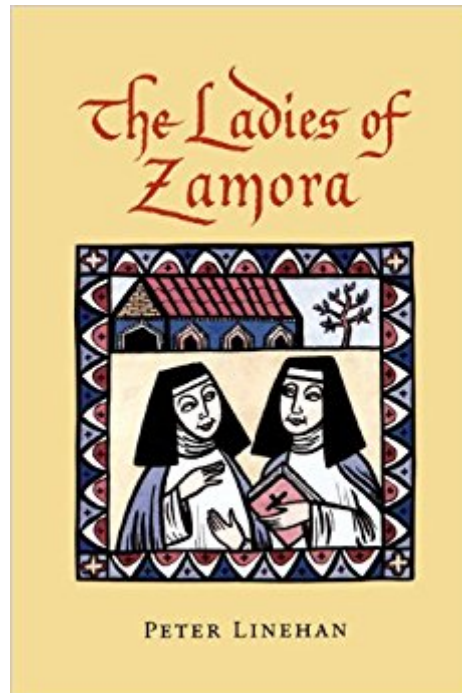




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The Ladies Of Zamora



Synopsis

The Ladies of Zamora tells the remarkable story of a scandal that occurred in a Spanish convent during the thirteenth century. Peter Linehan, the foremost expert on medieval Spain, expertly sets forth the details of the affair and shows how the effects were felt not just in Spain but throughout Europe, even as far as the papal curia. Established in 1264 by two wealthy sisters, the convent of Las Dueñas as soon became the focus of a bitter jurisdictional struggle between the bishop of Zamora and the local Dominican friars to whose order a faction of the sisters hoped to have their convent incorporated. In 1279, the bishop visited the convent and interrogated thirty of the sisters. The records of this inquiry, hitherto unpublished, provide the documentary basis for this book, and they reveal startling discrepancies between the stern precepts of their rule and the relaxed realities of life behind the convent grille. They speak of sisters in 'love nests' with friars at the convent gate, giving their prioress the evil eye, and threatening their bishop with sticks. At one level, the book can be read as an entertaining story—a saga of copulation, cross-dressing, and general mayhem. But Linehan uses the story to bring into sharp focus a number of usually unrelated aspects of the age: tensions between the mendicant orders and the local ecclesiastical authorities, thirteenth-century religiosity (female religiosity in particular), and collusion in high places, both in Castile and in Rome. One of the friars involved in the scandal eventually became Master-General of the Dominican Order until he was dismissed by Pope Nicholas IV in 1291. Finally, in 1300 Boniface VIII enacted a series of measures designed to bring under stricter control 'those damned friars' (as he called them) and convents such as that of Las Dueñas. The Ladies of Zamora provides novel insight into the century that began with Pope Innocent III's approval of the foundation of Saint Dominic's Order of Preachers and ended with a Dominican Order that had lost its innocence and fatally compromised the ideals that had already so profoundly affected Western society. We also see the social realities of a frontier society where the rule of law—canon law in particular—remained subject to the whim of willful men—not to mention women, of course.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

[Linehan] paints a vivid and compelling picture of a community whose members found themselves caught up in larger conflicts of authority within the Church and between Church and State. . . . A fine example of the way in which study of the local and the particular opens out on to the wider perspectives of Castilian history and the problems a Church as a whole faced with the rise of the mendicant Orders. --Colin Thompson, Times Literary Supplement

Using exciting archival material about a moral scandal in a convent of Dominican nuns in thirteenth-century Spain, Peter Linehan has produced a fascinating study of problems in the turbulent world of religion and the difficulties facing women trying to make their way in a patriarchal society. What might have been a mere anecdote turns out to be a first-rate in-depth study that sensationally exposes the manners and philosophy of an entire community-as exemplified by the ladies of Zamora. --Jacques Le Goff

The Ladies of Zamora is a lovely book, solidly based on first-hand investigations of documents in Spanish archives. Linehan's prose is disciplined, graceful, and clear, and his scholarship is absolutely first-class. --James A. Brundage, University of Kansas

Peter Linehan is Fellow and Tutor of St John's College, Cambridge. He is the author of, most recently, History and the Historians of Medieval Spain.

This was a book with a good PR department--its cover reads like a novel, but in fact it is a scholarly study. It assumes a huge amount of prior knowledge of Spanish and medieval history, as well as a working vocabulary of Spanish, Latin and even French words. And, though it was obviously well-researched, I didn't buy the author's thesis. In addition, his writing style was overly dense and rather choppy. This book could be worthwhile secondary source material for research, but if you're looking for the user-friendly non-fiction story that the cover is trying to sell you, you should pass this one by.

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