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Olds, Katrina B. Forging the Past: Invented Histories in Counter-Reformation Spain

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with a concrete understanding of Italian politics in the mid 1400s. She situates Pius's other writings alongside *The Commentaries*, and creates an intellectual history of Pius's own political thinking and its development. Moreover, she gives us an important and deeply contextualized interpretation of one of the most important humanist texts of the mid-fifteenth century. She should be commended for her work.

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Olds, Katrina B.

Forging the Past: Invented Histories in Counter-Reformation Spain.

New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015. Pp. xiii, 422 + 2 maps. ISBN 978-0-300-18522-5 (hardcover) US\$65.

With this ground-breaking book, Katrina Olds delves into a long-neglected and under-appreciated area of Spanish Golden Age scholarship: antiquarianism. It requires a fair bit of courage and a great deal of perseverance—the author herself might call it masochism—to plough through endless volumes of verbose Latin prose to extract meaningful information about the intellectual practices and learned disputes of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish erudites. But this thankless task has borne fruit. Fortunately for her readers (and for herself, we might add), Olds has chosen to approach her subject through the controversial and tantalizing figure of the Toledan Jesuit Jerónimo Román de la Higuera, the (in)famous creator of several “false chronicles” on early Spanish Christian saints. Written in a lively and engaging manner, *Forging the Past* explores the role of fiction and forgery in early modern religious history by taking its authors seriously instead of merely dismissing them as most critics have done up to now. Going back to their medieval origins, the book shows how such falsifications were actually quite common and very often accepted as true, whether out of interest or genuine piety and devotion. As Olds demonstrates through her nuanced study of the uses of the past in Renaissance Spain, myths and legends were fundamental to early modern people's sense of self and their sense of place in space and time. Uncertainties about sources seemed to evaporate when it came to questions of local or national identity.

Forging the Past is not concerned with disproving the validity of Román de la Higuera's writings or discrediting his unscrupulous methods. That is quite easy to do and historians have been hammering that nail for the past two centuries. Much more interestingly, Olds has chosen to situate the Jesuit's learned inventions in the context of the post-Tridentine revival of ecclesiastical history, and to examine the mechanisms undergirding the construction of intellectual authority and history writing in early modern Catholic Europe. Ultimately, by looking past the overly simplistic and reductive dichotomy of reason vs faith in which so many of these antiquarians have been confined and constrained, the author is able to show how and why someone like Higuera was actually quite representative of the scholarship of his time; by no means was he either an isolated figure or a figure working in isolation. The Jesuit's cunning ability to constantly navigate between sincerity and disingenuousness, legitimacy and disreputability—never clearly or squarely falling on either side—is precisely what makes this erudite such a complex yet elusive, and therefore fascinating, character.

The book opens with Román de la Higuera's active involvement throughout the 1590s in local and regional factional disputes over recent archaeological discoveries that conveniently filled the gaping holes in the early history of Christian Toledo. Building on this antiquarian craze, he claimed to have unearthed in local archives ancient (spurious) letters that demonstrated the existence of Christian martyrs in the city and that served as the foundation for his ambitious reconstruction of the community's entire history. Higuera's taste for controversy also explains his uneasy position within the Society of Jesus and his often tense relations with his superiors in Rome, who repeatedly tried to contain and marginalize this unrepentant loose cannon who antagonized them by provocatively (yet shrewdly) playing the Spanish crown and the Spanish Inquisition against the Jesuits and the Papacy in order to preserve his position and literally save his skin. Olds uses the genesis of the chronicles to probe and dissect Higuera's extensive network of patrons, correspondents, and supporters—as well as staunch opponents—who allowed him to circulate his writings and ultimately validate his imaginings through the accredited channels of scholarly communication. In the process, she shows how there was in fact a spectacular amount of diligent research and very serious erudition, not to mention an intimate knowledge of the ancient and early medieval world, that went into the production of these elaborate forgeries. Evidently, Higuera

was no mere con artist; he perfectly understood and to a large extent adhered to the standards of scholarship of his time, and tailored his texts to respond to the expectations of his readers and feed popular devotion.

The author also looks at the fate of the false chronicles after Higuera's death in 1611, and the lively debate and discussion they sparked among scholars, courtiers, and communities. Did the evident flaws of the texts irreparably compromise their usefulness or were they unable to detract from the deeper truth they conveyed about Spain's special place and privileged role in the history of Christianity? Olds examines the responses to the false chronicles at both the local and regional levels, where she finds a vibrant Republic of Letters connected to the most important centres of learning in Spain and Europe, as well as at the highest level of power, politics, and religion in Madrid and Rome. The question of the authenticity of Higuera's chronicles endured into the Enlightenment period, with broader implications about the nature of historical and religious truth. Their legacy lingers on to this day, since their findings form the basis of local identity and heritage in many Spanish communities. As Olds perceptively concludes, "the story of the creation, reception, scholarly rejection, and endurance of the false chronicles is also about the development of Spanish national identity, as Iberian scholars have been forced to come to terms with modernity and the convoluted history of their own history" (23).

By reading Jerónimo Román de la Higuera's false chronicles through the lens of both medieval "inventions" (of relics, documents, or traditions) and post-Tridentine militant scholarship, *Forging the Past* helps revise long-standing prejudices about the nature of erudition and antiquarianism in Catholic Spain. As such, it makes an outstanding contribution to our understanding of the production and circulation of knowledge within early modern European learned communities.

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