

Maimonides. Medieval Modernist. By FRED GLADSTONE BRATTON. Boston, 1967. Beacon Press. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. ix, 159. \$5.95.

The author's intention in writing this book was to produce a brief, popular, palatable biography of Moses Maimonides primarily for the Christian reader. He felt that Maimonides, the great twelfth-century Jewish scholar, Talmudist, and philosopher—author of the most comprehensive code of Jewish law (*Mishneh Torah*) and the influential philosophic opus *Guide for the Perplexed*, as well as numerous medical volumes—was unknown and unsung. More than that, only a non-Jewish writer, an outsider whose detachment would enhance his perceptivity, could bring to the subject “a greater degree of objectivity and a wider perspective” (p. vi). I fully appreciate the goal and enthusiastically endorse the motives of creative, sympathetic popularization and would, therefore, have been pleased to praise this book. On the whole, however, I find that there is a tremendous discrepancy between the promise and the performance. The book, written with verve and skill, contains flabby generalizations, oversimplifications, and unwarranted associations. Especially troubling is the author's fondness for reductionist formulae, the presentation of telescoped information which is often imprecise.

The title “medieval modernist” reveals the author's major gambit: to underscore Maimonides' philosophic and religious relevance and lasting significance by modernizing him, by depicting him as ahead of his times, by focusing upon him as the possible harbinger of modern science, modern Bible criticism, modern revisionist theology—in short, “the precursor of Spinoza and Einstein” (p. 27). In keeping with this, Maimonides is criticized on occasion for not being modern enough (see, e.g., p. 104 or p. 119: “Such a stand [on corporeal resurrection] is disappointing to the modern reader”). This impressionistic modernization of Maimonides gets completely out of hand when the author moralistically offers gratuitous advice to modern Jews and urges them to let “the spirit of Maimonides” free them “from bondage to an anachronistic legalism” (p. 149)—strange but familiar words.

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I. TWERSKY

Alfonso X, El Sabio. By JOHN ESTEN KELLER. New York, 1967. Twayne Publishers. Twayne's World Authors Series. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 198. \$3.95.

Although Alfonso X, El Sabio (1221-1284), is probably the one

monarch of medieval Spain whose name is known to the generality of students, real familiarity with his work has normally been limited to specialists. True, Alfonso's achievements in the worlds of literature, law, and learning have been the object of scholarly research for a considerable period of time. But up to now there has not been available in English a critical synthesis of those studies addressed to the beginning or casual student of the history of medieval Spanish culture. Keller's book responds to the need in an admirable fashion.

With a facility available only to the knowledgeable scholar, he has managed to concentrate his information and organize it into a format which is useful as an introduction to his subject, while retaining that measure of sophistication required by the advanced student. Without artifice the material is presented in a logical, straightforward, and coherent manner. If the reader looks for information on a particular aspect of Alfonso's life and career, he will find it readily and intelligently developed. For instance, the chapters on Alfonso's work in sacred and profane literature not only itemize his contributions and analyze them, but use background material to provide a short summary of the literary tradition within which Alfonso was working. Similar treatment is given to the fields of law, science, and historical writing.

Of course, particular chapters will appeal to readers according to their interests. Latin Americanists, for instance, will derive much quick profit from the chapter devoted to legal activity, especially the production of *Las Siete Partidas*, in view of the fact that those laws were transmitted to the New World and became operative there. Students of the history of Spanish literature obviously will find Keller's work indispensable. Indeed, his book is capable of serving so many interests that this reviewer does not hesitate to recommend it for every college library.

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COBURN V. GRAVES

The Crusader Kingdom of Valencia. Reconstruction on a Thirteenth-Century Frontier. 2 vols. By ROBERT IGNATIUS BURNS, S.J. Cambridge, 1967. Harvard University Press. Illustrations. Maps. Notes. Appendices. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xviii, 561. \$18.50.

In recent decades a number of historians of medieval Spain and Portugal have produced brilliant studies about the moving frontiers of the Christian kingdoms in the Iberian peninsula. For instance, Ramón d'Abadal has sketched the early advance to the Ebro valley in Catalonia, Pallars, and Ribagorça. Claudio Sánchez Albornoz and