

MUSLIM MINORITIES IN WESTERN SOCIETIES: THE MEDIEVAL SCENE

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Twentieth century Europe witnessed some of the most savage atrocities ever perpetrated against minority groups anywhere on earth. Thus, during the Second World War, large numbers of Jews and Roma (or Gypsies) were rounded up by the Nazis and sent to perish in such ill-famed concentration camps as Belsen, Dachau and Auschwitz. In the Soviet Union, meanwhile, the colonized and long repressed Muslim peoples of Central Asia, the Volga-Ural area, and Caucasia continued to suffer much persecution and genocide while the Tatars of Crimea were subjected, in addition, to deportation *en mass* to Siberia. Post-Soviet Russia maintained the same attitude especially vis-à-vis Chechnya where massive repression assumed draconian proportions during the final years of the last century and beyond. In the heart of Europe, the Bosnian Muslims—and, subsequently, the Kosovars—were subjected, at the hands of the Serbs and under the eyes of the U. N. and the international community, to the barbarities of “ethnic cleansing”: a term, incidentally, which has its roots back in sixteenth century Spain.

The purpose of this article is to put such recent events and developments, as have been briefly indicated above, in their proper historical and socio-cultural context. Apart from making it possible to see things in a wider perspective, this paper should hopefully facilitate a deeper and more profound appreciation of the phenomenon at hand by unraveling and identifying the sources and root causes of what is in fact a firmly established tradition of exclusivism and violent rejection of other people and cultures.

Reference will be made to the fate and experience of non-Muslims wherever appropriate. However, it is mainly with Muslim minorities in medieval Europe that this paper is primarily concerned with.

Until they were finally eliminated by means of expulsion or conversion to Christianity, Muslim minorities existed in two main parts of Europe in pre-modern times; namely, Sicily, on the one hand, and the Iberian peninsula—together with its offshore islands of Ibiza, Majorca and Minorca—on the other.

(i) The Iberian Crucible.

In Iberia, there were two principal categories of Muslims: that is, the Mudejars and, after the collapse of Granada in 1492, the Moriscos.

The Mudejars (a term derived from the Arabic *mudajjanun*: meaning domesticated, tame or subjugated) were Muslims (or Moors) who shunned the Qurānically-based advice of the 'ulamā'¹ that it was, under the circumstances, obligatory for them to migrate to extant Muslim states elsewhere. Many thousands chose to stay on in Iberia as vassals, serfs or slaves of Christian kings and nobles after the collapse of Muslim rule in successive parts of the Peninsula and its offshore islands, beginning with the fall of Toledo in 1085 until after the demise of the Kingdom of Granada some four hundred years later.

Whether he was a loyal and able soldier or administrator in the Pyrenean Kingdom of Navarre, or a skilled and hard-working craftsman or cultivator in Aragon, Castile or elsewhere in Iberia, the Mudejar, because of his labour and the taxes he paid, was regarded a valuable possession or 'royal treasure.'² It was largely

¹ Outstanding among these were Ibn Rushd and Aḥmad Ibn Yahyā al-Wansharisi. They argued that, rather than submit to non-Muslim rule, Muslims should emigrate to places where they can freely live in accordance with the prescriptions of Islam. *Hijrah*, or emigration, they pointed out, is an irrevocable duty which lasts till the Day of Judgement. Cf. al-Wansharisi: *al-Mi'yār al-Mu'rib*, 13 vols. (Rabat and Beirut, 1981), 2:119-41.

² C.f. John Boswell, *The Royal Treasure: Muslim Communities under the Crown of Aragon in the Fourteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977). At the popular level the same attitude was encapsulated in the Aragonese folk saying, "No Moor, no Money" (Quin no