

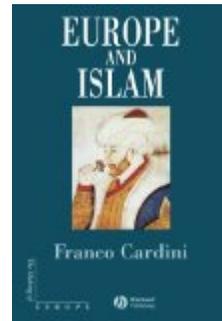
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Franco Cardini. *Europe and Islam*. Translated by Caroline Beamish. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001. x + 338 pages. \$73.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-631-22637-6.

Reviewed by Paul Buell (Department of Independent Learning, Western Washington University)

Published on H-Mideast-Medieval (October, 2002)



A study of European relationships with the Islamic world is a timely topic although, in the eyes of this reviewer, Cardini's attempt to provide an up-to-date survey has not been entirely successful. Cardini's account focuses on twelve themes, to each of which he allocates a chapter. The first is devoted to what Cardini views as the Myth of Poitiers. This battle (732-733), between an invading Muslim army and Franks led by Charles Martel is considered a turning point in history, preventing the domination of a nascent Western civilization by invaders. Cardini makes it clear that the battle solved little, a view generally held, that the threat of the Muslim enemy has probably been greatly exaggerated, and that most of Europe's problems during the period were self-inflicted. The next chapter, one of the strongest in the book and I suspect an area of specialization for Cardini, chronicles military and other conflicts between the Muslim world and Europe from late Carolingian times to the Crusades, with a great deal of attention paid to events in Muslim Spain. These conflicts, plus internal developments over which Christian Europe had no influence, left the Muslim world fragmented and weakened in the face of a speedy Christian response.

This response Cardini chronicles thematically in the following three chapters: chapter 3 deals with the first era of crusades, down to the early twelfth century; chapter 4 focuses on the role of the holy city of Jerusalem before and during the crusades, with a concentration on its role during the Crusading Era; and chapter 5 recounts later events in the Mediterranean region during the Crusading Era. In all of these chapters, and in the one that follows (chapter 7, entitled "The Lords of Fear"), Cardini has a great deal to say about the intellectual side of Europe's relationships with the Muslim world and Islam,

including an examination of its real and irrational phobias whenever faced with any evidence of Muslim power. This theme is expanded upon in chapter 9 which looks at the last real threat from the Muslim world, viz. the Ottoman Empire and the fears that its rise engendered in Europe, despite Philip II's great success at Lepanto.

The rest of the book, chapters 9 through 12, then chronicles the changes that took place as Europe came to be less fearful of the Muslim world, as its decline became only too evident to all observers. That was, with the exception of the brief interval of the late seventeenth century, when Ottoman armies launched their last serious invasion of Europe. Cardini shows how the Muslim world consequently came to be decreasingly feared and even accepted, sometimes idealized, at other times a source of comic relief, as in Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*. In addition, he shows that these views have persisted down to the present in spite of a Renaissance in the Muslim world that has made it a power to reckon with once again. In this regard, he appropriately ends his book, written in the mid-1990s, with a chronological entry of the Taliban's seizure of power in Afghanistan. The cycle has renewed itself again.

Cardini's book is full of detail and is valuable for that fact alone. There is also a great deal of useful analysis. It is, unfortunately, rather one-sided since, unlike Bernard Lewis' book which is written from the Islamic point of view, it provides very little information about the Islamic world for the reader.[1] Although the subject is discussed, the book also contains far too little regarding Europe as the cultural satellite of the Muslim world. This was true even if the cultural goods exported by the Muslim world were often reprocessed from the ancient

Greeks. It continued to be true for much of the Middle Ages and beyond, for example during the tulip crazes of early modern times, and the great interest in “Turkish” music of Mozart’s time. Cardini also says nothing about the Muslim world as a conduit for cultural goods from even greater distances, such as Chinese-style landscape painting via Iran, possibly gunpowder, and certainly Buddhist mysticism via Sufism and Franciscanism.

One can quibble with his title too. The book, in fact, is not about Europe and Islam, but Europe and the Islamic World. There is next to nothing about any interaction between the religion of Islam and Europe, despite the implications of the title. In fact, Cardini has comparatively little to say about Islam at all in his book, not even enough to make the appeal of Islam entirely clear, although he does attempt to do this. Cardini downplays the threat of the Muslim advance in the early Middle Ages and makes the invaders more human. In so doing, he (perhaps unintentionally) buys into the theory that the Crusades represented European aggression and cruelty rather than the logical reaction of a progressively powerful European world to conflicts in the Mediterranean since the seventh century.

The book contains a number of mistakes. For example, on page 10 the author already has Altaic-speakers in full possession of Turkistan at the time of the Battle on the Talas. On page 110, he has both the Golden Horde and the Ilqanate collapsing in the middle of the fourteenth

century, yet only the latter collapsed. Elsewhere in the book, however, Cardini seems perfectly aware of this fact. Perhaps the book was written and edited too quickly.

In addition to the author’s factual errors, there are a number of translator’s errors as well. One example occurs on page 107, where we are told of the Infante Enrico, or “Prince Henry the Navigator.” Enrico, of course, is Italian, the prince’s name in Portuguese is Henriques. Some passages read awkwardly or fail to make sense in English. Neither the index nor the bibliographical note is adequate given the range of material discussed in the book and there are no maps in spite of the wealth of geographical references. This makes it difficult for the general audience, at which the book is apparently aimed, to follow the events. Thus, the price, for the hardcover copy at least, seems high.

In conclusion, this is a useful book for a beginner, but one with many imperfections. It should not be read alone, which is unfortunate, since it was obviously written as a stand-alone introduction. Moreover, the book, with its limited bibliography, offers its readers little compensation for its inadequacies and its inability to provide a more balanced view.

Note

[1]. *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1982).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-mideast-medieval>

Citation: Paul Buell. Review of Cardini, Franco, *Europe and Islam*. H-Mideast-Medieval, H-Net Reviews. October, 2002.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=6834>

Copyright © 2002 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.