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978-0-521-88939-1 - Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom, c. 1050–1614

Brian A. Catlos

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Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom, c. 1050–1614

In the face of crusades, conversions, and expulsions, Muslims and their communities survived to thrive for over 500 years in medieval Europe. This comprehensive new study explores how the presence of Islamic minorities transformed Europe in everything from architecture to cooking, literature to science, and served as a stimulus for Christian society to define itself. Combining a series of regional studies, Brian Catlos compares the varied experiences of Muslims across Iberia, Southern Italy, the Crusader Kingdoms, and Hungary to examine those ideologies that informed their experiences, their place in society, and their sense of themselves as Muslims and as members of multi-confessional societies. This is a pioneering new narrative of the history of medieval and early modern Europe from the perspective of Islamic minorities; one which is not, as we might first assume, driven by ideology, isolation, and decline, but instead one in which successful communities persisted because they remained actively integrated within the larger Christian and Jewish societies in which they lived.

BRIAN CATLOS is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder and Research Associate in Humanities at the University of California Santa Cruz.

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For Wadjih F. al-Hamwi

أستاذي

صديقي،

أخي و...

أبي

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Preface

In the popular imagination medieval Europe is a land defined by Christian religion and culture, inhabited also by a small, persecuted Jewish minority, but which was essentially uniform in terms of religious identity. Muslims, on the other hand, are typically imagined as having constituted a foreign “other,” living in an Islamic world separated from what is often referred to as “the West” by a well-defined frontier marked by ideological opposition and political violence – Crusade and *jihād*. In this view, these worlds are seen as two self-contained and largely homogenous and incompatible components of an oppositional binary, as if they were two personalities, locked in what many would see as a timeless struggle – a “clash of civilizations” rooted in the fundamental, immutable, and irreconcilable differences believed to underlie their two cultures. On the other hand, relatively few outside of the Academy are aware that Islamic communities in fact comprised *part* of medieval European society, and that from the eleventh century through to the seventeenth century – beyond what is traditionally regarded as the end of the Middle Ages – populations of free Muslim subjects lived within the bounds of Western Christendom, or that Muslim slaves and travelers were a common fixture of European society long before the opening of the Atlantic world.

In fact, the Muslims of medieval Europe included substantial communities scattered right across the Latin-dominated Mediterranean, from the Atlantic coast to the Transjordan, as well as in Central and Eastern Europe. In some areas they survived only for a century or two, while in others they persevered for well over five hundred years. They did not live as isolated enclaves, they were not uniformly poor, and were not necessarily subject to systematic repression; rather, they comprised diverse communities and dynamic societies that played an important role in the formation of what would eventually emerge a modern European culture and society. This book sets out to survey the history of the Muslims of Latin Christendom, examining the experience of the various regional communities, and the circumstances that contributed both to their survival and to their demise. It aims also to investigate the relations of the

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Muslims, Christians (and Jews) who lived in medieval Europe in terms of how they imagined each other, how they structured their relationships, how they interacted politically, economically, culturally, and socially, and the impact they had on the development of European culture and society.

What is revealed is a tremendous variety of experience, both in terms of the internal life of these communities, their integration with the Christians under whose domination they lived, and their capacity to survive and persist. It reflects a history rich in possibilities, and shows that their survival and demise cannot simply be ascribed to the ideological conditions or changing religious culture of pre-modern Europe. Over the course of this study it will become clear that a whole range of factors, both local and regional, pragmatic and idealistic, contributed to their experience – a fact that may carry valuable lessons for our understanding of religious and cultural diversity, both in the world of the Middle Ages and in the world of today.

“History,” the saying goes, “is written by the winners.” If so, then this is a book about “the losers.” It is a book about the conquered, rather than the conquerors, about those who submitted, rather than those who triumphed. It is about communities and individuals who chose to stay in their ancestral lands and live under the regime of rulers and cultures whom they considered to be illegitimate, and who considered them, at best, to be infidels, and, at worst, agents of the devil; who chose to put their own salvation and the fate of their descendants in jeopardy; and who chose to live as a subjugated, second-class people, in a world in which it was most certainly not held to be self-evidently true that all men were equal or that they had certain unalienable rights. This is a book about the Muslims of Latin Christendom: an ethno-religious minority that comprised a significant proportion of the population of the Christian lands of the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages, and yet whose existence has been all but forgotten outside scholarly circles and the campaigns of local Spanish tourism boards.

Why is this case? It is not because there were few of them. In 1609, when the expulsion of the converted Christian descendants of the last Muslims of Spain was undertaken, over 300,000 were forced from their native lands into foreign exile – roughly twenty times the number of Spanish Jews who chose expulsion over conversion in 1492. A hundred and twenty years earlier Portugal’s Muslims had been expelled. It is not because it was specifically a Spanish problem. Significant communities existed also in Southern Italy, the Holy Land, and Hungary, and Muslim captives and slaves were sold and sent to the corners of Christendom. It is hardly a question of impact. Contact with Muslims and the Islamic world was one of the essential forces

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that shaped the European culture that emerged out of Latin Christendom. The existence of significant Muslim minorities within this society was a powerful engine of acculturation, adaptation, and innovation – a challenge and a stimulus for the Christians under whom they lived.

The historical obscurity of these Muslim minorities is due to two factors. The first relates to sources. It is indeed the case, for the most part, that “the winners” – consciously or not – determine the material that remains for future historians to use. Leaving aside the vicissitudes of war, fire, and natural disasters, the records and artifacts that survive the passing of ages are – generally speaking – those that are regarded as having some value and use, or a continuing relevance. In the centuries that passed since the disappearance of these communities, relatively few of the documents relating to the Muslims of Latin Christendom passed those tests, and those that did tended to be concentrated in a few specific regions. The second issue is scholarly bias and concern. Until the 1970s and the explosion of research relating to groups that had hitherto been considered marginal to the grand historical narrative, such as peasants, women, heretics, few historians perceived the subject Muslim communities as being a worthy object of historical inquiry.

Since then, however, there has been an flurry of academic interest, and a tremendous volume of historical research has been carried out on Italy and the Spanish kingdoms (quite a bit less on the Muslim communities of the Frankish East and Hungary). Both in Italy, and Spain – where Islamic society persevered beyond the Middle Ages – the impact of the Muslim past was undeniable: it left its imprint on language, food, popular culture, literature, architecture, and in a rich historical record. This has provided material for North American, British, French, and – most of all – Spanish historians to produce countless monographs, journal articles, and papers, examining every imaginable aspect of subject Muslim (*mudéjar*) history. It is this great output of scholarly work that has made the present study both possible and necessary. The overwhelming majority of the studies that have been carried out focus on specific communities, towns, regions, or kingdoms, or on specific themes or perspectives, and most are restricted to a rather narrow period of time. This has provided us with a means for understanding *mudéjar* society in rich detail, but has made it difficult to rise above the particularities of concrete communities and to discern larger patterns in their history. No scholarly monograph has undertaken to analyze the subject Muslim communities of Latin Christendom as a phenomenon, or has taken a broadly inclusive, comparative approach to the subject.

This is altogether understandable, given the challenges such a project presents. These communities were scattered across the breadth of the

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Latin lands, and followed distinct historical trajectories in each region. The availability and nature of sources vary dramatically from place to place and over time, making comparison difficult, and obscuring overarching narratives and common trends. Compounding this is the tendency for historical studies of these communities to be burdened by the agendas of the historians who have written them – agendas that reflect a whole range of modern ideological positions relating to the relationship of Christianity and Islam, the nature of ethno-religious culture and identity, and the place of Muslims in the national identities of European countries. Nevertheless, it is precisely the aim of the present study to provide such an analysis.

The first part of the book, “Static diasporas: Muslim communities of Latin Christendom,” presents a historical narrative of the Muslim minorities from the mid eleventh century through to the beginning of the sixteenth – a political history of a people with no great heroic figures, no long-ruling dynasties, and no independent, sovereign territory. The second part, “Living in sin: Islamicate society under Latin dominion,” adopts a thematic approach, and analyzes the ideological structures, administrative institutions, and quotidian relationships that gave shape to subject Muslim society and the *mudéjar* experience under Christian rule. The aim is to present a synthesis – an assessment of the history of the Muslim subjects of pre-modern Europe and of their relations with the Christian majority alongside whom they lived. It endeavors to propose a history of Christian domination of Islamic communities and the Muslim response to that domination, understood as much as possible from the perspective of those communities themselves. Hence, it is not a book about “European perceptions” of Islam, or Orientalism. It is not a book about Christian theological prejudices, or Crusade. It is not a book about the impact of Islam on the development of the West. And it is not a book about the brutality of Western colonial violence, or apparatuses of ethnic and religious oppression – although all of these matters necessarily enter into the discussion. Rather, it is a book about how subject communities persevered through centuries of domination, and the effect this had on them and on the societies in which they lived. Most significantly, perhaps, it presents a history that has not, up to this point, been accessible as a whole to scholars and students, and so constitutes a glimpse of a hitherto under-illuminated dimension of the complex world of the medieval past – a history of peoples who, while largely voiceless, were far from insignificant. It does not pretend to be exhaustive, and cannot aspire to be complete; its aim is to present the major trends and the most significant forces that shaped this encounter between the Islamic and Christian worlds, and to serve as a digest of present research and a starting point for further reading.

Acknowledgements

To say that this is a book that owes an immense debt to countless scholars is no hollow conceit. Faced with the enormous work of my colleagues and those who have gone before us, the research and writing became at once a rich pleasure and an exercise in humility – the more I learned, the more I was reminded of how little I knew. I regret that the notes and bibliography appended to this volume give only a suggestion of the scholarship that has contributed to this study, but the practical exigencies of publication make it inevitable that much would go unacknowledged. Nevertheless, a number of institutions and individuals deserve to be thanked directly and by name; with the qualification that any shortcomings of this study are, of course, my own.

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Abbreviations

ACA	Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó (Barcelona)
Ar.	Arabic
ARP	Arxiu del Reial Patrimoni
C.	<i>cancillería</i>
<i>carp.</i>	<i>carpeta</i>
Cat.	Catalan
Cast.	Castilian
CODOIN	P. de Bofarull y Mascaró, <i>et al.</i> (eds.), <i>Colección de documentos inéditos de la Corona de Aragón</i> (Barcelona: José Eusebio Montfort, 1847–1910).
CSIC	Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas/Consell Superior d'Investigacions Científiques
Lat.	Latin
MR	Mestre Racional
PCG	Menéndez Pidal, Ramón (ed.), <i>Primera crònica general de España</i> (Madrid: Gredos, 1977).
<i>pergs.</i>	<i>pergamíns</i>
Port.	Portuguese
Rom.	Romance

Note on usage

All dates provided within the book are Common Era (CE) unless otherwise noted. Place-names are given in the modern form used by their native inhabitants, with the exception of some for which the current English name is more recognizable (e.g. “Mecca,” not “Makka”). For sites that were formerly under Islamic rule the Arabic name is also provided at the first instance of each. I have eschewed the use of “Spain” for the period prior to the Hapsburg era, for the “Iberian Peninsula,” or simply “Iberia.” “Spain” (*Hispania*) was imagined as a unity only in certain specific contexts, was of variable meaning, and tended, in any case, to be expressed as often as not in the plural as “the Spains,” or “all the Spains” (as in *Imperator totius Hispaniae*).

The transliteration system used for Arabic conforms to standard academic use. Technical terms relating to Arabo-Islamic culture are normally given in Arabic and pluralized in Arabic, with exceptions made occasionally for words that have passed into the English lexicon, or for the sake of prose style (even sometimes at the cost of consistency). Definite articles are sometimes added even when technically unnecessary (e.g. “the *dār al-Islām*”). Terms in Latin and other languages are treated similarly. In excerpts from documents, the words *Sarracenus*, *Moro*, *Agarenius*, and the various other epithets are translated simply as “Muslim,” except in rare cases where a pejorative sense was clearly intended, or the terminology itself is discussed.

Personal names occur in a number of forms. Normally, the names of individuals are given in the form in which they occur in the primary sources, with the exception of well-known personalities, whose names may appear in English or whatever language they are normally expressed in. The names of individual subject Muslims usually appear in a Latinate/Romance form, even if corrupted. The names of rulers and other major personalities are given in the form corresponding to the language of the principality they ruled over (e.g. “Alfonso” in Castile, “Afonso” in Portugal, “Alfons” in the Crown of Aragon). The rulers of Norman Sicily and the Crusader Levant are given in English (e.g. “William II,”

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not “Guilelmus II”), for the sake of prose style, and because there was no singular contemporary vernacular tradition which determined their form. The names of emperors and popes are given in English. Regnal years are provided where appropriate. Locative surnames are sometimes translated, sometimes not (e.g. Bernard of Sahagún, but Sibila d’Acerra). Honorifics are usually given in English, except for Muslim rulers, who are better known by the Arabic versions.