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Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom, c.1050-1614

Brian A. Catlos

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'Although [Muslims] do not acknowledge a good religion, so long as they live among Christians with their assurance of security, their property shall not be stolen from them or taken by force; and we order that whomever violates this law shall pay a sum equal to double the value of what he took.' This statement, proceeding from the 13th-century Castilian law code *Siete Partidas*, encapsulates many of the complexities and ambiguities that characterised Muslim-Christian interactions, collaborations and conflicts in Latin Christendom during the Medieval and Early Modern periods. One of the achievements of this well-researched and exhaustive book is that it challenges some of the traditional historiographical views of interfaith relationships in 'frontier' territories. First, it overcomes the idea that Muslims were a subjugated minority in a predominantly Christian world and considers them, instead, as an integral and active part of it. Second, it challenges stereotypical views of 'unity' by focusing on the heterogeneity which characterised each ethno-religious group. Political, commercial and social networks involving Muslims and *mudéjares* (free Muslim subjects) created security and stability for most of them. However, within the same region and during the same period, Muslim soldiers, diplomats, peasants, jurists, intellectuals or craftsmen, among other categories, did not always behave and interact as a coherent group.

Catlos chose an intimidating title for an extremely ambitious book. The result is an intense and yet coherent reading, enriched by numerous source extracts, a comprehensive and up-to-date engagement with international historiography and a useful glossary. The first part takes the reader through a chronological narrative of the 'static diaspora' to which Muslim communities in Latin Christendom were exposed from the 11th to the 16th centuries. The second part is thematically structured and reconsiders many of the key stages discussed in part one, focusing instead on their representations and related historiographical debates, as well as on their legal, administrative, economic and social implications.

Thanks to an impressive range of archival sources proceeding mainly from Iberia (with relevant distinctions between the crowns of Castile and Leon, Aragon, Navarre and Portugal), as well as from southern Italy, Hungary, Lithuania and the Crusader States, Catlos' book examines the experiences of Muslims and *mudéjares* as individuals and communities, whose fortunes were not always interdependent. Catlos suggests that fiscal regimes and taxes paid by Muslims did not mirror the entire range of contributions that they provided to Christian powers and this range of unrecorded input might explain why in some cases royal and seigneurial authorities supported different ethno-religious groups, even against ecclesiastical impositions. Certainly, but only partially, religion defined identity and regulated contacts and exchanges, while acculturation, daily routines and practices, law and custom, economic and commercial interests and, more generally, *realpolitik* also played influential roles. The laws issued in areas of intense contact are also valuable in understanding some of those dynamics, especially since Muslims were subjected to multiple jurisdictions, whose boundaries they crossed at their convenience.

Even if the development of economically and administratively more stable Christian institutions favoured attempts at segregation and control of economically powerful minorities, it was only by the 16th century that the Iberian Peninsula – the last stronghold of Muslim communities in

Europe – experienced an extreme intransigent turn under Habsburg domination. A dramatic policy of expulsion was implemented and, perhaps not surprisingly, new concepts of 'race' developed. But Catlos' view on the failure of *mudéjarism* is more nuanced: 'It was a crisis of *conveniencia*; a divergence of interests and agendas, that left Islamic society in the Iberian peninsula increasingly irrelevant, if not threatening, anomalous, if not provocative.';

Muslim experiences under Latin rule proved extremely diverse in time and in different regional contexts. Fear of Muslims as a potential 'fifth column' persisted and undermined interfaith relationships, especially when extremist external movements threatened the long-term pragmatic dynamics that were in place. While acknowledging the limitations of his project, especially the lack of sources for some areas and time periods, Catlos successfully describes complex historical and historiographical landscapes. He encourages the reader to revisit ideas of tolerance, conversion and *convivencia* with an awareness of the complexity of such multiple interactions to avoid 'questions badly put'. The risk would otherwise be that inaccurate or partial views will continue to inform historically-led debates on interfaith relationships in an attempt to legitimise controversial political discourses relevant to 21st-century society.

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