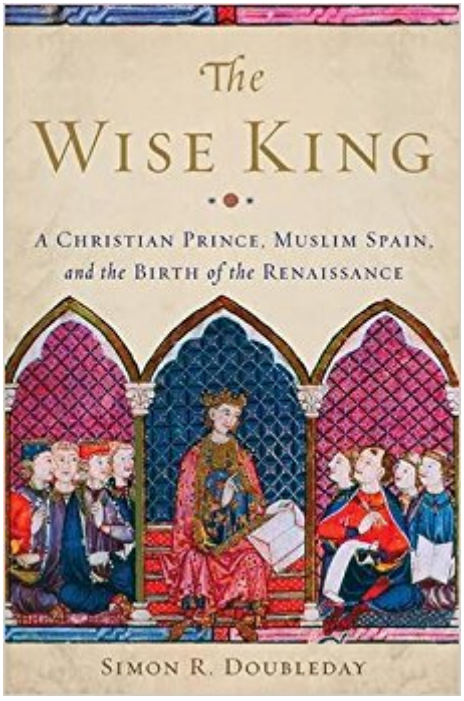
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The Wise King: A Christian Prince, Muslim Spain, And The Birth Of The Renaissance



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Synopsis

“If I had been present at the Creation,Ã¢â ¬Â• the thirteenth-century Spanish philosopher-king Alfonso X is said to have stated, “Many faults in the universe would have been avoided.Ã¢â ¬Â• Known as El Sabio, “the Wise,Ã¢â ¬Â• Alfonso was renowned by friends and enemies alike for his sparkling intellect and extraordinary cultural achievements. In The Wise King, celebrated historian Simon R. Doubleday traces the story of the king's life and times, leading us deep into his emotional world and showing how his intense admiration for Spain's rich Islamic culture paved the way for the European Renaissance. In 1252, when Alfonso replaced his more militaristic father on the throne of Castile and LeÃƒÂ n, the battle to reconquer Muslim territory on the Iberian Peninsula was raging fiercely. But even as he led his Christian soldiers onto the battlefield, Alfonso was seduced by the glories of Muslim Spain. His engagement with the Arabic-speaking culture of the South shaped his pursuit of astronomy, for which he was famed for centuries, and his profoundly humane vision of the world, which Dante, Petrarch, and later Italian humanists would inherit. A composer of lyric verses, and patron of works on board games, hunting, and the properties of stones, Alfonso is best known today for his Cantigas de Santa MarÃƒÂ-a (Songs of Holy Mary), which offer a remarkable window onto his world. His ongoing struggles as a king and as a man were distilled—in art, music, literature, and architecture—into something sublime that speaks to us powerfully across the centuries. An intimate biography of the Spanish ruler in whom two cultures converged, The Wise King introduces readers to a Renaissance man before his time, whose creative energy in the face of personal turmoil and existential threats to his kingdom would transform the course of Western history.

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Customer Reviews

"A fascinating journey into an unfamiliar realm."--Ã Â Sinclair McKay, Daily TelegraphÃ Â (Best Books of 2016) "Long overdue, giving deserved prominence to a man whose imagination spanned the worlds of Christian Europe, Islam, and Classical Antiquity. Few monarchs have lived up to the challenge he threw down."--Alastair Mabbott, Sunday Herald (Glasgow)"It is not hard to see The Wise King as a screen epic. It has drama and betrayal. There is love (and sex). It has writers and thinkers - Christians, Muslims and Jews. In the background isthe sun and passion of Spain."--Andrew Breeze, The Tablet"An illuminating biography of an intelligent and thoughtful man."--Kirkus Reviews"Elegant and learned, fast-paced and exciting. The Wise King provides a beautiful introduction to one of the most fascinating figures of the Middle Ages"--David Nirenberg, University of Chicago, author of Communities of ViolenceÃ Â "Imaginatively seeks to provide emotional depth to an account of Alfonso's reign... Readers will enjoy the broad range of sources, Christian and Muslim"--History TodayThe Middle Ages have long been categorized as an infertile intermission between the classical Greek and Roman world and the Renaissance...Doubleday (The Lara Family) here debunks the myth...[He] convincingly reasons that Alfonso was the epitome of a renaissance man."--Library Journal"In this insightful biography of Alfonso X of Castile and LeÃƒÂ n (1221-1284), Doubleday... illuminates the complexity of society in 13th-century Spain and, through the figure of the king, 'exorcises the myth that medieval Europe was mired in a dark age.'"--Publishers Weekly"This wonderful book sets to rest the fiction that the Renaissance was purely an Italian creation. Beautifully-written and lyrical, full of fascinating details and surprisingly sexy, Doubleday's book sheds new light on the remarkable life of Alfonso the Wise, and gives the Iberian peninsula the credit it deserves for serving as a hothouse of intellectual innovation."--Kirstin Downey, author ofÃ Â Isabella, The Warrior Queen"A fascinating work. Promoting culture and learning, moderating temper and greed, acting virtuously by example, even judiciously endorsing games and sex--these were the tasks that Alfonso assigned himself, even while he fulfilled the more traditional roles of warrior and defender of the faith. That he did all this not despite the very real proximity of a rival Islamic kingdom but precisely because of it is one of the most intriguing arguments of Doubleday's beautifully-written book."--Lisa Abend, Madrid correspondent, TIME magazine, and author of The Sorcerer's Apprentices"Cosmopolitan, learned, and deeply-cultured, Alfonso is proof that brightness shone in parts of Europe during what later became popularly, if unfairly,known as the

Dark Ages. His 13th-century preoccupations with manners,wisdom, friendship, music, sex, sport, greed, fear, and parenting are indeed a mirror of contemporary concerns. Few of us, however, have had the time--or the talent-- to think so deeply or write so eloquently about them. Doubleday's scholarly but accessible writing makes him the ideal guide and companion."--Giles Tremlett, Madrid correspondent, The Guardian and The Economist, and author of Catherine of Aragon and Ghosts of Spain"Sex, Greed, Wisdom, Joy: In Simon Doubleday's deft treatment, we find therenowned medieval King Alfonso the Wise pondering the same themes thatgrip the modern imagination. Doubleday is a gifted writer who introduces readers to a turbulent era while inviting thoughtful reflection on our own day."--Chris Lowney, author of Heroic Leadership and A Vanished World"Written in a lively style and displaying a mastery of far-ranging ideas,Doubleday's engaging and erudite work casts a wide and fascinating view on the convergence of ancient Islamic, Jewish, and medieval Christian cultures at the court of the 'Wise King'.... Will be of interest to scholars and general readers alike."--Teofilo F. Ruiz, Distinguished Professor of History UCLA, and recipient of the National Humanities Medal from President Obama"A scintillating account of how the modern gaze into the medieval mirror can foster wisdom and humanity in contemporary readers, princes and paupers alike."--Stanislao Pugliese, author of the NBCC-nominated Bitter Spring: A Life of Ignazio Silone

Simon R. Doubleday is Professor of History at Hofstra University, editor-in-chief of the Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies, and author of The Lara Family: Crown and Nobility in Medieval Spain. He received his BA from Cambridge University and his PhD in Medieval History from Harvard, and is the recipient of awards for Outstanding Scholarly Achievement from Hofstra and for teaching from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Despite SpainÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s colonial exploration and exploitation of the New World (after 1492), its new wealth, and the cultural achievements of its ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Golden Age,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• the ongoing Inquisition and its fanatical and brutal persecutions have always cast a pall, for centuries and in later perception, over its contributions or relations to the Renaissance in Europe (and later Enlightenment as well). But now Simon DoubledayÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s remarkable new book The Wise King: A Christian Prince, Muslim Spain, and the Birth of the Renaissance (Basic Books) in effect backdates the humanistic Renaissance from our conventional understanding of a start date in 15th-16th-century Florence to 13th-century Iberia and in particular, to the figure of Alfonso X, known as the Wise One or El Sabio.

DoubledayÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s lucidly cogent conversational style combines impressively broad research and command of source material to establish in and around Alfonso X the tradition of wisdom as an ideal. By establishing secure historical contexts, Doubleday can also probe beyond the documentation, with an intuitive sort of sympathetic understanding, in order to illuminate with informed and convincing conjecture the personal realm of Alfonso X. The books limns AlfonsoÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s considerable intellectual, cultural and political interests and ambitions within the staggeringly complex and ever-shifting constellations of dynastic and imperial alliances in Castile, Iberia and Europe in general (and the Holy Roman Empire), and how that intersects with personal, i.e. emotional, bonds of family. This study is particularly good at situating AlfonsoÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s ideals in relation to the contested territories and geopolitics of El-Andaluz and the profound intellectual achievements and influences from the Muslim world and the medieval Arabic ideal of adab or cultural refinement (91). Doubleday refers on multiple occasions to the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“tidal wave of translation from Arabic-language textsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (195) in Castile and Italy that prepared for -or in fact began- the Renaissance in Europe. His expositions of that influence on Alfonso extend from architecture to astrology to falconry, from the comic spirit (fun and games and sports) to notions of friendship, and on to familial affection, tutelage and the gendered challenges of parenting in the dynastic Middle Ages. The Wise King provides a continually fascinating illumination of humanistic impulses and cultural energies that converge in the figure of Alfonso X, who seems at once to embody, but also be ahead of, his time: Doubleday strikes a friendly tone as a wise cicerone to the King and his times.

If you know anything about the interconnections of the various Principalities of the Middle-ages in European you will find the Devil in the details in this book. Since I enjoy such background information I went through it fairly quickly. The title is Ironic seeing how it ended.

classic work at a good price

a good book. I am happy with it.

I must admit, before I opened this book, the only thing I knew about Alphonso X of Spain was that Edward IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s first son was named after him. But it didnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t matter, for though ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœThe Wise KingÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ is scholarly, itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s a perfect introduction to Medieval Spain for a newcomer to the subject. This book gave me a

fascinating insight into 13th century Spain - a peninsula occupied by small Spanish kingdoms and Muslim caliphates - and how these two diverse cultures co-existed and interacted with each other. This biography gives a portrait of a remarkable man whose military and cultural achievements have had a lasting effect on the Spanish. A crater of the moon is named after Alphonso, and a relief portrait graces the gallery doors of the House Chamber in the US House of Representatives (showing his diverse interests in Astronomy and the Law), and the author makes an intriguing case for how Alphonso helped pave the way for the Renaissance. Yet he is hardly known in the English speaking world.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœThe Wise KingÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ was a joy to read, being well written and entertaining. It is arranged thematically to cover the different aspects of AlphonsoÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s life while maintaining a strong narrative thread. There are useful family trees showing his connections to all the major royal houses of Europe (from my perspective his links to Eleanor of Castile were the most interesting of these). The book has left me with a desire to read more medieval Spanish history. ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s a really good read for anyone who is interested in medieval history, Spanish history, any history, the RenaissanceÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦ or just likes biographies of complex and interesting people who write poetry and wallop people with swords!

This is a book that will invite you in and make you feel like you are witnessing history. You care about the King and his circle and what happens to all of them. The book is not only about the king and his circle, however; the reader learns about Spain (and indeed different parts of Europe at that time), culture, and many other topics. Simon Doubleday gives a new perspective about the Renaissance. Most of us learned that it began and was centered in Italy, especially thanks to Machiavelli, but he shows that some of the ideas about leadership and ruling began in Spain. This is well-written in a lively style; Professor Doubleday teaches history at the university level, but his writing is approachable, clear, and elegant. I learned a lot from this book, and it makes me want to learn more about Spanish history. I didn't want the book to end!

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