

In press in the newsletter of the Association of Research Historians of Medieval Spain.

Chris Lowney. *A Vanished World. Medieval Spain's Golden Age of Enlightenment*. New York: Free Press, 2005. 321 pp. + 16 pp. of illustrations. ISBN: 0-7432-4359-5.

This book is avowedly a work of *divulgación*, and is not something research historians need consult. The only pertinent question in this venue is whether it can be recommended to students or non-Hispanist colleagues. Unfortunately, while the author's heart is in the right place—medieval Spain was a time of enlightenment; Spain benefitted from the contributions of three religions—the book has serious shortcomings. The author knows no Spanish, or at least sources in Spanish are always cited indirectly. The introductory full-page quotation from Pope John Paul II is at the very least insensitive.

The work is organized as a series of stories, such as “A Jewish General in a Muslim Kingdom” (Samuel ha-Naguid), “The Second Moses and Medieval Medicine” (Maimonides), “A Muslim Commentator Enlightens Christendom” (Ibn Tufayl), and a final chapter on Columbus, whose relevance is never explained. When chapters are devoted to the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Cantar de Mio Cid* as sources of information on medieval Spain, with almost no use of scholarship on either figure, the work's claim to accurately portray medieval Spain loses authority. That many inhabitants of Spain might not be happy about Charlemagne's attack on Zaragoza has not occurred to the author (Bernardo del Carpio is never mentioned); no more does he realize that the *camino de Santiago* was a source of immigrants.

There are many minor pieces of misinformation in this book, such as that the Duero river waters irrigated the gardens of Granada (239), Columbus's ships were named the Niña, Pinta, and Santa María (247), and *caballeros andantes* had a real role in fifteenth-century Spain (115). The extent to which sixteenth-century Spain's cultural flowering had its roots in Sephardic and Islamic Spain – how Fernando de Rojas and Cervantes, for example, were of New Christian origin – seems to have escaped Lowney. Only in passing are we told that St. Teresa was “*said* to have been descended *in part* from Jewish forbears” (183, italics mine). It is unfortunate that he apparently did not read either Gilman's *Spain of Fernando de Rojas* or T. D. Kendrick's *St. James in Spain*; neither is included in the generally thorough guide to “Suggested Reading” in English (299-305).

There is an abyss between this book and the learned, but *divulgativa* work of María Rosa Menocal, *Ornament of the World. How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (2003). The book has a professionally-prepared index.

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