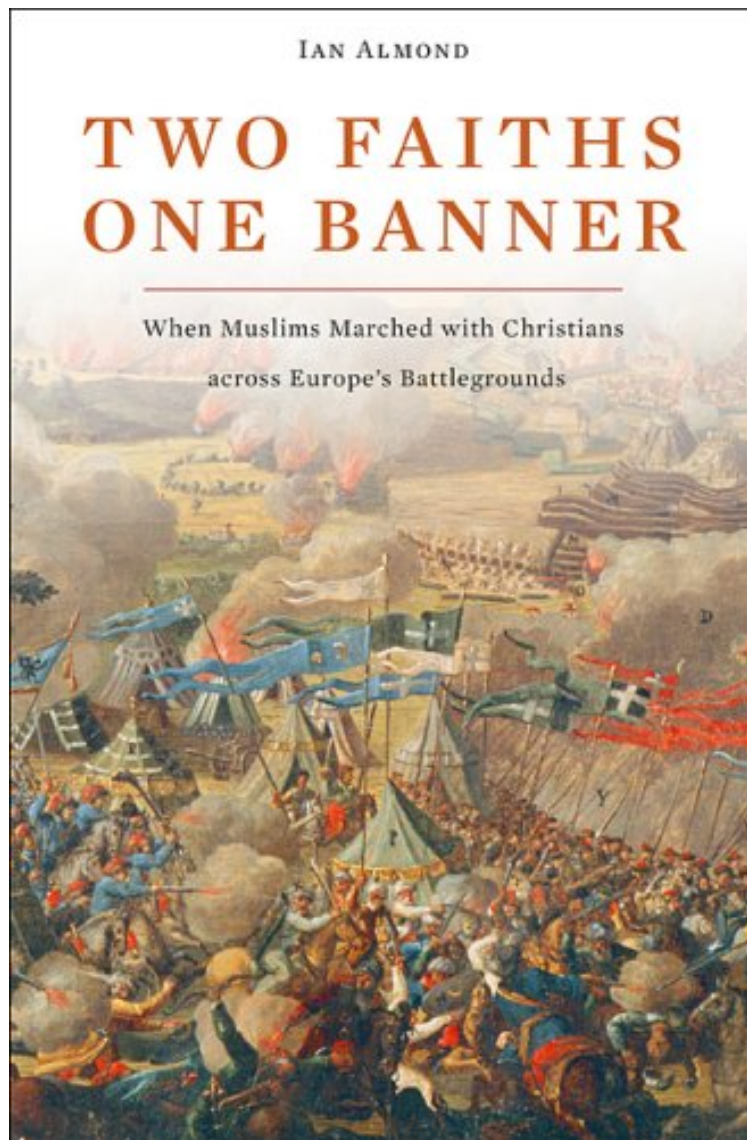


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Two Faiths, One Banner: When Muslims Marched with Christians across Europe's Battlegrounds

Ian Almond

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Ian Almond : Two Faiths, One Banner: When Muslims Marched with Christians across Europe's Battlegrounds before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Two Faiths, One Banner: When Muslims Marched with Christians across Europe's Battlegrounds:

21 of 24 people found the following review helpful. Paradoxical Military Alliances Going Beyond Religious

Affiliations By Serge J. Van Steenkiste Ian Almond shows with much conviction that the convenient omission of Muslims from Christian armies - and vice versa - in historical records is not an isolated incident. This collective amnesia reflects a view of history that is similar to driving a car in a thick fog without much visibility ahead or behind. Mr. Almond came to the realization that the writing of history was not like climbing a hill from which one could acquire an expanding view of an increasingly bigger area. Most people do not learn more and more about themselves. They modify their history continually (pp. 220-221). For this reason, Mr. Almond invites his audience to (re)discover through his selection of five military conflicts that Christians and Muslims occasionally fought on the same side against people of their own faith for one or more of the following reasons (pp. 218-219): A. There were times when impending invasions or assaults brought together communities which otherwise felt little sympathy for one another. For example, Christians made up more than 50% of the 'Ottoman' army marching against the Hapsburgs during the siege of Vienna in 1683 C.E. This observation becomes 'understandable' when readers consider two facts: 1) Hungary's Protestants resented the colonial attitude of the Catholic Hapsburgs. Furthermore, the lot of Hungarian peasantry was that of serfs whose living conditions were atrocious (pp. 144-147; 175). B. Another related reason is the hatred of a common enemy. In the second half of the 11th century C.E., two of the steadiest coalitions arose between on one hand, the Christian kingdom of Leon-Castile and Muslim Zaragoza, and on the other hand, the Christian kingdoms of Aragon and Catalonia and Muslim Lerida. These alliances rose as a result of the 'Balkanization' of Muslim Spain in the Taifa period as the kingdoms of both faiths positioned themselves to attain supremacy over one another (pp. 24-25). C. The economic promise of material gains was another powerful motivator to fight together with people of another faith. This materialistic attitude often resulted in a kind of emotional investment. After their deportations from Sicily to the town of Lucera in Southeast Italy in 1224 C.E., many Muslims went to Palestine with the Christian army of Frederick II for the ultimately peaceful, but temporary 'lease' of Jerusalem (pp. 49; 58-59; 61; 65-68). D. Affections, marriages, curiosity, and inexplicable attractions and fascinations between elites also pushed Muslims and Christians to form alliances. At the end of the first half of the 14th century C.E., Byzantine Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos became the first basileus to acquire a Muslim son-in-law, i.e., Umur of Aydin, a Turkish ruler. This relationship was born not only out of the needs of realpolitik, but also out of a personal sincerity between both men (pp. 114-115; 117). E. Finally, the existence of a shared culture, a common language or set of values was a factor in making possible for Christians and Muslims to fight as comrades-in-arms against people of their own faith. Michal Czajkowski (who converted to Islam) and his regiment of 'Polish Cossacks' fought for the Ottomans against the Russians during the Crimean War (1853 - 1856 C.E.) (pp. 197-198). To summarize, Mr. Almond invites his audience to go beyond the populist 'clash of civilizations' between Christianity and Islam by realizing that history is often not as simplistic as propagandists on all sides want them to believe.

25 of 45 people found the following review helpful. Not as advertised By Seth J. Frantzman This book claims to show that there is no 'Clash of Civilizations' but showing that Muslims and Christians often fought together against common enemies. But the actual accounts show that in fact this is not true. There is only one or two accounts of Muslims joining Christians to fight other Muslims. In fact the book is primarily a series of vignettes of Christians helping Muslims, sometimes forced to do so as vassals or slaves, kill, enslave and slaughter other Christians. This is not an example of an alliance of Christians and Muslims against common enemies, it is merely an example of Muslim armies exploiting Christian differences to carve up and colonize Christian Europe. The Ottomans were experts at this, pressing Armenians and Greeks and other colonized East European Christians into service to fight Catholics and other Orthodox Christians. This book is simply not as advertised. There was no collaboration between Muslims and Christians against fellow Muslims. The 'alliance' simply went one way, the collaboration went one way. Seth J. Frantzman 20 of 43 people found the following review helpful. Polemic -- Author's Point: We're Wrong to Think that Muslims and Christians Aren't Compatible By David M. Dougherty As I said in my title to this review, the author takes a few historical situations where Muslims and Christians fought on the same side for some short-term or convenient reason and then expands his thesis as a learning point in the present day that Muslims should not be vilified by Christians. He might well have used Desert Storm where Christians and Muslims fought together against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, but none of this proves anything. Even in the cases cited, there is little to learn as all have been well-covered in other historical works. The author is British and presents a very European point of view from the far left-wing, and indeed he has published in the left-wing UK journal "Radical Philosophy." There is a substantial amount of "British Empire Syndrome" visible here, and evidently the author fell in love with Turkey, its people and Islam during his six years in Turkey. One is reminded of Lawrence of Arabia but without the heroics and literary skill. The case in Chapter 4, where Protestant Hungarians fought with the Ottoman army in the siege of Vienna in 1683, is perhaps the worst bit of scholarship I have read. There is no mention of the recently concluded Thirty Years War that pitted Catholic Austria (the Habsburg Empire/Holy Roman Empire) against the Protestants (it was much more complex than that, but for the moment, that will do since the Protestants were heavily persecuted and decimated in that war by the Habsburgs) and the effects of that war. The Protestants in Czechoslovakia were eliminated and the Hungarian Protestants, Calvinists, Lutherans and Unitarians, were isolated and further persecuted by Leopold. Without writing the author's book for him, Mehmed IV offered Thokoly the title of King of Upper Hungary for his alliance, and he would receive his kingdom (and possibly the administration of

Vienna) which would be under Ottoman protection and only subject to annual tribute, after the capture of Vienna. What a shock that Thokoly would make common cause under those circumstances. The author conveniently omits that the Ottomans imposed a kindertax on their Christian subjects and kept them in the subservient status of "dhimmitude" or "protected minorities." However, this was not a benign status. A Christian's word held no meaning in an Islamic court, the dhimmis were subject to taxes from which Muslims were exempt, etc., etc. The worst of all was the kindertax where Ottoman Spahis would periodically come through Christian villages and take the children in the best physical condition, the boys to be converted to Islam and put in the Janissary Corps and the girls put into harems. The Turkish word for their Christians also meant "cattle", and that was an accurate description of their attitude towards Christians. In modern times, these factors were at the root of the conflict between the Orthodox Christian Serbs and Muslim Bosnians, but the US and Europe decided to support the Muslims to assure themselves of a steady supply of oil. Gee, once again Christians were on the side of the Muslims, but I doubt that President Clinton understood the historical background. Also omitted were the long lines of female Christian captives swept up by the Ottomans on their way to Vienna to be used to meet the intimate needs of the Ottoman soldiers. Once again they were the most attractive Christian girls in the country through which the Ottomans passed, and they were all murdered when Kara Mustafa retreated from the unsuccessful siege of Vienna. But no matter, the Ottomans and Christians were all heroic soldiers fighting side by side. Excuse me while I go and throw up. My point in all this is that these cases do not prove the author's point that Christians and Muslims are not natural enemies and the West should adopt an inclusive attitude towards Muslims, radical jihadists or not. Unfortunately for the author's polemic, history and the Quran tend to support the opposite. If we are to commit national and international suicide, then it will take much more evidence than this and a very good reason. Or, perhaps the election of politicians eager to appease. Just on this single case in five, see: "The Siege of Vienna" by John Stoye "A History of the Habsburg Empire 1526-1918" by Robert A. Kann "The Enemy at the Gate" by Andrew Wheatcroft none of which are in the author's reference list. However, one will find Karl Marx in his list concerning the Crimean War. In short, this is not an even-handed scholarly book. Its aim is to show how Muslims do not belong to an "other" civilization, but really are part of the essence of Europe. This contention isn't historically true, and even with the massive "spin" evident throughout this work, the author fails to prove his point. Unfortunately, this book is really not worth reading.

When, in our turbulent day, we hear of a clash of civilizations, it's easy to imagine an unbridgeable chasm between the Islamic world and Christendom stretching back through time. But such assumptions crumble before the drama that unfolds in this book. *Two Faiths, One Banner* shows how in Europe, the heart of the West, Muslims and Christians were often comrades-in-arms, repeatedly forming alliances to wage war against their own faiths and peoples. Here we read of savage battles, deadly sieges, and acts of individual heroism; of Arab troops rallying by the thousands to the banner of a Christian emperor outside the walls of Verona; of Spanish Muslims standing shoulder to shoulder with their Christian Catalan neighbors in opposition to Castilians; of Greeks and Turks forming a steadfast bulwark against Serbs and Bulgarians, their mutual enemy; of tens of thousands of Hungarian Protestants assisting the Ottomans in their implacable and terrifying march on Christian Vienna; and finally of Englishman and Turk falling side by side in the killing fields of the Crimea. This bold book reveals how the idea of a Christian Europe long opposed by a Muslim non-Europe grossly misrepresents the facts of a rich, complex, and above all shared history. The motivations for these interfaith alliances were dictated by shifting diplomacies, pragmatic self-interest, realpolitik, and even genuine mutual affection, not by jihad or religious war. This insight has profound ramifications for our understanding of global politics and current affairs, as well as of religious history and the future shape of Europe.

From Publishers Weekly Almond, an associate professor and Islamic specialist at Georgia State University, draws on a multitude of sources to create an alternate history of interactions between Christians and Muslims in Europe over 800 years, boldly concentrating on unity and collaboration instead of friction and division. His approach shows how Muslims were a vital and regular part of Europe and its true history, not the European history he believes is being airbrushed to exclude Jews and Muslims. Almond's examples prove his point; he cites Muslim and Christian sharing of languages, cultures and lifestyles throughout Europe, the use of Muslim-style florals and geometric design in European church architecture of the 13th century and, of perhaps the utmost significance, leaders who sought the aid of Muslim armies when their country was being invaded. Reports during the Crimean War testified to cooperation and even warmth between Christian and Muslim soldiers. Muslims were also on both sides in the battle for Constantinople in 1453. Even the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683 has been overdramatized to create or emphasize a clash of civilizations paradigm. Almond chastises those who promote stereotypes such as the Terrible Turks and suggests that the goal of such government and media-propagated mythologizing is to use Muslims to distract from problems within modern-day society and governance. (Apr.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. An excellent history, it is at the same time high drama, with characters noble and base, involved in the adventure of their lives. These are astonishing materials presented through careful and reliable scholarship. A most unusual gem of a book full of human stories told with lucidity and charm. (Nur Yalman) Almond draws on a multitude

of sources to create an alternate history of interactions between Christians and Muslims in Europe over 800 years, boldly concentrating on "unity and collaboration instead of friction and division." His approach shows how Muslims were a vital and regular part of Europe and its true history, not the European history he believes is being "airbrushed" to exclude Jews and Muslims...Almond chastises those who promote stereotypes--such as the Terrible Turks--and suggests that the goal of such government and media-propagated mythologizing is to use Muslims to distract from problems within modern-day society and governance. (Publishers Weekly 2009-03-09)About the AuthorIan Almond is Associate Professor at Georgia State University and author of Sufism and Deconstruction and The New Orientalists.