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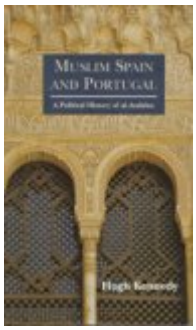
Hugh Kennedy. *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus.* New York and London: Longman, 1996. xvi + 342 pp. $52.67 (cloth), $20.50, paper, ISBN 978-0-582-29968-9.



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The nearly eight century long Muslim presence in Iberia, from the conquest in 711 to the fall of the Kingdom of Granada in 1492, confronts the studied medievalist as well as the lay reader with a distinctive society that flourished on the periphery of both Islam and Christendom. Subject over its eight hundred years to the fluid political dynamic of the Islamic world, particularly that of North Africa, as well as an evolving Christian Iberia, the history of al-Andalus is a study in contrast between a society characterized intermittently by political stability and civil war, military prowess and weakness, and jihad and alliance with the Christians in the name of political expediency. In Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus Hugh Kennedy offers a erudite and thorough study of the political history of al-Andalus. Kennedy's study rests on a solid foundation of contemporary and secondary Arabic sources as well as on the classic and more recent studies of al-Andalus by such authors as E. Lévi-Provencal, Ambrosio Huici Miranda, J. Bosh Vila, Rachel Arie, E. Monzano Moreno, M. Barcelo, et. al. A boon to the study is the author's judicious and critical use of his sources. This is particularly true of contemporary Arabic and Christian sources, especially those dealing with the period of the conquest, which the author carefully judges against the political climate in which they were written. This is, no doubt, crucial in a study which attempts to address the motivations behind political events.

Both the title of this work and the author's comments in the introduction make clear that the focus of the study is the political - and not broadly social - history of al-Andalus. It is not, nor does it claim to be a comprehensive study of Iberian Muslim society. But as a political history, Kennedy seeks to convey more than a simple narrative of "rulers and battles." His intent is to provide an "understanding of the structures which lie behind events and decisions."(p.xiv) The primary "structures" he identifies are the capacity of the successive regimes to develop a viable revenue system, i.e., taxes, which, Kennedy argues, reflected the capacity of the regime to both consolidate and extend its rule, and the military, which of course were the means of defending the regime against internal as well as Christian threats. Thus, litera-

ture, art, architecture, theology, and economic and social relations are considered only in so far as they impacted the political dynamic on the peninsula.

The structure of Kennedy's work is fundamentally chronological, beginning with the conquest in 711 and continuing to the fall of Granada in 1492. It is in his treatment of the conquest and the period immediately following, however, that Kennedy traces the origins of certain characteristics of al-Andalusian political society that would play a deciding factor in its subsequent development. First, the conquest of al-Andalus is presented as a continuation of the Muslim conquest of North Africa. The growing reliance of the Arab conquerors on recently converted local Berber tribesmen to provide the bulk of their military altered the political and military dynamic by injecting into an already complex environment the clan and tribal rivalries of the Berbers. As Kennedy makes clear, the various rulers of al-Andalus would ever be subject to developments in North Africa. Indeed, it would be the Berber rebellions of the 740s that would infuse a strong Syrian presence and contribute to the rise of the Umayyads after 756. Likewise, the origins of the Almoravid Empire (1050-1145) could be found in the fluid and often violent relations of the Berber tribes of the Atlas Mountains of Morocco.

Another critical factor addressed by Kennedy is the failure of the Muslim conquerors to establish a viable political system in al-Andalus after it became clear that a Muslim presence was there to stay. Though characterized by some quite lengthy periods of stability throughout its 800 year history, the political stability of Muslim Iberia would continually be threatened by the familial, clan, religious, and ethnic tensions, not to mention the ever present and growing Christian threat that lie underneath a precarious political order. Central to the question of political viability and stability and to how the above mentioned challenges to security would be played out was the capacity of a regime to raise revenues. During the initial conquest, booty served well enough to satisfy the needs of the state and the military. But this did not provide a sound fiscal basis in times of relative peace or later during the extended period of the reconquista. There developed over time in addition to booty, a variety of methods for raising funds, from the jizya, which was a poll tax paid by non-Muslims, whose collection became problematic after the conversion of the bulk of al-Andalus's non-Muslim population, to the kharaj (land tax), and finally, the various magharim, which were taxes not sanctioned by Islamic law. These final "illegal" taxes were characteristic of the Taifa Kingdoms which emerged after the collapse of the Caliphate of Cordoba in 1031. One of the central strengths of Kennedy's work is his illustration of this critical relationship between a regimes legitimacy and its ability to raise revenues. Its political authority over the various and numerous semi-autonomous lessor rulers and its military prowess clearly stood in direct relationship to a sound fiscal system.

In addition to the diverse fiscal "structures" which underlie the politics of al-Andalus, Kennedy stresses the role of the military both in its reflection of a regime's inherent strength and its ability - or inability - to project that strength either in conflicts with their Muslim neighbors or in jihads against the Christians. Like the other substructures of the politics of al-Andalus which Kennedy addresses, military practices were also established during the period of the conquest. Clearly, the reliance of the early Arab conquerors on Syrian junds and on Berber troops to gain their initial victories and subsequently to secure their conquests, established an awkward and often problematic relationship between the Muslim state(s) of al-Andalus and their militaries. The Syrian jundis subsequently settled on lands confiscated from local Christians and served as revenue farmers, thus preserving their independent status as a warrior caste. By the late tenth century, however, particularly during the reign of al-Mansur

who sought to professionalize the military, these former Syrian jundis had been converted into land holding tax paying subjects. This social evolution, Kennedy suggests, left subsequent regimes ever more dependent upon Berbers and saqaliba (mercenaries usually of slavic origin). This periodic military debility also led to the practice of competing Muslim regimes employing local Christian forces against one another. Muslim arms never completely lost capability of carrying the day against their Christian enemies, but overtime these underlying structural problems clearly eroded their capabilities especially when confronted by an increasingly organized Christian resistance. Portuguese raids around Seville in 1225 highlighted these differences. Kennedy notes that "this gulf between the military and civilian is in striking contrast to the situation in the Christian towns of the frontier regions, where virtually the entire adult male population was trained in the use of arms and could man the walls and raid deep into Muslim territory."(p.264) As the Christians advanced, this disparity between the social basis of the two militaries grew more acute.

If there are flaws with this work, they are generally errors of commission and not omission. Clearly, the politics of al-Andalus cannot be separated from the broader society of which they were but a reflection. But this is not social history, and to expect the author to have addressed such broader questions would fundamentally alter the nature of the work and extend its length by any number of volumes. Nevertheless, since revenue collecting plays such an important part in the author's argument, a bit more attention to legal issues, such as the evolving nature of land tenure, would have contributed to the soundness of the work. Furthermore, the work is presented as accessible to a lay readership. The complex nature of Muslim patronyms could make it difficult to follow the often complex intra-clan rivalries, an aspect critical to understanding the politics of al-Andalus. But again, this is the fault or weakness of the reader and not attributable to the author.

These are minor concerns when compared to all that Hugh Kennedy's Muslim Spain and Portugal accomplishes. His is a solidly written work that illuminates not only the unique and complex nature of the politics of Muslim Spain and Portugal, but provides an insight into a culture and society still unfortunately remote to non-Islamicists.

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