

# Letras Hispanas

## Volume 11, 2015

**TITLE:** *Friendship in Medieval Iberia: Historical, Legal and Literary Perspectives*

**AUTHOR:** Antonella Liuzzo Scorpo

**PUBLISHER:** Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2014

**AUTHOR OF THE REVIEW:** David Navarro, Texas State University

The term *amicitia* [friendship] is relevant to all spheres of human life and time periods. Its perception has been adapted or modified based on the different social, cultural and geographical contexts in which it has been studied. In the case of medieval Iberia, its complexity and blend of religions, cultures and traditions played an important role for interpersonal friendships; however, the social and political bonds generated from them have yet to be studied in depth. Antonella Liuzzo Scorpo's *Friendship in Medieval Iberia: Historical, Legal and Literary Perspectives* focuses on the different typologies of friendship that emerged during the so-called Peninsular Renaissance of the 13th century. This period took place under the patronage and kingship of Alfonso X of Castile (1221-82) whose literary productivity extended to all facets of knowledge including translation works, historical chronicles, legal codes and poetry. The book examines the different representations of friendship and human bonds established at a social, political, personal and emotional scale in three particular Alfonsine works: the legal compendium of *Siete Partidas* (SP), the historic chronicle of *Estoria de España* (EE), and the Marian miracle collection *Cantigas de Santa María* (CSM).

Chapter One, "A History of Friendship: Classical and Medieval Perspectives," serves as an explanatory section on the term *amicitia*, from its classical conception until the medieval period. Initially conceived as a blood tie among individuals, *amicitia* later combined other features of "mutual help and solidarity in difficult situations" adding conviviality and communication inherited by Aristotle as "fundamental requirements" (11,

20). With the advent of Christianity the concept incorporated new elements such as charity, peace and concord. During the medieval period, several factors including social status, gender, religion and ethnicity contributed to shaping the framework of friendship. The new approach to *amicitia* included therefore not only human feelings and emotions but also a military and economic component, as it appears in feudal and kinship relationships that defined what friendship was, could be or should be (21). In the Iberian Peninsula, friendship developed in a similar path as the rest of Europe as a social agreement aimed to protect the public peace and the constituted order from a vassallic structure foundation (29).

In Chapter Two, "Friendship in the Works of Alfonso X of Castile," Liuzzo Scorpo accurately examines Alfonso's perception of friendship as portrayed in three of his works: the Marian songs *Cantigas de Santa María* (CSM), the historic chronicle *Estoria de España* (EE) and the law-collection *Siete Partidas* (SP). Alfonso's most important lyric production, the Galician-Portuguese compilation of CSM, combines the work of pictorial, musical and narrative scenes to "condemn the mundane" and "address the divinity" (5). The poems permit today's modern reader to understand or imagine the social interactions, levels of friendships and relationships established among different individuals from various social, hierarchical and religious backgrounds. In a similar way, the unfinished chronicle *Estoria de España*, which shows a historiographical compendium from the origins of the Iberian Peninsula up to Alfonso's father Fernando III, serves as an

additional study case on the king's conception of *amicitia*. In this case, the author analyzes Alfonso's attitude towards the different groups that took control of Iberia in order to "define an Iberian common heritage" (62), by nurturing the Roman and Visigothic essence while undermining the Arab invasion. The seven-part text of *Siete Partidas* (1256-65) aimed to promote Alfonso's juridical unification of his domains and to secure his legislative monopoly. Liuzzo Scorpo dissects the term 'friendship' in Title XXVII of Book IV of the treatise. The argument here rests on the Aristotelian vision of *amicitia* retained by Alfonso and presented "to deal with a moral and doctrinal subject rather than to provide a list of pragmatic norms aimed at regulating social exchanges" (79). The analysis of this law establishes a classification of friendship more inclined towards human perfection, purification of self-being, and correct moral behaviour, rather than ties founded on lineage and marital unions: it is grounded on mutual benevolence and respect; it is fundamental for everybody, regardless of their social or economic status; and it is necessary to enhance pacts of mutual respect and honor to preserve rights and privileges.

The religious component of *amicitia* nurtured by the Scholastic medieval doctrines and the societal feudal relations is explored in Chapter Three, "Spiritual and Religious Friendships." The author provides several useful examples from the Alfonsine sources to show not only the theological value of friendship, but also the feudal features that shaped the term. The spiritual connections between the holy figures and their human devotees are analyzed in *CSM*. She asserts that despite the religious component present in the miracles, the relationships and *amicitia* established between the Virgin and her followers rest also on symbols and rituals of vassalic structure (88). A similar approach is examined in *SP*, where the social norms regulating monastic life inside and outside the cloister were clearly regulated, particularly when defining the hierarchical differences between religious and secular orders. In *EE*, the different vassalic bonds at a political level between the king, the *hermandades* (brotherhoods) and

the military orders are also explored in depth. These *militia Dei* were meant to defend Christendom from religious enemies but also, as the author affirms, to sustain "Alfonso's ambitious political plans" (108).

The role of friendships and its political implications are discussed in chapter 4. *Politiké philia* (political friendships) are sustained by the classical definition of "a common cultural background, traditional values and geographical origins" (112), which later on filtered into the medieval feudal society. The author suggests that political friendships were supported to enhance kingship and vassalic relations which served to provide mutual support on the battlefield and against partisan challenges, as opposed to an *amicitia* based on personal and emotional connections. In this respect, political friendship was shaped by loyalty, pacts and agreements to maintain the interests of the Crown, and "was the instrument to preserve and safeguard social order" (118). Friendships were, above all, supported on loyalty versus betrayal, which was contemplated as a sin that could lead to enmity. Liuzzo Scorpo argues that Alfonso's interest in political alliances was not only utilized to receive military protection and secure his domains, but also served as a mechanism for personal problem solving. The examples provided by the author include the promise of perpetuated peace between dynasties to maintain the transmission of an amicable bond, vassalic relationships, friendship restoration between former enemies, and marital bonds.

Chapter Five, "Pragmatic Alliances and Interfaith Relationships," deals with the levels of friendship experienced among groups of different religious beliefs and ethnic affiliations. One of the main arguable and debated topics in medieval Iberia refers to the level of contact and interaction experienced between the Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities known as *convivencia* (cohabitation). The Christian expansion of the *Reconquista* during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries against the Muslims led to a series of pacts and agreements of personal and political nature between both parties. However, the main component that shaped these friendly relationships was forged on a submissive model—Muslim pays respect to the Christian knight and king—similar to that established between

the lord and his subjects. In *EE*, several examples are used to portray the political alliances between the Christian and Muslim elite, despite their religious divergences. This is the case of the amicable friendship between El Cid and Abengalvón, the Muslim governor of Molina, or the pacts coalition between Alfonso VI and the Muslim ruler of Toledo, al-Mamūn. In *CSM* and *SP* (Partida VI, Titles XXIV and XXV) various study cases are examined to show the Muslim and Jewish subordination to Christian power. In regards to the Jews, despite their profitability thanks to their financial and administrative skills, they are perceived by Alfonso as an anti-model of friendship due to their military irrelevance, a key factor to establish interfaith relationships, and the anti-Jewish stereotypes of Christ killers and evil-doers.

The last chapter, "Friendship, Sex and Gender Relationships," focuses on types of friendships between subjects of the opposite sex other than marriage and concubinage. The author argues that these three Alfonsine works stand out for a misogynistic view on women, who are only recognized as friends under certain established conditions; they are portrayed in the chronicles as "malevolent and vicious" or as "fragile individuals" (183), and from the legal point of view, the

same negative attitude prevails. Only on certain occasions are women represented in positive terms, but they are always subject to their role of good wives: "supportive, submissive and obedient" (180). They seemed to be restrained to establish non-marital relationships with men due to their limitations in their social circles. An interesting part of this analysis lies in the use of lexicon toward friendship and its multiple meanings. The terminology of these expressions did not rest on the classical idea of *amicitia* promoted by the Christian doctrine, but they directly refer to a variety of connections established among individuals based on different types of affiliations; for example, the use of *compagna* is employed to mercantile and economic relationships, while the concepts *amigo* and *compannero* describe political skills and social positions between the contractors.

Liuzzo Scorpo's study provides an interesting and concise study of the portrayal of *amicitia* in Alfonso's literary visionary world. It contributes to understanding the different levels of social interactions among the king and his followers from diverse economic and religious backgrounds as a resource of life survival subject to a series of circumstances which enhanced the cultural and human scenery of medieval Iberia.