

**Book Review/ Kitap Tanıtımı: Elizabeth Drayson, 2018,
*The Moor's Last Stand: How Seven Centuries of
Muslim Rule in Spain Came to an End*, London: Profile
Books, 2018.**

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Makale Gönderim Tarihi
12.07.2021

Makale Kabul Tarihi
19.09.2021

Atıf Bilgisi/Reference Information

Chicago: Akyildiz, S. H., "Book Review/ Kitap Tanıtımı: Elizabeth Drayson, 2018, *The Moor's Last Stand: How Seven Centuries of Muslim Rule in Spain Came to an End*, London: Profile Books, 2018.", *Vakanüvis-Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 6/2 (2021): 948-952.

APA: Akyildiz, S. H. (2021). Book Review/ Kitap Tanıtımı: Elizabeth Drayson, 2018, *The Moor's Last Stand: How Seven Centuries of Muslim Rule in Spain Came to an End*, London: Profile Books, 2018.. *Vakanüvis-Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 6 (2) , 948-952.

Reinterpreting the story of Sultan Boabdil and his surrender of Granada in 1491 CE -- and the end of the 750-year-old Muslim rule in Iberia -- is the subject of Elizabeth Drayson's *The Moor's Last Stand: How Seven Centuries of Muslim Rule in Spain Came to an End*. This book investigates the role of the Arab leadership and their attempts to control Granada and contain the encroaching Catholic armies led by the Spanish royalty Ferdinand and Isabella. In the case of Boabdil (Abu Abdallah Muhammad XI, b.1460--d.1533 CE), Drayson says: '*This book sets out to bring to the fore a man who has not received the historical*

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attention he deserves, and who has certainly never been regarded as a conventional hero' (p.xvii). To achieve this aim, the author uses scholarly works and original documents and primary sources.

Boabdil is remembered in history for his mother's, Axia's reprimand, '*You do well, my son, to cry like a woman for what you couldn't defend like a man*' (p.117). After he surrendered the Alhambra's keys to Ferdinand on the 6th January 1492 and entered into exile, it supposedly was said. Or did this story emerge decades after the event? Drayson examines Boabdil anew and asks, was he weak, an ineffective leader, indeed, a client of Ferdinand and Isabella? Alternatively, was he a thoughtful and talented power-broker who made, under the circumstances, the best strategic and moral decision for the besieged Muslims of Granada in 1491?

The book contains nine chapters. Chapter one sets the context of Boabdil's leadership of the Nasrid dynasty of Granada (1237-1491CE) by describing the beginning of the conquest of Iberia (Spain) in 711 CE when the expanding Muslim armies defeated Spain's Visigoth-Catholic ruler, Roderick. Outlined is the history of the Nasrid Granada; highlighted is the fractured political world of Al-Andalus's 20 competing Moor mini-states. Also noted is Pope Gregory's IX, in 1229 CE, '*authorisation of the crusade*' against Al-Andalus and call for the 'reconquest' of Spain (p.8). However, when Boabdil was born, his world was united by Islam and the Arabic language but divided by '*conflict, treachery, brutality and murder*' among the Muslim scholars, clans and royal families (p.21). Chapter two, 'Man of Destiny: Boabdil's Early Life', describes his privileged upbringing within a complicated and dysfunctional family background. His father Abu-I Hassan and uncle El Zagal were both warrior-types who fought to control Granada. His mother, Axia, was a strong influence on Boabdil throughout his life.

Chapter three, 'From Knight to King: Boabdil Reigns in Granada', discusses the luxury of life in the Alhambra, and, in contrast, the daily events, the trade, the truces, the violence and the raids on the land frontier between the Granadan emirate and the Christian north. When Boabdil became sultan in 1482 CE, Ferdinand and Isabella viewed his territory as a vassal state. Chapter four, 'Captured', is about the failed raid by Boabdil and his troops in 1483 into Christian lands. It resulted in

his captivity under the Spanish monarchs and his release on agreement of his vassal status to them. Drayson says in this agreement, Boabdil was 'shrewdly compliant' and 'statesmanlike' (p.62). Ferdinand was aware of the '*internal divisions within the Nasrid camp*' (p.64) and that Boabdil's release from imprisonment would intensify them.

Chapter five 'From King to Pawn', relates to Boabdil's power struggle with his uncle El Zagal, Ferdinand's military support of the former over the latter, the continuing encroachment of the Catholic Monarch's armies on Al-Andalusian strongholds, the failure of the North African Muslim powers to assist the Granadans militarily, and the war-weariness of the Granadans. Chapter six, 'Checkmate: The Path to Surrender', tells of Boabdil, in 1490, sending his vizier to Ferdinand and Isabella; '*...it may have related to the recently agreed truce, although some believe it related to the potential handover of Granada*' (p.93). But Drayson says the texts do not show Boabdil to be a 'traitor to his people' (p.94). Rather, it was Ferdinand who used 'cunning' and 'duplicity' against Boabdil (p.95), as well as his military strategy talents. Indeed, '*The triumphs he had in the war up till 1490 would not have happened without gunpowder technology, something the Moors had not fully utilised*' (p.97). '*Despite the threatening situation, Boabdil was in no mood to relinquish his kingdom. Granada was still formidable because of its position and defences...*' (p.97). However, by 1491, the Granadans faced food shortages and an ever-increasing siege by Ferdinand's army. Secret negotiations and diplomacy between the two sovereigns discussed and debated the terms and conditions of capitulation (surrender) of Granada.

Chapter seven, 'Exile', looks at Boabdil's exile into the surrounding mountains with his people, and eventual decision, in August 1492, to move himself and his family to Morocco--with the encouragement of Ferdinand and Isabella; '*This had almost certainly been their plan all along*', says Drayson (p.121). The author discusses the loss of Granada's Muslims' freedoms and privileges in the eight years after January 1492. Following the surrender agreement, Muslim life appears to have more or less continued; however, the Moor elite sold their lands and property and resettled in North Africa, so those left behind were the Moor farmers and craftspeople. By 1495, the surrender concessions were

withdrawn, and Islam and Muslim institutions were driven underground (p.133). (In 1609, Phillip III ethnically cleansed all Moors from Spain). In this chapter, the Spanish and Muslim primary sources provide first-hand accounts of men and women who retained their Islamic culture in private. Drayson comments: *'There is no blame for Boabdil in these sources...'* (p.139). Chapter eight, 'Boabdil in Fiction and Legend', concerns how Boabdil is remembered, both negatively and positively. The author explains that 'fiction' and 'legend' fill the gaps in his history: *'...which recreated Boabdil's persona in contradictory and conflicting ways that often recall the divergent and confusing contemporary interpretations of his life and deeds'* (p.139).

Chapter nine, 'The Moor's Last Stand', brings the chapters together and explores the legacy of Boabdil and what this means for today's and tomorrow's world. Drayson explains that *'One of my aims in this book has been to rescue Boabdil's reputation. That reputation hinges on the vexed issue of how Spain's medieval legacy is perceived'* (p.163). She states that *'history and fiction merged in the first centuries after 1492 to create an image of Boabdil which demonised him'* (p.170). During later centuries, historians and fiction writers portrayed Boabdil in a more understanding and positive light. Some modern writers associated him with 'political resistance', 'cultural tolerance', and 'the embodiment of exile' (p.173); while his defence of Granada shows he *'had more than a touch of medieval heroism about him'* (p.177).

So, was Boabdil the hero of the Granadans or the dupe of Ferdinand and Isabella? Was he a talented diplomat and negotiator or the wrong person for the job? The dysfunctional Nasrid dynasty and the warlike Hasan and El Zagal pathed the way for Boabdil's dilemma in 1491. Yet, he alone had to decide whether or not to defend Granada to the death and, in the process, see the Granadans massacred by Ferdinand and Isabella's army? Alternatively, should he sign a surrender agreement and ensure the continuity of the Moors within a united Catholic Spain? Boabdil chose the latter option. However, very soon, the aims of the victorious Ferdinand and Isabella became apparent, and it did not include a role for the Moors, Arabic culture and Islam, tolerance, and multiculturalism. Consequently, the Granadans experienced 'shame' and 'misfortune' (p.138); they lost their culture and 'sense of belonging'.

At the same time, their elites felt the sorrow of internal and external exile--with both groups 'strangers in their own land' (p.139).

The maps and illustrations in this book are helpful and assist in our understanding of the geography, architecture, art and culture connected with the books' subject. Overall, this book is a good academic starting point for studying the final decades of Muslim Al-Andalus, and Drayson has produced a readable, sympathetic, and topical history of Boabdil and the Moor civilisation in Europe.