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Review of: Joseph F O'Callaghan, *The Gibraltar Crusade: Castile and the Battle for the Strait*

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O'Callaghan, Joseph F. *The Gibraltar Crusade: Castile and the Battle for the Strait*. The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. 392 pp.

Like Peter Linehan, Thomas Glick, or the late Robert I. Burns, SJ, Joseph O'Callaghan has long been one of our surest Anglophone guides to the history of the medieval Iberian Church, state, and frontier. This new book, a sequel to *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain* (University of Pennsylvania, 2003), will further burnish that reputation. A masterful look at the battles waged by Castile, Nasrid Granada, and Marinid Morocco for control of the lands south of Seville, *The Gibraltar Crusade* explains in colorful detail how strategic cities like Jérez de la Frontera, Tarifa, or Gibraltar came to be Castilian, while also looking beyond these specific conquests to make a larger point about their significance within the broader trajectory of the *reconquista*.

As O'Callaghan recognizes, Alfonso X's decision to divert the brunt of the Castilian war effort from Granada to North Africa may appear to have been a miscalculation. Why, for example, did Alfonso assault the Moroccan port of Salā (1260) rather than finish off the Kingdom of Granada, vulnerable in the wake of Fernando III's and Jaume I's breathtaking conquests of Córdoba, Valencia, Murcia, and Seville in the early thirteenth century? Indeed, Alfonso's Moroccan designs ultimately came to naught, and Granada – rejuvenated by the new Nasrid regime – remained a Muslim thorn in Castile's side for another two and a half centuries. O'Callaghan, however, sees this phase of the *reconquista* differently, describing the Castilians' turn towards Gibraltar and Africa as an astute and far-sighted decision. While Alfonso's interest in the Strait was fueled at least partly by pride – Castilians believed that North Africa had once been part of the Visigothic patrimony and, thus, rightfully belonged to them – it was also a pragmatic reaction to the new state of affairs in mid-century North Africa. As Alfonso and his heirs realized, the Marinids could not be ignored; their consolidation of power in Morocco, as well as their increasingly frequent interventions into Iberian affairs (whether on their own behalf or at the invitation of the Nasrids), posed a grave threat to Castile's Andalusian possessions. O'Callaghan thus makes a convincing argument that it was precisely “Castilian success in the fourteenth century in denying the Moroccans easy access to Spain” that “made possible the ultimate conquest of Granada” (1). If that conquest took longer than expected, much of the credit should go to the genius and talent of the

Castilians' Marinid and Nasrid foes, whom O'Callaghan credits with having prolonged the life of Iberian Islam against some steep odds.

Of course, it was not merely the Marinids and Nasrids that hindered the Castilians' crusading efforts. As O'Callaghan shows, Castilian designs were often undercut by their fellow Christians, as the Aragonese and Portuguese – not to mention dissenters among the Castilian nobility – were perfectly willing to make common cause with their Muslim neighbors when it suited their interests. More than once, O'Callaghan observes, "Political realities obviously trumped religious considerations and the spirit of the crusade vanished" (85). And even when Alfonso X, Sancho IV, and Alfonso XI managed to assemble a unified front, their armies remained perpetually starved for revenue, in spite of their persistent efforts to extract crusade privileges and ecclesiastical revenues from a Papacy that was simultaneously reluctant to fund the Iberian crusade at the expense of the Holy Land, and yet also determined to dictate the terms of its prosecution. (That said, all of the Castilian kings profiled here seem to have had little compunction about either collecting the *tercias* and *décimas* without papal approval, or dusting off older bulls of crusade when new ones were not forthcoming.)

Faced with the obvious complexity of a story involving so many actors and so many contradictory motivations, O'Callaghan has nevertheless managed to arrange the tangle of battles and treaties which comprise the Gibraltar crusade into an eminently readable (if perhaps too narrowly political and military) narrative studded with rich and humanizing portraits of its outsize protagonists. Following a preliminary chapter introducing the relevant geography and sources, O'Callaghan slips into an eight-chapter, campaign-by-campaign account of the crusades from Alfonso X's ill-fated pursuit of Salé to the death of Alfonso XI at the siege of Algeciras in 1350, the climax of which is certainly the Castilian victory at the Battle of Saladó (1340). The book rounds off with two chapters of denouement: Chapter 10 digests the main themes and features of this period of the *reconquista*, and Chapter 11 looks forward to 1492. While specialists will want to read the book cover-to-cover, marinating in O'Callaghan's accumulated wisdom, students and more casual readers may wish to skip directly to that tenth chapter, which offers an economical summation of his main arguments.

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