates both Rabelais and his giants to the ideals of the humanistic and evangelical elite whose learning and values he both shared and greatly advanced.

CHARLES G. NAUERT, JR.
University of Missouri,
Columbia

SABINA FLANAGAN. *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098–1179: A Visionary Life*. New York: Routledge. 1989. Pp. xiv, 230. \$29.95.

Sabina Flanagan straightforwardly announces her intention to provide a "general introduction to Hildegard . . . an account of what she wrote and how she did it" (p. xiii). In addition to biographical data, Flanagan summarizes Hildegard's work with a pertinent survey of the social and political background of her life. Discussion of her scientific treatises doubles as an ecological background. The book concludes with some modest speculations regarding Hildegard's neurophysiological profile. It is based almost entirely on the primary sources written by and about Hildegard. More bibliographical information appears in the rather sparse notes. This is not to imply that the book rests on a shaky foundation. It does not. But it is intended as a survey, and that is its strength. It will fill a hole on many a scholar's bookshelf and ought to find a place on student reading lists for years to come. Flanagan com-

plements but does not pretend to displace such works of analysis as Barbara Newman's *Sister of Wisdom* (1987).

Flanagan's book centers on Hildegard's writing, which was firmly rooted in her vision—thus, the title of the work. Flanagan argues persuasively that Hildegard was not a mystic in the ordinary sense. Primarily she was an intellectual interested in the nature of the universe, but she was also a reformer actively seeking to restore the lost harmony of the cosmos. Her visions helped her express an integrated system that informed her scientific, theological, and pastoral activities. As opposed to the trances of Elizabeth of Schönau, Hildegard's visions came to her when she was conscious, a condition that Flanagan relates to the hallucinatory and emotional effects of migraine pathology. The migraine experience of attack, crisis, and resolution fits Hildegard's work patterns and explains her strategic uses of illness at crisis points. This pathology is intended to account not for Hildegard's achievements as a writer and as a prophet but only for their visionary framework.

There is no question in Flanagan's mind that Hildegard's prophetic persona was not a literary device or even an instrument of power. It was her psychological underpinning. When Hildegard was confronted with opposition, her decisions were invariably guided by nonmystical factors. She relied on her prophetic stance to reinforce her own self-confidence. Her sense of authority depended on her ability to consult her visions and to interpret them favorably. In this spirit, Flanagan interprets Hildegard's behavior as a writer: she did not write or preach without a formative vision to give shape to knowledge she had otherwise accumulated. Her own concerns acted formatively on her visions, which in turn provided her with the information and inspiration that she required. It was thus a visionary talent, possibly growing out of a pathological condition, that enabled Hildegard to make effective use of her learning at a time when the monastic pursuit of knowledge was becoming increasingly marginalized by the development of the schools. Flanagan has thus provided a sensible context for the "supernatural" element in Hildegard's thought, while safeguarding her legitimate and enduring place in the human intellectual heritage.

JO ANN MCNAMARA
Hunter College

ROGER COLLINS. *The Arab Conquest of Spain, 710–797*. (A History of Spain.) Cambridge: Basil Blackwell. 1989. Pp. xii, 239. \$49.95.

This book is part of a proposed fifteen-volume series on the history of Spain from the prehistoric to the modern periods. In addition to the work reviewed here, Roger Collins is scheduled to produce the next two components, which will cover the ninth through the early eleventh centuries. Taken together, the three will constitute a more detailed treatment of the last half

of the period covered in his *Early Medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity, 400–1000* (1983). As in the case of this earlier book, *The Arab Conquest of Spain* not only gives the nonspecialist in the English-speaking world access to a detailed study of early medieval Iberia but also provides arguably one of the best treatments of the subject in any language.

The *Arab Conquest of Spain* sets the stage for the invasion of 711 by assessing the Visigothic kingdom on the eve of its fall and laying to rest the sterile hypotheses about the “decadence” that led to its sudden demise. Collins then makes his way through the historiographical jungle surrounding the conquest itself by skillfully cutting away the legendary undergrowth. The rest of the work, with the exception of a chapter on the birth of the kingdom of Asturias, is devoted to the perennial struggles of the Cordobán governors and emirs to exert their authority over al-Andalus, from the suppression of the Berber revolt to the pacification of the Ebro region. The choice of 797 as a terminus is not as “clean” as that of 710, but the resulting openness of the book is excusable in light of the promised sequels.

The real strength of the volume lies in its highly self-conscious attention to the sources and to the opinions of previous historians. The most notable example of this is the author’s reappraisal of the relative value of the Latin and Arabic documentation pertaining to the conquest of 711. As Collins points out, historians have traditionally slighted the almost contemporary *Chronicle of 754*, written by a Christian living under the new Muslim regime, placing all of their trust on Arabic histories that, although purporting to be based on lost early accounts, nonetheless in their present form date from centuries after the invasion. His approach—which seems so logical that it is hard to believe that it has not been followed before—is to use the *Chronicle of 754* as the foundation of his account, carefully supplementing it with information from the later sources. Collins demonstrates the same precision and acuity with regard to source criticism when reconstructing the events that led to the rise of the kingdom of Asturias as well as those pertaining to the establishment of the Umayyad emirate in Córdoba.

The result of his tight interweaving of narrative and source criticism is a book that promises to serve the needs not only of the novice concerned with “what happened” in eighth-century Spain but of the specialist who is more interested in where the ideas fit in terms of the primary and secondary materials related to the subject.

KENNETH BAXTER WOLF
Pomona College

MODERN EUROPE

DILWYN KNOX. *Ironia: Medieval and Renaissance Ideas on Irony*. (Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, number 16.) New York: E. J. Brill, 1989. Pp. xviii, 237. \$43.00.

This brief but learned study will give aid and comfort both to intellectual historians and literary scholars who accent continuities between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and to those who see a new departure in the rhetorical sensibility of the Renaissance, although the work is too narrowly conceived to do full justice to the theme of irony. In the first part of his book, Dilwyn Knox organizes his discussion of medieval and Renaissance theories of irony thematically, not chronologically, to emphasize the point that, as a rhetorical figure or trope, irony received the same kinds of definitions in both periods. Distinctions between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance here are quantitative, based on the wider range of classical treatments of the subject available in the Renaissance, rather than qualitative. In rhetorical handbooks, grammatical and rhetorical commentaries, epistolographies, treatises on humor, lexicons and glossaries, works written in Latin and in the vernaculars, theorists in both periods saw irony, whether as a trope embedded in a single sentence or as a more extended literary device, as a rhetorical embellishment in which the speaker states the opposite of what he means, for humorous or ridiculous effect. They applied it, similarly, to illustrating the Aristotelian modes of logical opposition; to pretense, concealment, and sometimes to lying; and to mockery, satire, and invective. And, whether classical, medieval, or Renaissance, all authors commenting on irony in oral discourse made the same points about the importance of pronunciation, tone of voice, and manual and facial gestures in enabling irony to work or in unmasking it.

The chief, indeed the only, innovation that Knox sets in Renaissance irony theory is the rediscovery of Socratic irony, which medieval thinkers had by-passed or misinterpreted, despite references to it in Cicero’s *De officiis* and Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Knox’s view, Renaissance authors understood Socratic irony primarily as a literary tactic. Socrates’s wit and urbanity, his modesty and self-deprecation, were seen as entertaining and disarming pedagogical devices, at times read as an oblique praise of the virtue of magnanimity but more typically confined to educating knowledge from his interlocutors and exposing the fallacies of the sophists. Thus far, Knox uses his materials with erudition and persuasiveness. But he casts his net too narrowly by emphasizing theory at the expense of practice. For his account of Socratic irony in the Renaissance omits its philosophical and theological uses in works such as Nicholas of Cusa’s *De docta ignorantia* and Erasmus’s *Incomium moriae*. Although he acknowledges that irony often kept company with other rhetorical tropes in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, this omission prevents Knox from exploring its epistemological and moral associations with paradox in some of the most important works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. So only part of the terrain of irony is mapped in this otherwise finely crafted book.

MARCIA L. COLISH
Oberlin College