

Book Review

Islam and the West: The Moriscos, a Cultural and Social History

By Anwar G. Chejne. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983, 248 pp.

This book is perhaps the best overall presentation of the Morisco question in English. The author has succeeded where others have failed in presenting a work simultaneously acceptable to the specialist and capable of being read by the cultivated general reader. The specialist will probably not find a better study of the Moriscos, because the author has adopted a comprehensive overall approach. The very complete bibliography includes studies of most of the distinguished specialists on the subject, particularly the Spaniards, as they have studied this topic more profoundly than anybody else. The works of non-Spaniard scholars who have made significant contributions to this field, such as Cardaillac of the University of Montpellier and Harvey of the University of London, are also listed. Chejne has further relied on numerous *aljamiado* manuscripts, which makes his study an important contribution in its own right. The author's clear and simple style, as well as his manner of presentation, will also satisfy the general reader.

The issue of the Moriscos remains both fascinating and relevant to our time. Chejne has not examined a specific aspect of the Morisco question, as did Cardaillac in his classical study of the Morisco question's po-

lemical dimension. Neither has he produced a definitive study, for that was not his intention. Instead, he has relied on numerous studies that have examined particular aspects of the topic. This is clear from his references to such experts as Fuentes and from his reliance on original manuscripts. As a result, his book is a synthesis which achieves the double objective of presenting a comprehensive view of the Moriscos while indicating new avenues of research that could be, and indeed have been, pursued in the future. For example, one could cite several international conferences on the Moriscos that have been organized since the publication of this book, some of which were held in countries with no previous interest in the Moriscos. Conferences organized by Abdeljelil Temimi in Tunisia, the latest of which is being held as I type this review, immediately come to mind.

Chejne's book stands out as a serious scholarly study from the perspective of cultural history, which is his field of specialization. The sources he used enabled him to adopt a multidisciplinary approach within the scope of cultural history. Chejne therefore approaches the subject from various angles in different chapters, i.e., "The Moriscos in a Hostile Environment," "Religion, Beliefs and Observances," "The Polemics of the Moriscos," "History, Legends and Travel," and "Morisco Poetry." This approach has enabled the author to portray successfully the rich content of the Moriscos as a subject of study in a relatively simple and clear style, despite its great complexity.

It is not easy to study an entire society as well as its religious beliefs, literary and cultural production, and various inherent elements in one book, for each of these justifiably could demand separate treatment. Yet that is precisely what Chejne has attempted to achieve. It would perhaps be vain to present his positions on the numerous questions that he examines, for he did that himself in a way which is credible given the honesty, frankness, and impartiality reflected in his positions. For example, he expressed his opinion of the state of the Moriscos with eloquence:

The Morisco, like his Mudejar ancestors, witnessed abrupt and shattering change within a lifetime. His mosques were destroyed or converted to churches; his estates and homes were taken away and occupied by military commanders, noblemen, and church leaders under whom he served in a status below a slave. He worked in the fields with little or no return, under 'the Christian bossing him with an ecstasy of self-magnificence.' He was conscious of the perfidy of his Christian oppressor, who reneged upon the terms of capitulation accorded to him under solemn oath. Moreover, when he was forced to embrace Christianity, he

was rejected even within the fold of Christianity, and placed in the position of upholding a religion that from the outset denied him any hope now or in the future. Hence, the Morisco felt a strong sense of betrayal and, inspired by his heritage, resisted. The Granadans, in particular, had a vivid memory of their past. Although it was demeaning to them to live under Christian rule, they had little choice but to accept terms in 1492 that were both generous and benign, hoping to coexist peacefully among Christian compatriots with whom they were bound by history and geography, besides other linguistic and cultural factors. No sooner had the peace terms been concluded than they were revoked, leaving Granadans frustrated and humiliated (p. 16).

The author outlines a synthesis of the Morisco question, presenting the main social, cultural, and religious aspects clearly and frankly. This book could be classified as a product of a social historian who has mastered the techniques of a linguist. The two are often combined so smoothly that it is hard to detect the differences of approach. While analyzing the question externally, the internal dimension is omnipresent thanks to Chejne's continuous reliance on original texts either directly or through the works of others. He sometimes relies on a meticulous textual analysis, as in the section entitled "Morisco Polemics: Aljamiado Manuscript BNM4944" (pp. 85-95). These pages constitute an analysis of the Morisco arguments to illustrate the superiority of Islam over both Judaism and Christianity. The above ten pages contain, on the average, eleven footnotes per page. The importance of documentation also predominates in chapter 10, which is a presentation and analysis of Morisco poetry. In each chapter, Chejne presents a profound analysis of a particular theme without exhausting it altogether. The reader thus acquires an idea of the overall framework of the Moriscos while receiving specific examples.

This is really the reason why this book is useful for both the specialist and the general reader. As the author himself combines the two qualities of a specialist and a generalist, he can, unlike many other authors, cross back and forth between the two groups with ease. The result is a specialized work for generalists.

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