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Review of Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *The Last Crusade in the West: Castile and the Conquest of Granada*

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Joseph F. O’Callaghan. *The Last Crusade in the West: Castile and the Conquest of Granada*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. 384 pp.

The 1492 capture of Granada, the last of the Iberian Islamic kingdoms, marked an end to centuries of armed struggle between the peninsula’s Christian kingdoms and the Islamic states of Al-Andalus. *The Last Crusade in the West* is the third installment in Joseph F. O’Callaghan’s magisterial series of studies that situates the Iberian “Reconquest” within the larger context of the papal crusades in the Middle East. In this volume, O’Callaghan examines the military and diplomatic exchanges between Christians and Muslims in Iberia from the mid-fourteenth century until 1492, reframing the conquest of Granada as the “last great crusade waged in western Europe.” (11)

The first five chapters trace developments along the Castilian frontier during the reigns of Pedro I (1350-1369), Enrique II (1369-1379), Juan I (1379-1390), Enrique III (1390-1406), Juan II (1406-1454), and Enrique IV (1454-1474). Chapters six and seven explore the final stages of the warfare under Isabel (1474-1504) and her husband, Fernando, the so-called “Catholic Monarchs.” Throughout, O’Callaghan balances narrative accounts of the military and diplomatic back and forth between the Catholic Castilians and their Muslim opponents in Granada with careful examination of military organization, methods, and campaign financing, especially the crown’s negotiations with the papacy over the Church’s financial contributions to the war effort, contributions that included crusade bulls and certain ecclesiastical revenues. These themes receive more focused attention in the eighth chapter, while the final chapter examines the crusading ideology and religious conflict that O’Callaghan sees as the fundamental motivating force behind the centuries of warfare in Iberia.

O’Callaghan supports these arguments with an impressive array of evidence, especially Castilian and Portuguese chronicle accounts and a smaller body of historical narratives by Andalusí-Moroccan writers (in translation). Papal and royal documents, including fiscal records, diplomatic correspondence, and papal bulls, are also submitted to careful analysis. Poetry, in the form of the rich corpus of historical ballads, is also brought to bear on the book’s recontextualization of the Iberian campaigns within the broader crusading movement. The author is particularly attentive to language that reflects the religious dimension of the struggle and what he sees “a conflict between two societies, one permeated by Christianity, the other by Islam.” (226)

O'Callaghan's rich evidentiary offerings and meticulous analysis make a compelling case for a crusading ideology at work in the Iberian Reconquest, and it is pleasing to see religious motives given their due as a genuine force in history. That said, his emphasis on the spiritual comes at the expense of other, more secular goals that operated in tandem with or under the cover of religious conviction, such as the drive for power, profit, and territory. For example, royal appropriation of the *decima*, the tenth of ecclesiastical revenues, in order to fund the Granada campaign can be read both as an expression of Christian faith and ideological opposition to Islam and as an attempt by an expanding monarchy to expand the royal fisc at the expense of the Church. I wonder, too, whether the chasm he posits between Muslim and Christian society might be somewhat overdrawn. These complaints aside, this book is a very useful resource on the last centuries of the Reconquest and will surely find eager readers among those interested in military history and inter-faith relations in medieval and early modern Iberia.

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