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

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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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Joseph F. O'Callaghan. "Through a meticulous choice and interpretation of Arabic, Catalan, Castilian, English, and Latin chronicles and ecclesiastical, municipal, and royal notarial records, O'Callaghan lays out with consummate care and with great detail the story of the brutal struggle for control of the Strait of Gibraltar—a struggle that would ultimately seal the fate of Spanish Islam."—Medieval Review. The epic battle for control of the Strait of Gibraltar waged by Castile, Morocco, and Granada in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries is a major, but often... The Aftermath: The Strait of Gibraltar to 1492. List of Abbreviations. Notes. Joseph F. O'Callaghan is Professor Emeritus of Medieval History, Fordham University. He is the author of The Last Crusade in the West and Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain, both available from the University of Pennsylvania Press. Product details. Amazon calculates a product’s star ratings based on a machine learned model instead of a raw data average. The model takes into account factors including the age of a rating, whether the ratings are from verified purchasers, and factors that establish reviewer trustworthiness. No customer reviews. There's a problem loading this menu right now. by Joseph F. O'Callaghan. Preview. Download. Of Acre, 1189-1191: Saladin, Richard the Lionheart, and the Battle That Decided the Third Crusade. John D Salah Ad-Din Al-Ayyubi (Saladin): hero of the battle of Hattin and liberator of Jerusalem from the Crusaders, 532-589 A.H. 1137-1193 C.E. 212 Pages·2007·12.93 MB·1,894 Downloads·New! Salah Ad-Din Al-Ayyubi (Saladin): hero of the battle of Hattin and liberator of Jerusalem from A Most Holy War: The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom (Pivotal Moments in World. 284 Pages·2008·3.42 MB·1,624 Downloads·New! than other Christians, made the battles, sieges, and massacres of The epic battle for control of the Strait of Gibraltar waged by Castile, Morocco, and Granada in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries is a major, but often overlooked, chapter in the history of the Christian reconquest of Spain. After the Castilian conquest of Seville in 1248 and the submission of the Muslim kingdom of Granada as a vassal state, the Moors no The epic battle for control of the Strait of Gibraltar waged by Castile, Morocco, and Granada in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries is a major, but often overlooked, chapter in the history of the Christian rec... Joseph F. O'Callaghan is Professor Emeritus of Medieval History at Fordham University, where he has taught since 1954.