ROYAL STUDIES JOURNAL

2020 VII

Juana I: Legitimacy and Conflict in Sixteenth-Century Castile

Gillian B. Fleming

Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018

Review by: Jessica L. Minieri

WINCHESTER UNIVERSITY PRESS

Juana I: Legitimacy and Conflict in Sixteenth-Century Castile. By Gillian B. Fleming. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. ISBN: 978-3-030-08970-2. ix + 356 pp. €85.59.

During the early hours of the morning of 12 April 1555, Juana "La Loca," the proprietary monarch of the Kingdom of Castile, Crown of Aragon, and their territories across the "Ocean Sea," drew her final breath within the royal palace of Tordesillas, the site of her imprisonment for over four decades. Prior to her confinement, Juana inherited the Castilian throne after the deaths of her mother, Isabella I of Castile (r. 1474–1504), and siblings, Juan of Asturias (d. 1497) and Isabella of Portugal (d. 1498). Yet, the interference of her father, Ferdinand II of Aragon (r. 1479–1516), and husband, Philip I of Burgundy (b. 1478), encouraged rumours that she suffered from mental illness, which called into question Juana's right to power after her brief personal rule (1506–1507). This legitimacy crisis (*c.*1504–1555) is the focus of Gillian B. Fleming's *Juana I: Legitimacy and Conflict in Sixteenth-Century Castile*.

Within this book, Fleming explores the impact of Juana's life, brief reign, and influence on the Kingdom of Spain during its transition to Habsburg rule and into a global empire. Fleming argues that despite Juana's position as a "failed queen regnant," her rule, imprisonment, and legacy cast a long shadow over the reign of her son, Charles I & V (r. 1516–1556), due to her position as "*la reyna mi senora*," since questions concerning his legitimacy as her "co-monarch" remained constant (10 and 288). Her significance as a political actor for the Kingdom of Spain rests not in her tenure, Fleming stresses, but in the ramifications of her imprisonment, the ill-treatment she received at the hands of her family members, and her supposed mental illness. While she spent four decades locked in the royal palace at Tordesillas, she acted not only as an incapacitated co-monarch, but also as a reminder to all of Europe that the true Spanish sovereign resided as Tordesillas.

This monograph offers a refreshing look at a monarch that has long been depicted as "the mad queen" within the literature and popular imaginary, while also demonstrating that popular depictions often ignore Juana's own attitudes towards her kingdom and her place in such. Thus, Fleming's analysis of Juana's accession and personal rule, as well as her view of the Spanish kingdoms as "Isabelline and Castilian rather than Caroline and Imperial," constitutes an important opening to a much-needed re-assessment of her own political successes and failures (10).

The myths surrounding Juana detract from her role in the formation of the "Spanish state." Fleming's concentration on the political sphere takes much of the focus away from the legend of the "shadow queen"; while she

does discuss Juana's mental health and its effects on her later life and legacy, she does not make it her focus (133). Instead, she argues that Juana's *locura* could have resulted from the decades she spent in isolation, as her daughter, Catalina (b. 1507), was the only one of her children to live with her mother and then only until her marriage to John III of Portugal in 1525.

Fleming argues that her melancholic behaviour resembles that of modern maximum-security prisoners after spending long periods in social isolation. While any discussion of Juana's mental health is speculative and risks imposing a retrospective diagnosis, Fleming's analysis strays from the scholarship of Ludwig Pfandl and Vincenzo Querini, which primarily viewed her in terms of her *locura*. This approach allows her to focus on significant questions regarding female rule and the emergence of the Habsburg dynasty in Iberia.

The placement of Juana of Castile's legitimacy crisis at the heart of late-medieval Castilian-Aragonese politics enables a necessary and long overdue re-examination of her career that liberates the Queen from the legend that surrounds her life. Therefore, for Fleming, Juana's role as co-monarch and mother of a dynasty outweighs her "image problem," as is also the case with other medieval and early modern queens, notably Anne of Great Britain (r. 1702–1714) and Catherine of Aragon (r. 1513–1533), whose "tragedies" have long shaped perceptions of their careers, and obscured our comprehension of their behaviour. Accordingly, Fleming works to dismantle the perception of Juana as the victim of her male family members and instead presents her as a woman whose influence remained central to the Castilian-Aragonese Crown: "Juana held court, often meeting *La Mouche* de Veyre, who represented Charles. She met an envoy of Louis XII, to whom she reaffirmed her support for Fernando's return to Castile, and on 4 December received a Portuguese envoy, Enrique, bishop of Ceuta, with whom she discussed questions of future governance" (140). This is hardly the image of an aloof monarch who did not wish to rule; if anything, Fleming's study demonstrates that much is left to be explored about the political life of this sovereign.

Thus, Fleming's study captures the significance of Juana's career and its legacy while also illustrating how women, particularly the women of the House of Trastamara-Habsburg, influenced the character of the emerging Kingdom of Spain. As she argues, Juana's mental illnesses and "failures" should not diminish her career in her own right, in terms of her co-monarch, Charles I & V, or their counterparts across early modern Europe.

JESSICA L. MINIERI
Binghamton University