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Green-Mercado, Mayte. Visions of Deliverance: Moriscos and the Politics of Prophecy in the Early Modern Mediterranean

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Green-Mercado, Mayte.

Visions of Deliverance: Moriscos and the Politics of Prophecy in the Early Modern Mediterranean.

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019. Pp. xx, 310 + 4 ill. ISBN 978-1-5017-4146-3 (hardcover) US\$58.95.

Between 1568 and 1570, the excitement over the Morisco revolt in the mountainous Alpujarra region of Granada reached Valencia and Aragon. According to inquisitors, the Moriscos (the descendants of former Muslims who converted to Christianity) trusted that the Ottoman sultan would send his army to Spain, and that Spain would once again be Muslim. Fearing that the uprising could expand, King Philip II and his Consejo de Estado sent an army to suppress the rebels, and considered paying back the Turks by supporting a revolt of the Christian Ottoman subjects in Greece. The continuous interweaving of hopes and fears, political strategy and religious discourse run through Mayte Green-Mercado's research as an intriguing *fil rouge*. The result is a rich and fascinating book, which deals with the role of prophecy in shaping the Moriscos' cultural identity and political agenda over the century between the forced conversion of the Muslims imposed by the Catholic Queen Isabella (1502) and the expulsion of the Moriscos decreed by Philip III (1609).

The book is broadly divided into three sections. The first section (chapters 1 and 2) studies how the newly converted Muslims of Castile confronted the trauma of forced assimilation into Catholic society. It begins with the case study of Agustín de Ribera, a Morisco youth of Ajofrín who claimed to receive prophetic visions in which Moriscos would be saved by returning to Islam, and it then shows the importance of Islamic prognostications in mobilizing the Moriscos to revolt in the Alpujarras (1568–71). Focusing on the broader circulation of prophecies in the Mediterranean, the second section (chapters 3 and 4) explores the cross-cultural movement of texts and ideas, and analyzes the role of the Ottomans in Morisco apocalyptic expectations. The author examines Morisco prognostications in apocalyptic texts known as *jofores*, and inquisitorial sources alongside Venetian, Greek, and Ottoman prophecies, tracing in a masterful way the Mediterranean-wide idea of the Ottoman sultan as “Emperor of the Last Days.” She also highlights the political impact that these prophecies had on Iberian Moriscos, as well as on their agency in their dialogue

with the Ottomans, particularly after 1570 (during the years of the so-called Grand Morisco Conspiracy in Valencia and Aragon).

This is probably the most impressive part of the book. Green-Mercado is able to cast fresh light on the problem of a “connected history” of early modern apocalyptic expectations, and her research can be at the same time a model and a starting point for future scholars. Christian prophecies on the Ottoman’s seizure of Rome, in particular, deserve further inquiries. The Venetian prophecy attributed (in a later version) to Guy de Lusignan was transmitted by a large number of manuscript copies that would have been impossible to discuss in a work on Morisco prophecies. It is interesting, however, to note the different years in which, according to the different manuscripts, this prophecy of an “Ottoman Rome” would have been fulfilled: from the years immediately following the fall of Constantinople (1453) to the aftermath of the Battle of Lepanto (1571), when the prophecy reaches Spain. More important, the ambiguity of the messianic expectations concerning the Ottoman sultan should be noted: if in Morisco *jofores* the sultan will bring the Iberian Peninsula back under Muslim rule, in the Venetian prophecy, the sultan’s conquest of Rome simply precludes his miraculous conversion to Christianity and his actions to reform the Christian world (something that apparently, according to the author of this prophecy, Christian rulers were not able to do).

The fluid nature of prophetic discourse clearly emerges in the third and final section of the book (chapters 5 and 6), which frames prophecy as a language of negotiation and diplomacy, that is, as a political discourse deployed by the Moriscos for strategic purposes outside their community. While Gil Pérez, a double agent who acted as an informant of the Inquisition, mentioned Morisco prophecies to confirm the suspicions of the inquisitors, in the period immediately before the expulsion (1601–5), the Moriscos used prophetic discourse to secure help from Henry IV of France for a rebellion planned for the Kingdoms of Valencia and Aragon.

Aside from a wide array of primary sources (mainly inquisitorial trials), the author introduces the requisite secondary literature and discusses it with sharpness and expertise. Studies on Morisco history and culture have greatly increased over the last few decades, but Green-Mercado’s work offers the first comprehensive overview of Morisco apocalyptic expectations. Her work is innovative in at least three ways. First of all, she places Morisco apocalyptic thought and practice in a broad Mediterranean context, showing Morisco

cross-cultural links not only with Ottoman but also with Christian culture. Second, she analyzes prophecy not only as a message but also as a practice that *creates* Morisco political identity and does not derive from it. I find this to be a compelling perspective. Finally, by combining microhistory and global history (within a connected rather than a comparative perspective), she sheds light on the ways in which *jofores* were read, commented on, and understood by the Moriscos. By discovering more about the audience and the circulation of Morisco prophecies, Green-Mercado has taken the only possible path to understanding the function of prophecies as expressing emotions such as fear and hope but also expressing religious identity and political strategy.

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