

The Moor's Last Stand: How Seven Centuries of Muslim Rule in Spain Came to an End

Elizabeth Drayson

Interlink Books (Nov 22, 2017)

Softcover \$20.00 (206pp)

978-1-56656-004-7

One of the seminal events in both Spanish and Muslim history, the 1492 handover of Granada to Ferdinand and Isabella effectively ended seven hundred years of an Islamic kingdom in southern Spain. Less known is the story of the man who handed over the city, Boabdil (also known as Abu Abdallah Muhammad XI), and Elizabeth Drayson looks at the sultan's life in her well-crafted work *The Moor's Last Stand*.

Though Boabdil ruled the last Moorish stronghold for only ten years, it was a truly eventful decade. His family dynamics are heavy on intrigue and betrayal, as Boabdil had to face off with his father, then his uncle, in a series of power struggles. Taken prisoner by the Spanish in a failed attempt to gain territory, he reclaimed the Alhambra only by besting his family rivals—and only after promising to have Granada pay tribute to Ferdinand and Isabella.

At the same time, Catholic rulers were happy to let these fights play out, allying with one faction against another in a divide-and-conquer approach that Boabdil saw coming too late. His choice not to intervene in the Spanish conquest of Malaga—a condition he agreed to in exchange for his freedom—is shown to have isolated his own territory. And though he agreed to surrender Granada only after setting out elaborate terms, the Spanish crown carefully rewrote those terms to ensure the long-term loss of Muslim sovereignty in the south. Humbled and disgraced after turning over his city, Boabdil went into exile, and Drayson explores several possibilities for what happened to him after that point.

Throughout the short and well-paced book, Drayson uses writings from the time and historical takes on the era to explain and understand Boabdil's ill-fated choices and the decline of Muslim rule. The sieges, conflicts, and intrigue are excitingly rendered, and *The Moor's Last Stand* manages to make a relatively overlooked historical character into a three-dimensional figure.

JEFF FLEISCHER (November/December 2017)

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