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UCLA Historical Journal

Title

Mark D. Meyersoi. *The Muslims of Valencia in the Age of Fernando and Isabel: Between Coexistence and Crusade*. Berkeley, University of California Press: 1991, 372 pp.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/18n5d286>

Journal

UCLA Historical Journal, 13(0)

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Publication Date

1993

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Mark D. Meyerson. *The Muslims of Valencia in the Age of Fernando and Isabel: Between Coexistence and Crusade*. Berkeley, University of California Press: 1991, 372 pp.

Historians of medieval and early modern Spain, particularly those interested in the crown's treatment of its Muslim and Jewish subjects, will find Mark Meyerson's new book an important, revisionist addition to the historiography. His research is thorough, his arguments are convincing, and many of the theories in this work are quite original. Meyerson focuses on the Mudejars, or Muslims living under Christian rule, of the kingdom of Valencia during the reign of Fernando II (1479-1516). Fernando held the throne of the Realms of Aragon, a conglomeration of states which included Valencia, and which had a long history of expansion and trade in the Mediterranean. His wife Isabel ruled over the Crown of Castile, whose society was geared more strongly toward crusading against the Muslim states of the peninsula. Together the Catholic Monarchs introduced the Inquisition throughout their realms between 1478 and 1483 to prevent *conversos*, or converts from the Jewish faith, from backsliding into Jewish practices; they expelled the Jews, who had been integral to Iberian society and economy since ancient times, from their kingdoms in 1492; they unleashed the fanatic Cardinal Cisneros in the newly-conquered kingdom of Granada in 1499, where he pushed the resident Muslims into revolt and forcibly converted thousands; and in 1502, they faced the remaining Muslims from the kingdoms of Castile and Granada with the choice of conversion or expulsion. Historians have traditionally studied this chain of events and assumed a conscious policy of religious purification on the part of the Monarchs. Meyerson, however, studying the Mudejars who were allowed and even encouraged to remain in the Crown of Aragon until later reigns, offers convincing proof that Fernando and probably even Isabel had no intention of effecting any sort of ethnic cleansing.

Meyerson presents the thesis that the Monarchs' actions with respect to their subject religious minorities were not part of any grand scheme, but were rather always reactions to certain types of events. Many modern historians such as J. N. Hillgarth have concluded that Fernando and Isabel preferred to rule according to the traditions of their predecessors and innovated only when forced to by circumstances. Christian monarchs had traditionally ruled over members of the three religions in Spain for more than seven hundred years. Fifteenth-century circumstances, however, had changed dramatically, beginning with the peninsula-wide pogroms in 1391, during which one third of the Jewish population was forcibly converted to the Christian faith. A new religious group now existed in Spain, the *conversos*, whose very presence destabilized considerably the traditional *modus vivendi*. The Catholic Monarchs felt themselves responsible for the vulnerable souls of these neo-Christians; the Inquisition, therefore, was instituted by the Monarchs in order to combat the judaizing tendencies of many of these reluctant lambs of God. When Fernando and Isabel came to the conclusion that this institution alone, no matter how ruthless its methods, was not enough to save the *converso* souls, they took the next step of expelling the Jews from their lands so that their readily witnessed, familiar traditions would not tempt the new Christians into sinful ways. The Monarchs' goal for the expulsion, therefore, was not to cleanse the land of Jews, but rather to protect a segment of their Christian population.

As Meyerson shows, a similar situation arose with the Mudejars of Granada and Castile. When Isabel (against Fernando's wishes) sent Cardinal Cisneros to proselytize to the Granadan Muslims, his harsh methods led to rebellions in certain parts of the kingdom. The defeated rebels were faced with the choice of baptism or death. Again, a large body of unenthusiastic New Christians, called Moriscos, was formed. Working from their experiences with the *conversos*, Fernando and Isabel decided that the Moriscos would not learn to be good Christians until they were isolated from their Muslim friends and kinsmen. In 1502, therefore, they rid Castile and Granada of all remaining Mudejars. Once again, their actions were

given impulse not by a policy of the creation of a unified state, but rather by their self-perception as the protectors of Christian souls, a role which they considered more important than that of protectors of their kingdoms' economies.

After laying out his general arguments in the introduction and beginning of the first chapter of his book, Professor Meyerson proceeds to the specific case of the Muslims of Valencia, the study of whom provides the basis for his theories. The first chapter is concerned with Fernando's Mudejar policy as it affected Valencia, where Muslims made up thirty percent of the population. A Morisco problem did not exist in the Crown of Aragon until 1525, when the *Germanias* social uprising resulted in violent, mass conversions. During Fernando's reign, therefore, the situation remained status quo, with the Mudejars living and working beside the kingdom's Christians much as they always had. The Mudejars not only posed no threat to Morisco souls, they were a definite source of wealth for the crown's coffers and a mainstay of the Valencian economy. Meyerson provides plentiful evidence that the king actively competed with the seigneurs of his kingdom for the tenancies of large numbers of Mudejars—while the king was patron of all his Muslim subjects, those who lived on seigneurial lands paid feudal dues and taxes to their lords, which income the king felt he could better employ. The king and his nobles sometimes went to great lengths to lure Mudejars away from each other's territories. Fernando also protected the Mudejars in the royal courts; but since they were tolerated among Christians only for economic reasons, their oppressors were seldom punished beyond a sentence of financial restitution because the Mudejars' financial health was advantageous to the crown. Fernando and his predecessors did not practice 'tolerance' in the modern, post-Enlightenment sense towards his Muslim subjects. Fernando's religious zeal differed from Isabel's in that he preferred less forceful, more persuasive methods be used to convert the infidels. He was also practical enough to realize that the Mudejars were not going to convert voluntarily. He therefore pursued the policy which was most economically beneficial, while disregarding his own aversion to Islam and legislating to isolate wherever possible his

Christian subjects from exposure to the Mudejars' offensive religious practices.

In chapter 2, Meyerson addresses the larger context of the ongoing war between the Spanish powers and various Islamic polities, and its effect on Fernando's Mudejar policy. His basic question is, with Spanish Christians crusading against the infidel in Granada and the Maghrib and against the Ottoman Turks, why did they not turn against the Muslims next door? Also, the Valencian Mudejars had often risen up in the past against their oppressors, particularly in the thirteenth century after the region's conquest by King Jaume I. Why, with the religious confrontation intensifying and their fellow Muslims being expelled from Castile and Granada, did the Mudejars not revolt now? Meyerson answers the latter question by pointing out that, though they did cooperate covertly with the Ottomans, collude occasionally with Muslim raiders, and send money to the sultan of Granada, the Mudejars were practical enough to know that their numbers were nowhere near as overwhelming as they had been two hundred years earlier. They assessed the realities of the situation, the relative powers of the combating forces, and acted accordingly. Also, they were more accepting of their secondary status within Valencian society and more pessimistic about the possibility of the Islamic reconquest of the region. The Christians, on the other hand, had also become accustomed to coexisting beside the Mudejars, were aware of their economic role in the kingdom, and therefore did not become confused between the Muslim abroad and the Muslim at home. Because of the Crown of Aragon's mercantile orientation, the region's inhabitants were accustomed to perceiving war in the Mediterranean as a defense of mercantile interests, and therefore were not as overwhelmed by religious zeal as their Castilian neighbors. Fernando shared this history; his Mudejar policy, therefore, was hardly affected by his international Islamic engagements.

The next three chapters of *The Muslims of Valencia* are much more revealing of the book's origins as a doctoral dissertation. While they are quite polished, the basis for these chapters is the organization and interpretation of archival data relating to Mudejar life in fifteenth-century Valencia. Chapter three, entitled "Mudejar

Officialdom and Economic Life," explains the roles and relative importance of officials and describes the social hierarchy within the *aljama*, or Mudejar corporate municipal community. It also provides quite a bit of interesting detail relating to the variety and range of Mudejar economic activity: fifteenth-century Mudejars engaged in livestock-raising, manufacturing, commerce, and primarily agriculture. Meyerson's conclusions relating to their land-tenure patterns could prove relevant to many historians interested in agrarian studies. The next chapter, "Taxation of the Mudejars," provides a great deal of information, much of it presented also in clear and helpful charts, on those outlays which so affected the workings and viability of the Mudejar community. Chapter five, "Mudejars and the Administration of Justice," gives the reader fascinating insight into how the Muslims fit into the judicial system. The traditional model for religious minority communities, which had been concretized in Valencia by the privileges granted in the surrender constitutions of the thirteenth century and confirmed by all subsequent Aragonese rulers, included the right to maintenance of a separate, religion-based legal system. Meyerson shows how the Mudejar courts had been largely infiltrated by Christian officials and procedures in the fifteenth century, but argues that the Mudejars had learned how to function in such circumstances and therefore were seldom denied justice.

Each of these three technical chapters is thorough and enlightening, but somewhat limited by the sparsity of analysis of historical processes and the lack of relation of the data to comparable contexts. The final chapter, "Conflict and Solidarity in Mudejar Society," while structured similarly to the previous three, reaches a new height of originality, completion, and relevance. Although the surviving documents of the period are all issued from the point of view of the Christian majority and therefore only give an external glimpse into Mudejar life, the author uses a variety of tools, many anthropological, to delve beyond these restrictive documents and lay out a more intimate view of the workings of the *aljama*. He considers the challenge posed to the integrity of Mudejar culture by long exposure and accommodation to the dominant culture of the Christians, and

recounts many of the methods by which the Muslims resisted acculturation. Perhaps more interestingly, he describes the Mudejar social structure as it had evolved from their Berber and Arab forbears and how this inheritance resulted in the Mudejar institution of the blood-feud. Such cultural particularities, as much as their religion, differentiated the Mudejars from their Christian neighbors; the dominant society, however, never realized the depth of these cultural differences, and therefore never understood truly why baptism alone did not a Christian make.

These final chapters of the book provide a careful portrait of Mudejar society in Valencia during the reign of Fernando. Robert I. Burns has written a masterful series of books detailing the Valencian Mudejar experience from the time of the region's conquest (1232-1245) until the end of the thirteenth century, through its first formative decades when the impact of Christian rule was most disruptive. John Boswell wrote *The Royal Treasure: Muslim Communities under the Crown of Aragon in the Fourteenth Century* as a dissertation in 1977. In this work, he concentrates on the Mudejars of Valencia during the middle 1300s when the war against Castile was at its destructive height; the portrait he paints of Mudejar life is even more disheartening than that of Meyerson or Burns. Many historians have studied the Moriscos, who replaced the Mudejars after 1525 and were finally expelled from Valencia and the rest of Spain in 1609-1614. Meyerson's work fits into the chronological lacuna of the fifteenth century, which only a few other historians have even touched and none with anywhere near the seriousness and insight of Meyerson. For those interested in Mudejar society and its evolution in the region most densely populated and affected by their presence, this book, along with the others described above, is indispensable. Those whose interests range toward other topics such as peasant life or the Spanish crown's treatment of subject minorities will also find this work quite useful.

The book has a few weaknesses. The various sections sometimes seem disjunctive in tone between one another, a fault which can probably be traced to the book's origins as a dissertation. These variations in emotional approach, commonly from optimism to pes-

simism, can be quite jarring, and could have been avoided with careful editing. Also, the author follows the policy of leaving all the names, primarily Muslim, which he cites as examples in the form in which he found them in the documents. The Christian scribes who recorded the documents transcribed the names with varying degrees of skill as they befell on non-Arabic-speaking ears. Names which seem different in Latin or Romance could actually prove to be variants. Further research by the author to reach educated guesses as to what the Arabic names might actually have been, as Burns does in his works, might yield a wealth of further information about family relations and social structures.

The greatest failing of the book, however, is its tendency to study the situation as a tree alone, without siting it in its forest. Meyerson proves quite convincingly that in many ways fifteenth-century circumstances were quite advantageous to the Mudejars of Valencia, particularly to the agricultural workers. For example, land was available and the conditions of tenure were comparatively favorable, as the crown and the seigneurs were competing for Mudejar tenants. Meyerson relates this situation to a state of under-population and a chronic labor shortage in the kingdom. This problem, however, was traumatically affecting all of Europe, which had been ravaged by plagues and famines during the previous century. Historians of this period have long been attempting to puzzle out the effects of this general depopulation on the social structures of Europe, according to the varying reactions of social groups to the crisis. Meyerson's detailed data, if related to the general situation, would have provided a valuable addition to the historiography of the fall of the feudal order.

The few weaknesses of the book, however, are overwhelmed in number and importance by its many strengths. This work is highly recommended, and should prove very fruitful to any historian.

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