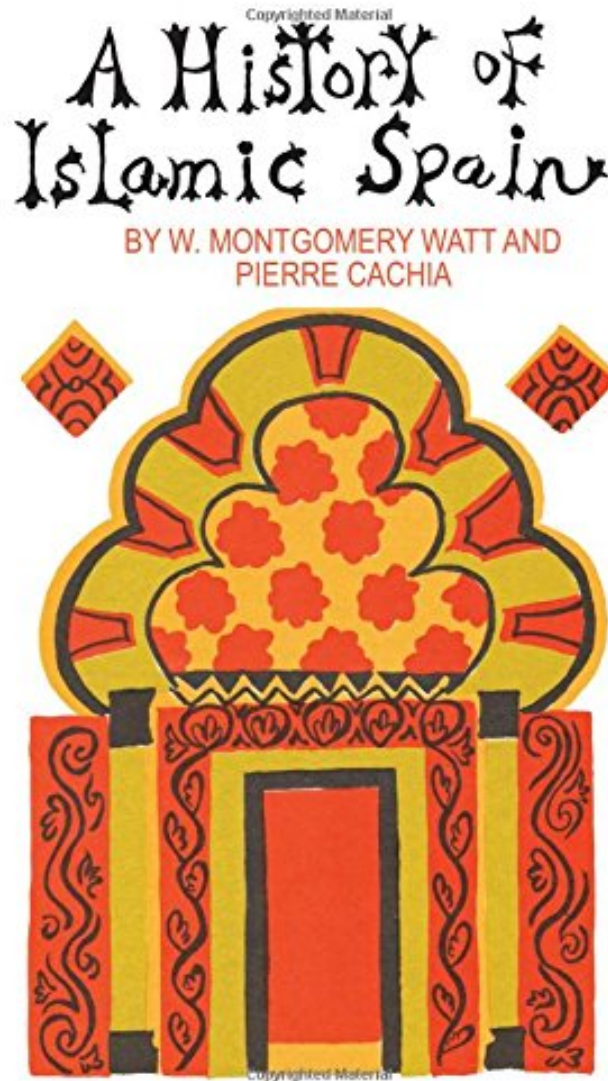


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A History of Islamic Spain

Pierre Cachia

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Pierre Cachia : A History of Islamic Spain before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A History of Islamic Spain:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The Rise and Fall of Islam By bill greene This book provides an excellent introduction to a frequently ignored part of Western history. Most people know how the so-called Dark Ages followed the collapse of Rome and then almost a thousand years later the Renaissance suddenly burst forth in Italy. This book tells a lot about the intervening years and the foundation that was built for Western Civilization by the dynamic mixing of East and West in Spain. It also is a primer on the history of Islam and how it quickly spread from

the Middle East to distant lands far to the East and West. The authors are knowledgeable in this subject and bring a readable history for the layman as well as the advanced history buff. There is plenty of detail to illustrate the politics, culture, and everyday life in Muslim Spain, or al-Andalus, as it was called. I was surprised at the great number of "tribes," or Muslim sects, and Berber groups from Africa, that created constant political turmoil in Spain for several centuries as one group overthrew another. Initially published in 1965, the authors relate a factual history, unvarnished by today's political correctness or new stronger emotions concerning Muslims. The story starts in the 7th-8th century when Islamic forces spread their conquests across North Africa and up into Spain and Southern France until Charles Martell drove them back from Tours into central Spain where they ruled over the major provinces for over 500 years. All the while, Christian kingdoms in Northern Spain held their frontiers from repeated attacks and gradually, in the 11th-13th centuries, drove the Muslims back to a single area in Granada, after reclaiming Toledo, Cordova, and Seville and the heart of al-Andalus. Then, in 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella drove the remaining Muslims from Granada. But, underneath all this turmoil, the authors describe the constant mixing of cultures as all these invaders melded with the original inhabitants and new arrivals. A unique feature of Islamic Spain was that they were far removed from the Central Caliph in Baghdad, and thus more independent, less fixed on the theology of Islam, and more concerned with the practicalities of government. The authors do a good job of showing how this fostered a creative mix and new energy from the indigenous people as they reacted to the ideas of the invaders. The art and architecture of the Moorish cities is a testament to this symbiosis of the varied cultures. The authors also provide very good coverage of the competing intellectual battle between conservative theologians and philosopher scientists in the 11th and 12th century that ended by radically shaping the future of these two great religions and civilizations. Averroes and St. Thomas Aquinas represented the pragmatic thinkers who sought to advance the physical sciences alongside spiritual theology as two mutually supportive ways of thinking. But the great Muslim scholars in the Middle East like Al Ghazali saw physical science and philosophy as opponents of religion, incompatible, and contrary to the teachings in the Koran. But Averroes was proven right: Western monks in the new universities springing up in Western Europe adopted his ideas and laid the foundation for scientific advances, and the separation of church and state, which fueled much of the European progress in the centuries that followed. The Holy Men in the Middle East clamped down on all such new thinking and relegated Islamic nations to stagnant tribal life for the ensuing millennium. In spite of these issues with Islamic fundamentalism, the authors pose this question: Do not the lovely buildings like the Great Mosque of Cordova and the Alhambra of Grenada validate the Islamic period in Spain as a great culture? Or does the answer lie in comparing these buildings to the Parthenon in Greece. The latter is a thing of great beauty and an expression of the liberating humanist spirit of Greece, while the Moorish buildings are merely things of intrinsic beauty-- but without any reference to the culture that built them. Regardless of your answer, the truth is that when the Christians from the North retook these beautiful cities from the Moors, their eyes and minds were opened to greater new ways of thinking and doing! It's a thought provoking book, and well worth the time to read and study.

5 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Makes a good easy read
By Gogol
Not the most detailed book on Islamic Spain but a decent read all the same. Covers all the major points in the history of Islamic Spain from the initial Muslim conquest to the final fall of Granada with some insight into the art, science and culture of Andalusia. Decent book, easy to read (you could probably get through it in a day)
I would say worth the money (this was initially published by EUP) but looking at how much it is going for now, maybe not.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars
By louis b
very helpful

The period of Muslim occupation in Spain represents the only significant contact Islam and Europe was ever to have on European soil. In this important as well as fascinating study, Watt traces Islam's influence upon Spain and European civilization - from the collapse of the Visigoths in the eighth century to the fall of Granada in the fifteenth, and considers Spain's importance as a part of the Islamic empire. Particular attention is given to the golden period of economic and political stability achieved under the Umayyads. Without losing themselves in detail and without sacrificing complexity, the authors discuss the political, social, and economic continuity in Islamic Spain, or al-Andalus, in light of its cultural and intellectual effects upon the rest of Europe. Medieval Christianity, Watt points out, found models of scholarship in the Islamic philosophers and adapted the idea of holy war to its own purposes while the final reunification of Spain under the aegis of the Reconquista played a significant role in bringing Europe out of the Middle Ages. A survey essential to anyone seeking a more complete knowledge of European or Islamic history, the volume also includes sections on literature and philology by Pierre Cachia. This series of "Islamic surveys" is designed to give the educated reader something more than can be found in the usual popular books. Each work undertakes to survey a special part of the field, and to show the present stage of scholarship here. Where there is a clear picture this will be given; but where there are gaps, obscurities and differences of opinion, these will also be indicated. Full and annotated bibliographies will afford guidance to those who want to pursue their studies further. There will also be some account of the nature and extent of the source material. The series is addressed in the first place to the educated reader, with little or no previous knowledge of the subject; its character is such that it should be of value also to university students and others whose interest is of a more professional kind.

This rapid survey of eight centuries of Hispano-Islamic history is a competent, informative, and pleasantly readable performance. Designedly aimed at the educated reader, it will also interest the specialist for its many keen reappraisals of the civilization and the strengths and weaknesses of Moorish Spain. C. J. Bishko, *The American Historical* This is the best introduction in English to Islamic Spain. The authors have presented a clear synthesis of politics and culture. J. N. Hillgarth, *Speculum* One must be immensely grateful to Professor Watt for having made the constructive effort to draw together the work of several sets of specialists and communicate the result to the educated world at large. L. P. Harvey, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* About the Author W. Montgomery Watt (1909-2006) was professor emeritus of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Edinburgh. He is the author of numerous books, including *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions*, *Islam: A Short History*, *Muhammad's Mecca*, and *Islamic Surveys: The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe*. Pierre Cachia taught at the University of Edinburgh, and was Senior Lecturer in Arabic. He is now professor emeritus of Arabic language and literature at Columbia University.