

Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain

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Ana Echevarria

A life-long dedication to the study of medieval Spain ably fits Joseph F. O'Callaghan to address one of the most discussed issues in this field. Spanish historiography has had to deal for years with the topic of the specificity of the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages, because of its Muslim inhabitants. Whether it be as a state or as subjects of Christian kings (known as *Mudejars*), these people felt they were as much 'Spaniards' as were the Christians. Christian propaganda depicting the 'Reconquista' as a war to eject the Muslims from territories rightfully owned by Christians (dealt with in O'Callaghan's first chapter, 'The Reconquest: Evolution of an Idea') has been idealised in Spain, both as part of the origins of the nation, and because of the traditional alignment in the modern Roman Catholic church. Despite some challenges in the last thirty years, the word 'Reconquest' is still used generally, with the public continuing to use the term in common conversation. It is no surprise that Hispanists such as O'Callaghan himself, J. Hillgarth, P. Linehan, the late D. Lomax and A. MacKay have all discussed at great length the convenience (or otherwise) of using this concept for the history of medieval Spain.

Another facet of this question is whether the war prosecuted by the Christian kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula - both for territorial and religious reasons - can be classified within the more general field of confrontation between Christians and Muslims in the wider Mediterranean basin: that is, as a part of the Crusades. Again, recent scholarship has been proposing this new approach to the Reconquest.⁽¹⁾ However, it is this book by O'Callaghan that provides the most accurate and detailed study of this question over a long time period and throughout the whole peninsula.

Firstly, Joseph O'Callaghan discusses the problem of modern vocabulary as it is applied to medieval religious conflicts, in a chapter entitled 'Reconquest, Holy War and Crusade'. He continues with a good description of the Christian and Islamic sources he has used for this book. This chapter demands further comment and commendation. Far from limiting his survey to Spanish and Portuguese medieval sources, both

in the vernacular and Latin, O'Callaghan has undertaken extensive research in Arabic material (in translation), French, German and Pontifical records and chronicles in Latin. This wealth of sources gives a balanced view of the dilemma 'reconquest versus crusade' and helps to place the Iberian conflict in a world-wide perspective (at least according to medieval standards).

Chapters two to five focus on a chronological overview of crusading in the Iberian Peninsula, from the late eleventh to the middle of the thirteenth centuries. Although the reason for such a time-frame is not given in the text, we can assume that the author is analysing the origins of the crusading phenomenon on both eastern and western sides of the Mediterranean, and tracing its history up to the Fifth crusade, that is, the era of splendour of the crusades. The argument is clear: the precedent of crusade as a religious war can be found in the Spanish Reconquest (notably at Barbastro, 1063). The concept was then elaborated by the Papacy for the first and second crusades, when the attack on Islam was envisaged as a double offensive on both sides of the Mediterranean. When the crusades to the Holy Land became less frequent, Spanish crusades were at their apogee, the subject of bulls from several popes, and concentrating the efforts of native and foreign fighters. During all this period, the indulgences granted to the 'fighting pilgrims' were the same as those granted to those going to the Holy Land. Pilgrimage to Santiago was very closely linked to crusade in Spain, and to the ideology of pilgrimage/crusade to the Holy Land. The papacy always tried to keep Spanish knights preoccupied with engagements in their own territory, while offering the Church and faithful the possibility to finance crusading endeavours throughout the eastern and western territories.

In this part of the work, the author uses papal bulls extensively to demonstrate that those issued for the Holy Land were very similar in their clauses to those issued for war against Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula. He relies heavily on the pioneering work by José Goñi Gaztambide, *Historia de la bula de cruzada en España*, (Vitoria: Editorial del Seminario, 1958), which is rounded out with references to other primary sources. (It would have been interesting to have the actual text of some of the bulls quoted so as to compare the style of those dealing with Spanish matters to those concerning the Holy Land.) The stress is always placed on the fact that the papacy transformed the Reconquest into a crusade. Nevertheless, there is also another question: whether the earlier Spanish propaganda affected the Roman curia and moved the then Pope Urban II to call for the First Crusade. The close contacts between the Papacy and the high clergy coming from the Iberian peninsula to Rome have been used by scholars to prove this, for example in Theresa Vann's 'Reconquest and the Origin of the Crusades' [in *The Crusades: Other Experiences, Alternate Perspectives*, ed. Khalil Semaan (Binghamton: Global Publications, in press)].

A further point needing clarification is why those French knights, who had already fought in Jerusalem, would have wanted to join the crusade in Spain afterwards (Balears, Zaragoza), if the remission of their sins was already achieved (pp. 35-38)? Maybe more stress should be made on economic matters at this point.

The last three chapters examine more earthly matters, such as the current state of warfare technology and armies, the financing of the crusade and the ritual accompanying the whole campaign, as sanctioned by Mozarabic and Roman liturgy. These three aspects were vital for the success of Christian campaigns, and should not be ignored. Indeed, the chapter on finance (enlarged and changed, but inspired by a previous paper presented by the author in the conference which commemorated the conquest of Seville by Fernando III [\(2\)](#) is the clearest explanation of the variety of incomes used by the king to subsidise his wars one can read on this particular subject. However, I missed the detailed study of the changing meaning of '*tercias*' (a term which is difficult to pin down, but which O'Callaghan has successfully elucidated), which was included in the article but not in this book.

The eighth chapter, 'The Liturgy of Reconquest and Crusade', gives a groundbreaking approach to crusading campaigns in Spain, as it studies the development of a religious war step by step. This is a very convenient tool for students and public who are not experts in the field of crusades. Another interesting issue mentioned by the author is preaching. A study of this subject for the Spanish front is still to be made. It is unfortunate that O'Callaghan has not undertaken this task more in depth - undoubtedly due to space constraints - especially given that recent works on the subject have ignored or misunderstood the role of preachers and their mission in the Iberian Peninsula. [\(3\)](#) There are also some interesting works on the 'Cleansing of

Mosques and Consecration of Churches' which have been omitted in the - otherwise - very complete and updated bibliography of this book.[\(4\)](#)>/p>

A few objections to minor errors: the word '*parias*' has no origin in Arabic, but comes from the Latin *pars*, *partis*, that is, the kinglets paid 'their parts' to the Christian monarchs. Two mistakes can be found on pages 17 and 289 (Aníbal Barbero for Abilio Barbero), and pages 191 and 196 (San Isidro instead of San Isidoro or Saint Isidore), which do not hinder comprehension of the text, but may confuse the reader when looking for references.

The genealogical tables should be very useful to the reader. However, while the maps included in the book may help the non-Spanish reader with the evolution of frontiers in the Iberian Peninsula, they do not clarify the arguments given in the text. Nowadays we can count on very good cartographic material for the Reconquest, offered in a small but valuable volume (J. Mestre Campi and F. Sabaté, eds, *Atlas de la Reconquista* (Barcelona: Peninsula, 1998)), which depicts the issues involved much more clearly.

In the light of recent events, the study of the long-lasting armed confrontation between Christianity and Islam can provide new clues for the understanding of the mechanisms of world power. Joseph O'Callaghan has provided an interesting approach to the phenomenon of religious wars, focused on such modern concerns as propaganda and economic foundations. It is our hope, as historians of medieval Spain, that he will also succeed in calling the attention of other scholars to the importance of a broader view in crusading studies, which should take into account the Spanish horizon.

Notes

1. For an updated bibliography, see José Manuel Rodríguez García, 'Historiografía de las cruzadas', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Sección III- Historia Medieval*, 13 (2000), 341-95.[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. Joseph F. O'Callaghan, 'La financiación de la conquista de Sevilla', in *Sevilla, 1248*, coord. M. González Jiménez (Madrid: Fundación Ramón Areces/Ayuntamiento de Sevilla, 2000), pp. 191-206. [Back to \(2\)](#)
3. The two works by Christoph T. Maier, *Preaching the Crusades. Mendicant Friars and the Cross in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology: Model Sermons for the Preaching of the Cross* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), fail to include the Iberian Peninsula in the European context. A work which should be acknowledged, still in press at the time when Joseph O'Callaghan was working on this book, is Patrick Henriot, 'L'idéologie de la guerre sainte dans le Haut Moyen Âge hispanique', *Francia. Forschungen zur Westeuropäischen Geschichte*, 29:1 (2002), 171-220.[Back to \(3\)](#)
4. I am thinking of a thought-provoking article written by Pascal Buresi, 'Les conversions d'églises et de mosquées en Espagne au XIe-XIIIe siècles', in *Villes et religion: Mélanges offerts à Jean-Louis Biget par ses élèves* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2000), pp. 333-50.

Professor O'Callaghan is pleased to accept Dr Echevarria's review and does not wish to comment further.[Back to \(4\)](#)

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