

The Medieval Spains ~ Suggested Reading

The Ornament of the World

by Maria Rosa Menocal

Not only was Professor Menocal my advisor at Yale, but I helped her with this book, doing the Arabic translations and taking a couple of inferior photographs of the murals in the church of San Roman in Toledo, one of the traditional Mozarabic parishes in that city. Professor Menocal, who died in 2012, was a marvelous prose stylist, so this book, a *NY Times* bestseller, is a fun read and very informative.

The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise: Muslims, Christians, and Jews under Islamic Rule in Medieval Spain

by Dario Fernandez-Morera

Over the past decade, one of the biggest complaints about Professor Menocal's 2002 book, *The Ornament of the World*, is that it overstated the case for *convivencia*, religious tolerance. While I now agree with some of that criticism, Dario Fernandez-Morera's book, which came out in 2016, probably goes too far in the opposite direction, towards a more traditional view of Muslim aggression and Christian resistance and *Reconquista*. It's decently written, well-researched, and somewhat polemic. Nonetheless, it will give you a good handle on the scope of the controversy.

Kingdoms of Faith: A New History of Islamic Spain. & Infidel Kings and Unholy Warrior: Faith, Power, and Violence in the Age of Crusades and Jihad

by Brian A. Catlos

Academic jealousy is a terrible affliction. Every time I think about Brian Catlos, a professor at the University of Colorado, I get a burning sensation in my throat, something like acid reflux only more vexing. He's handsome, well-spoken, a favorite of students, kind to fellow scholars and a prolific and popular writer of good prose, and I hate him. You, of course, will enjoy these two books which, although written by a true gentleman and scholar, are very accessible for laymen.

The Mercenary Mediterranean: Sovereignty, Religion, and Violence in the Medieval Crown of Aragon

by Hussein Fancy

This book, which came out in 2016, is probably the most impressive piece of scholarship on Spain I've read in the last 15 years. Fancy is a young professor at the University of Michigan and he takes as his topic the Muslim horsemen who served the Christian kings of Aragon. As I mentioned in my last lecture, there are enormous troves of documents still extant from the Crown of Aragon, over 300,000 in Arabic, Latin, Catalan and Hebrew, and Fancy and seems to have read them all. He's a good writer, and although it's a scholarly work, with lots of footnotes, the prose is strong enough, and the story is interesting enough, to overcome that.

Ballandalus by Mohamad Ballan

<https://ballandalus.wordpress.com>

Ballandalus is not a book, it's a blog run by Mohamad Ballan, a recent Ph.D. from the University of Chicago who is now doing a post-doc at Dartmouth. Ballan has a nice eye for images and a good way with words. Also, like professors Catlos and Fancy, Ballan is a strong representative of recent academic trends in the study of Medieval Spain, the most important of which is the increasing tendency to include Spain in a category called "Mediterranean Studies", together with North Africa, Italy, Sicily and the Levant.

Ballan's recent post on the 650th anniversary of the murder of Pedro the Cruel is very good, in fact, it's so good, that I borrowed heavily from it for my last lecture.

An Eccentric Culinary History

<https://eccentricculinary.com>

This is my food history blog. If you want to read 8,000 words about the history of chicken and waffles, I'm your man.