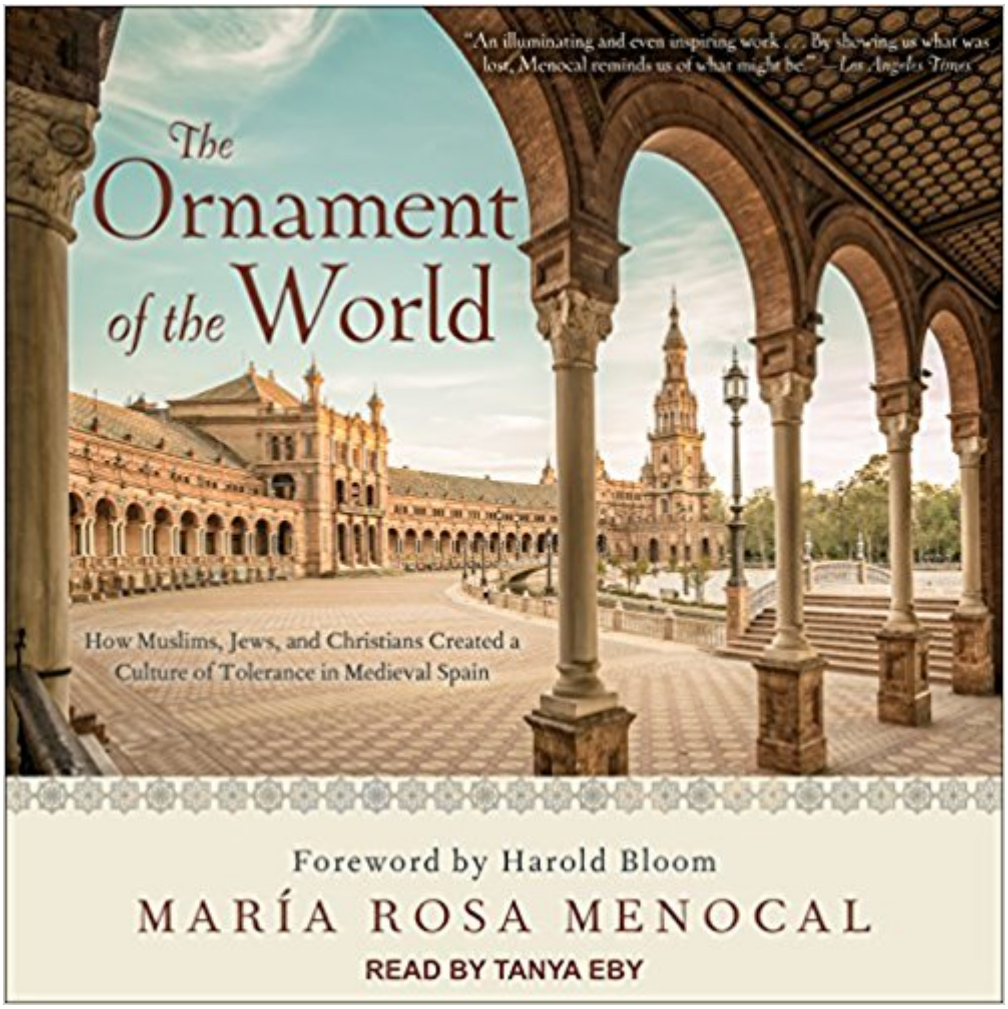
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The Ornament Of The World: How Muslims, Jews, And Christians Created A Culture Of Tolerance In Medieval Spain



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Synopsis

Widely hailed as a revelation of a "lost" golden age, this history brings to vivid life the rich and thriving culture of medieval Spain where, for more than seven centuries, Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived together in an atmosphere of tolerance, and literature, science, and the arts flourished.

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Customer Reviews

MarÃƒÂ-a Rosa Menocal’s wafting, ineffably sad The Ornament of the World tells of a time and place--from 786 to 1492, in AndalucÃƒÂ-a, Spain--that is largely and unjustly overshadowed in most historical chronicles. It was a time when three cultures--Judaic, Islamic, and Christian--forged a relatively stable (though occasionally contentious) coexistence. Such was this period that there remains in Toledo a church with an "homage to Arabic writing on its walls [and] a sumptuous 14th-century synagogue built to look like Granada’s Alhambra." Long gone, however, is the CÃƒÂ rdoba library--a thousand times larger than any other in Christian Europe. Menocal’s history is one of palatine cities, of philosophers, of poets whose work inspired Chaucer and Boccaccio, of weeping fountains, breezy courtyards, and a long-running tolerance "profoundly rooted in the cultivation of the complexities, charms and challenges of contradictions," which ended with the repression of Judaism and Islam the same year Columbus sailed to the New World. --H. O’Billovich --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Menocal (R. Selden Rose Professor of Spanish and Portuguese and director of Special Programs in

the Humanities, Yale Univ.) has previously published The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage, as well as other books on the role of the vernacular in medieval cultures. This book certainly reflects her deep scholarship. Menocal offers persuasive evidence that the Renaissance was strongly foreshadowed by the intellectual climate of Spain in the preceding centuries, starting in 783 with the founding of Andalusia by Abd al-Rahman, an Umayyad from Syria. The culture created was receptive to intellectual pursuits not allowed in the rest of Europe for several centuries, including the creation of impressive libraries and the study and translation of Classical authors. Menocal claims that this environment was largely a result of the tolerance shown by this ruler and his successors toward Christians and Jews and their cultures. Menocal has not given us a history book so much as a demonstration that puritanical cultures of any ilk are detrimental to the development of science, art, and literature. Her arguments are convincing even without the dark background of September 11. Recommended for all libraries.Clay Williams, Hunter Coll. Lib., New York Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Maria Rosa Menocal, Proefessor of Spanish and Portuguese at Yale University and specialized in medieval culture, gives us a condensed account in some 300 pages of some 700 years of history of medieval Spain between 711 and 1492. Her captivating description of the birth, apogee, and decline of the Arab/Moslem civilization in Al Andalus is enlightening and engaging. She makes a brilliant selection of personalities who were important players on the stage of this astonishing and unusual period of a society of Moslems, Christians, and Jews living together in harmony in a culture of tolerance. Each religious community was contributing in creating and enriching an outstandingly learned center in the South/West of Europe, the rest of which was still in the `dark" ages. She weaves her prose around these key personalities whom she chose among the rulers, military leaders, philosophers, poets, and troubadours from the three religious groups. Each `protagonist' plays an important role in political, military, or cultural events at a given important moment of this period.Menocal focuses in particular, with deep and smart analysis, on the linguistic, scientific, literary, artistic, and architectural influence of the Arab/Moslem civilization and advance on Medieval Europe, coming indirectly from Baghdad - seat of the Abbasids Caliphate - or directly from Al Andalus. She writes in an accurate, elegant, clear, and almost poetic style which really makes her book feel like an epic poem praising Al Andalus, and lamenting the loss of this unusually rich world built by Arabs and Moslems, with the full contribution of Christians and Jews.Finally, Menocal's book is a most significant contribution to the effort of recognizing and restoring the rightful and legitimate

place of the influence of Arab/Moslem civilization on the Renaissance of Europe. Furthermore, the book is a canny reminder and an eye-opener showing a different angle of Islam, when its face at the present time is distorted and disfigured by extremism and fanaticism.

This was one of several books we used in a wonderful course that I had called "Literature and Culture of Muslim Spain." One of the books was a straightforward history, and others provided examples of the literature produced. Ms. Menocal's book, which is not so much a history as a collection of essays about different aspects of "Al Andalus," was the class's favorite. We only read parts of the book for the class, but post-graduation, I have finally gotten a chance to read it in its entirety. I'm impressed. Menocal knows her stuff, but more importantly has a great passion for her subject. At the end of the book, one must ask, "Why have we been taught virtually nothing about this fascinating time and place, which was so important and influential upon Western Culture?"I think this is an important book that deserves wide readership. This is not really an objective book. Ms. Menocal is an unabashed cheerleader. (However, if you want another point of view Menocal provides an excellent addendum with suggestions for further reading.) If I have any criticism, it is that sometimes Menocal's cheerleading becomes a little cloying. But this is minor. Five stars.

This history book opened a new world for me. I did not learn about this chapter in history from school. Mernocal writes in a balanced way about the complexities of life in the middle ages where Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived and thrived side by side. for centuries. Then, she writes of the unraveling of this way of life through time by the fundamentalists in each religion.To me, it spoke of the need today to look closely at our America values of freedom of religion and tolerance for that freedom that is inherent in our constitution.

Everyone who looks in confusion and consternation at the current state of the Islamic governments should read this book. Menocal clearly and intelligently shows how the varied monotheist in Spain lived and worked together to form peaceful and productive society over a long time, many different administrations, and large geography. Would it were that ISIS is doing chest thumping about their peaceful integration with the other monotheist to improve medicine, art and science instead of calling young men to rape preteen girls.

I read the kindle edition while in Spain and it made my trip so interesting! What a great story and told well. Maria can write readable long sentences but also excessively long and incoherent ones.

Many, many typos and minor mistakes. These flaws could be easily fixed by a good copy editor.

An indispensable intellectual voyage. As important a book as, say, Said’s "Orientalism".

Excellent history of the Muslim culture in Southern Spain during the several hundred years of tolerance under which Jews, Christians and Muslims lived together in peace. The book made me aware of how little we were taught in school of the role the Arab world played in culture, poetry, architecture, translation of ancient parchments,etc. Our understanding of history has been dominated by the Western point of view to our detrimentand has a great deal to do with the situation in today’s world. A well written and interesting and important book,

This is a stunning book written by an author who writes with both knowledge and passion about a place and a period that is often overlooked. This work, together with two books by Russell Shorto (The Island at the Center of the World and Amsterdam) remind readers that tolerance has a long and remarkable history and that polarization and violence were held at bay by brave and canny people over very long stretches of time.

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