David J. Wasserstein. *The Caliphate in the West: An Islamic Political Institution in the Iberian Peninsula*

Corinne Lathrop Gilb

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mora; cultures of different civilizations. Thus in concluding that "the central cultural battles of the future" will be between "mythology and practical humanism," Kavolis has brought together the accumulated knowledge of diverse civilizations in identifying contemporary trajectories, whatever the specific forms and symbolic designs they may assume, either today or tomorrow, within contemporary civilizations and within their moral cultures.

Carroll J. Bourg


Wasserstein's book reads like a doctoral dissertation intended for scholarly specialists. For the more general reader even in the scholarly community, a chapter placing the caliphate in broader historical context would have been helpful. Since the book is about religion as the basis for political rule, a theoretical chapter comparing the role of religion in the legitimization of different kinds of rulers might have been useful. The chapter also could have compared different religions as sources of cohesion in different kinds of polities. It could even have compared 'Abbasid and Umayyad regimes in terms of how their versions of Islam served legitimization and cohesion. Since Wasserstein's book deals with a period in Muslim Spain's history, it could have been more thorough in relating the period to the broader whole of Spanish Muslim history and to uses of religion North African governance. As it is, what we have here is a monographic, diligently researched, but very narrowly conceived.

In the early stages of Islam, the Muslim community was a combined religious and temporal entity of which the caliph was supreme head. As Muslim conquests proceeded rapidly, there were factional struggles, doctrinal quarrels, and rivalry for the caliphate. As a result, the nature of caliphate changed, when the Prophet died, the Shi'ite faction insisted that his cousin and son-in-law was the sole rightful heir to the leadership role. They said the ruler's function was not acquired, but innate. He was not only ruler but also teacher, with superior (inherited) powers of mind and heart. The Sunni majority had a secular view of the role of ruler. Losing out, Shi'ites fell back into opposition to the state.

When Sunni Umayyads (the leading family of Mecca) came to power in 644, they claimed to be hereditary monarchs. Shi'ites said they were usurpers. As conquests enlarged the empire, there was also the issue of relationships between Arab conquerors and non-Arab subjects. The Umayyads were a military occupying force of Arab tribal kings. By mid 8th century A.D., there was rival-
ry among the Umayyads and widespread discontent among the conquered peoples.

The 'Abbasids, a branch of Mohammed’s family, began subversive activity in 718, took over in 750, moved the residence of the caliph from Damascus to Baghdad by 762, and began to suppress heretics. The central government lost interest in the North African areas ruled by Muslims. Muslims (mostly Berbers) had conquered most of Spain between 710 and 718. When the 'Abbasids came to power, one branch of the Umayyads fled to Spain, founded a dynasty there in 756, and detached Muslim Spain from 'Abbasid rule.

The 'Abbasids gradually lost control over most of their empire. As the temporal power of the 'Abbasid caliph declined, his emphasis on his religious role increased buttressed by the fact that he was a guardian over the holy shrines in Arabia. The caliphate in Spain claimed rival legitimacy.

Wasserstein’s book is about the Iberian caliphate, which served as a political weapon for two caliphs, then was used to serve the personal ambition of dictator. When that dictatorship fell: "the outworn and fundamentally empty ideology of the Umayyads and their caliphate could never rebuild a state but attempts were made to use it that way for a half century of more after the deposition of the last Umayyad"(p.2). "The result in Spain was a large variety of caliphal forms, none of them long lasting or territorially very significant"(p.2).

Many scholars say that the caliphate in Spain was abolished in 1031. Wasserstein’s main point is that rulers in Spain did not think they had abolished the institution. Theories of the caliphate lived on after 1031, while the institution fell to a very sorry state.

This book is carefully footnoted, contains a bibliography in Arabic, Spanish, French, German, and English. Much of the very detailed evidence is based on coinage.

Someone wishing to compare civilizations and develop theories could draw upon this book for facts about interrelationships between religion and governmental power, but Wasserstein is preoccupied with getting the facts straight. He does not attempt larger of deeper analysis or comparisons. One gets little sense form this book of how glorious the civilization was that Muslims built in Spain, nor the part played by the caliphate in fostering such a glorious civilization.

Corinne Lathrop Glib