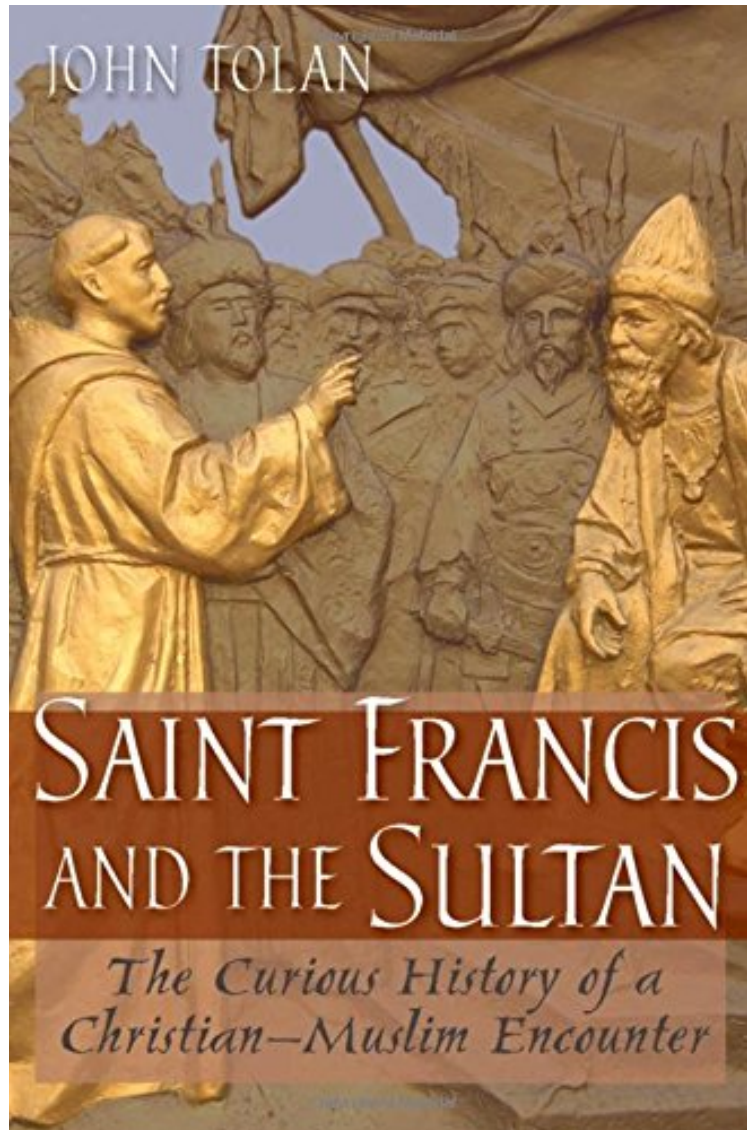


Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter

John V. Tolan

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In September, 1219, as the armies of the Fifth Crusade besieged the Egyptian city of Damietta, Francis of Assisi went to Egypt to preach to Sultan al-Malik al-Kmil. Although we in fact know very little about this event, this has not prevented artists and writers from the thirteenth century to the twentieth, unencumbered by mere facts, from portraying Francis alternatively as a new apostle preaching to the infidels, a scholastic theologian proving the truth of Christianity, a champion of the crusading ideal, a naive and quixotic wanderer, a crazed religious fanatic, or a medieval Gandhi preaching peace, love, and understanding. Al-Kmil, on the other hand, is variously presented as an enlightened pagan monarch hungry for evangelical teaching, a cruel oriental despot, or a worldly libertine. Saint Francis and the Sultan takes a detailed look at these richly varied artistic responses to this brief but highly symbolic meeting. Throwing into relief the changing fears and hopes that Muslim-Christian encounters have inspired in European artists and writers in the centuries since, it gives a uniquely broad but precise vision of the evolution of Western attitudes towards Islam and the Arab world over the last eight hundred years.

"[A] richly documented and attractively illustrated study." --Catholic News Service "A brilliant study on a timely topic... The entire book shows impeccable scholarship, precise writing, and keen cultural insights that speak with unparalleled authority and ecumenical diplomacy. ...Highly recommended for all academic libraries." --Catholic Library World "A welcome and useful survey of the changing European perspectives on Francis and al-Kamil, and will be a welcome addition for scholars and readers interested in Francis, his changing image, and European perspective on Islam." --The Catholic Historical "...Tolan provides fascinating insights into the historical context in which the trestises and images under discussion came into being." --Bret Roset, Radboud University "John Tolan has produced a richly detailed metahistory of an intriguing encounter between East and West, Islam and Christianity. The modest lesson we can draw from it, it seems, is that every encounter is pregnant with multiple meanings and interpretations. This, in turn, should move us to consider the best possible meaning and interpretation so as to better allow for mutual learning and understanding." --The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences "No single individual would have the scholarly competence to cover this much material, and its authors list reads like a who's who of contemporary ecumenical critically orthodox theology...How well does the book accomplish its task? It is written and organized well, and the articles are uniformly of high quality. The writers are some of the best orthodox theologians today...It is an excellent starting point for further research and, to the best of my knowledge, there is nothing else like it. Some of the articles are gems, and all are worth reading." --The Living Church

About the Author John V. Tolan was educated at Yale and Chicago. He has taught at universities in North America and Europe and is currently Professor of Medieval History at the University of Nantes. He has published widely in both French and English, including most recently *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (2002).