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King John’s Delegation to the Almohad Court (1212)

Actualité. Annonce de parution


A study of medieval interreligious interactions as manifested in Matthew Paris’s story of an English delegation to the Almohads.

Is Matthew Paris’s story of an English diplomatic delegation, sent by King John to the caliph of Morocco in the summer of 1212, nothing more than fiction, or does it report actual historical events? Did King John really offer to subjugate his kingdom to the Muslim caliph and did he consider converting to Islam? Was one of John’s diplomats genuinely a converted Jew with whom the Muslim ruler conversed about theological issues? And how may a new reading of this medieval chronicle in its appropriate historical context contribute to our understanding of the professionalization of diplomatic practice, the emergence of European bureaucratic kingship, Christian-Muslim political interaction, interreligious polemic, and conversion? In this book, these questions are explored as part of the first full-scale study of Matthew Paris’s report. The volume proposes an entirely new interpretation of the text and portrays a multifaceted and inherently complex picture of the interactions between Christians, Muslims, and Jews around 1200 that draws on law, politics, statecraft, history, culture, and religion. This study also prompts a re-evaluation of the delegation story as a ‘test case’ for John’s measures during his reign. Matthew’s text is examined in its historical context of Christian-Muslim encounters on the frontier in order to advance our understanding of a crucial era of political and diplomatic transformation.

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