

CULTURAL FLOURISHING IN TENTH CENTURY MUSLIM SPAIN  
AMONG MUSLIMS, JEWS, AND CHRISTIANS

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By

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# CULTURAL FLOURISHING IN TENTH CENTURY MUSLIM SPAIN AMONG MUSLIMS, JEWS, AND CHRISTIANS

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to discover what made it possible for such an extraordinary cultural flourishing to occur among Muslims, Jews, and Christians in tenth century Muslim Spain during the reign of the Umayyad Muslim leader Abd al-Rahman III and his Jewish vizier (minister of state), Hasdai ibn Shaprut. What historical, societal, and personal factors made it possible for these two leaders to collaborate?

My analysis primarily looks at the time of Muslim rule in Medieval Spain (called al-Andalus by the Muslims and Sepharad by the Jews) from 711 to 1031 C.E. However, in order to place that time period in context, it is important to look at what was happening in Spain before the Muslim invasion as well as what was happening in the known world, in particular the Mediterranean basin, from the first to the eleventh centuries. For example, the Muslim empire spread rapidly in the seventh and eighth centuries, eventually encompassing the territories from Spain to the Indus River and controlling all the trade routes across the Mediterranean.

The discovery of the works of Aristotle and other Greeks during the eighth century by the Muslims in Baghdad was also important. The Muslims translated the Greek documents into Arabic, analyzed the ideas, provided commentary, and

continued the process of discovery. The information, spread throughout the Muslim world, would have a dramatic impact on the tenth century Spain of Abd al-Rahman III and Hasdai ibn Shaprut. Most of the organized scientific activity in al-Andalus began under their patronage. Together these two built an educational structure to support scholarly and cultural advancement. They put the scholars and translation teams in place that would impact generations to come, laying much of the foundation for the later European Renaissance.

Abd al-Rahman III based his rule on the collaboration of various national/ethnic/religious groups within his kingdom: Arabs, Berbers, Jews, and Christian descendents of the Iberio-Hispanic population. For the most part, he offered these groups equal opportunity to participate in public affairs and to rise in government service. He was known for his tolerance and encouraged a spirit of co-existence. He came the closest of any of the Spanish medieval rulers, Muslim or Christian, to achieving the spirit of *convivencia*, the idealizing word used by historians Ramon Menendez Pidal and Americo Castro to describe the co-existence of Muslims, Jews, and Christians in Muslim Spain. This is not to say there was total harmony and peace in Medieval Spain. There were tensions within the territory as well as external threats.

The thesis challenges us to learn from the examples set by Abd al-Rahman III and Hasdai ibn Shaprut and to seek a spirit of *convivencia* for our own imperfect world just as they did in their imperfect world. This requires us to step outside the real and imagined boundaries of our religions and societies, to act for a larger common good, *and* to teach our children these values.

## PREFACE

In light of the many conflicts in the world today where religious differences play a major role, I was interested in finding examples in the past where people of different religions have worked together in a positive way. The book written by Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* inspired my thesis topic.

Many in the West are not aware of the intellectual debt that we owe the Muslims and Jews of the medieval Islamic empire. It began in Baghdad when the Muslims rediscovered the intellectual and scientific documents of the Greeks, which had been lost to Europe. The Muslims not only translated the Greek documents into Arabic, but they analyzed the ideas, provided commentary, and continued the process of discovery. These ideas were transmitted, exchanged, and further developed throughout the broad Islamic empire from India to Spain, with Medieval Spain becoming an intellectual powerhouse. It would be the ideas transmitted through Muslim Spain that would provide the foundation for much of the European Renaissance. It is my hope that American school children will be taught about these remarkable accomplishments that could have only happened with people of different religions, languages, and cultures working together.

The focus of my thesis is to examine why such a cultural flourishing occurred among Muslims, Jews, and Christians in tenth century Islamic Spain, called

al-Andalus by the Muslims and Sepharad by the Jews. It has taken at least 500 years to get to today's level of understanding about Medieval Spain. History is usually written by the winners. After the completion of the Christian Reconquest of Spain in 1492, resulting in the expulsion of the Jews and Muslims, the historical records of that time were written from a Christian point of view. It was not until the late nineteenth century that historians looked at sources written in Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin to examine the Islamic and Jewish heritage of Spain.

There has been a longstanding debate among scholars that continues today about how tolerant or intolerant Islamic Spain was. Those who support the view of tolerance commonly use the word *convivencia* to describe the interactions among the Muslims, Jews, and Christians. The historian and philologist Ramon Menendez Pidal (1869-1968) coined the term *convivencia*, meaning co-existence of norms struggling against each other.<sup>1</sup> By studying languages, he made important contributions to the understanding of the multi-ethnic origins of modern Spaniards from the time of Medieval Spain. Pidal's student, the historian Americo Castro, 1885-1972, borrowed Pidal's notion of *convivencia* to explain Spain's multi-religious, multi-ethnic society in an idealized way. He wrote that Spaniards did not become the distinct group that they are until after the Muslim invasion of 711. Alex Novikoff writes that...“Castro credited Islam with having

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1. Alex Novikoff, “Between Tolerance and Intolerance in Medieval Spain: A Historiographic Enigma,” *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim in Confluence and Dialogue* 11, no. 1-2, (2005): 21.



introduced the ‘horizon of tolerance’ to the Spanish peninsula, its origins being in the character of the Koran [Qur’an], which was, by virtue of its syncretism of Islamic beliefs with those of the Judeo-Christian tradition, a monument of tolerance in itself.”<sup>2</sup> However, Castro also thought that some of the motivation for the three groups to work together was a practical approach to the political realities of the time. Thomas Glick writes that recent historians tend to use the term *co-existence* because that takes into account the social dynamic of contact and conflict.<sup>3</sup>

Glick notes that in the last two decades there has been a “historiographic revolution” in scholarship pertaining to Spanish medieval history and an increased interest in Islamic studies. New regional and local data has become available. In addition there is new work being done in medieval archaeology that will be particularly helpful in looking at the Muslim society. This will help compensate for the fact that more has been written about Christian Spain than Muslim Spain.<sup>4</sup> It will be interesting to keep abreast of the new information that emerges about this important time and place in medieval history.

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2. Alex Novikoff, “Between Tolerance and Intolerance in Medieval Spain,” 21.

3. Thomas F. Glick, “Convivencia: An Introductory Note,” in *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*, ed. Vivian B. Mann, Thomas F. Glick, Jerrilynn D. Dodds (New York: George Braziller, 1992), 2.

4. Thomas F. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005), xv.

My thesis addresses the factors that made co-existence among the Muslims, Jews, and Christians possible in the tenth century during the reign of the Umayyad Muslim ruler Abd al-Rahman III and his Jewish vizier (minister of state), Hasdai ibn Shaprut. The city of Cordoba was the capital of Abd al-Rahman III. Since then many have lovingly referred to the “spirit of Cordoba” as a way to describe the bright cultural flourishing that occurred there.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have enjoyed the Liberal Studies Program at Georgetown University with its focus on interdisciplinary studies, human values, and ethics. I have learned something valuable from each of the professors that I have had in the program. I especially want to thank Professor Ori Z. Soltes, Ph.D., for his ideas, support, and time in mentoring me through the thesis process. I value his expertise in many fields and his enthusiasm for the learning process.

I also wish to thank my family, friends, and co-workers for their tremendous support. A special thanks goes to my son and daughter-in-law, Christopher and Amanda Allen.

In writing this thesis, I found the scholarly works of the following authors to be particularly useful: Maria Rosa Menocal, Jane S. Gerber, Thomas F. Glick, David Levering Lewis, Joseph P. O’Callaghan, Richard Fletcher, Alex Novikoff, and Bernard S. Bachrach.

## DEDICATION

To my parents Mary and Richard Penn  
who have spent their lives quietly working for the common good

## NAMING CONVENTIONS

The Arabic name for the medieval Islamic province in Spain is al-Andalus. Its inhabitants are called Andalusis. The term Andalusí can refer to a single individual or the culture. Thomas Glick writes that to call them Andalusians is misleading because that usage connotes the present-day region of Andalusia, whose boundaries are smaller than those of the historical al-Andalus.<sup>5</sup>

The Jewish name for medieval Spain is Sepharad (also spelled Sefarad). The Romans called it Hispania and the Greeks called it Iberia.

This paper covers time in two eras. The years before the birth of Christ are referred to as Before the Common Era (B.C.E) and time since then is referred to as the Common Era (C.E.).

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5. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, xxi.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the factors that made it possible for a cultural flourishing to occur among Muslims, Jews, and Christians in tenth century Islamic Spain during the reign of the Umayyad Muslim leader Abd al-Rahman III and his Jewish vizier (minister of state) Hasdai ibn Shaprut. This research effort explores the question of how historical, societal, and personal factors made it possible for these two leaders to collaborate. The study examines how their collaboration led to such an extraordinary cultural flourishing in the tenth century that laid the groundwork for an even greater cultural flourishing in subsequent centuries and would lay the foundation for much of the European Renaissance. It appears that they were the right men in the right place at the right time.

Abd al-Rahman III, or Abderaman as he is known in Latin, lived from 891 to 961. He ruled from 912 to 961, first as emir and later as the self-appointed Caliph. The Jew Hasdai ibn Shaprut lived from 915 to 970. He served as vizier for Abd al-Rahman III from the 940s until 961 and for al-Hakam II from 961 to 970. The historical analysis will show that both Abd al-Rahman III and Hasdai ibn Shaprut were products of their family upbringings and the societies their ancestors had forged. In addition, both were extraordinary men who worked individually and as partners in a very positive way.



The magnificence of the tenth century can be summarized in the following ways. By the 900s, the city of Cordoba in al-Andalus had reached its zenith. It was an international center of trade and learning. The mixture of Muslim art and architecture with the Roman and Visigothic influences made it a beautiful city. It was said that nowhere else in Europe could such splendor be found. It had many mosques, synagogues, fountains, and public baths. Cordoba was home to at least 100,000 people of various nationalities and ethnic backgrounds.<sup>1</sup> It was a center of intellectual activities attracting both Muslim and Jewish scholars. The influx of Muslim scientific and medical knowledge and agricultural and technological advances from the east contributed to its success. The city reportedly had 70 libraries. It was said that the Caliph's library held approximately 400,000 volumes.<sup>2</sup> Muslims and Jews established schools and many great intellectual works were studied and translated into other languages. Embellishment of Cordoba reached a peak in the tenth century under Abd al-Rahman III, with marble and semi-precious stones being imported from Constantinople to construct a new palace.

The Jewish statesman Hasdai ibn Shaprut described Sepharad (the Jewish name for al-Andalus) in the following way:

The land is rich, abounding in rivers, springs, and aqueducts; a land of corn, oil and wine, of fruits and all manner of delicacies; it has pleasure-gardens and orchards, fruitful trees of every kind, including the leaves of trees upon which the silkworm feeds....There are also found among us mountains...with veins

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1. Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 28.

2. Ibid., 29.

of sulphur, porphyry, marble and crystal. Merchants congregate in it and traffickers from the ends of earth...bringing spices, precious stones, splendid wares for kings and princes and all the desirable things of Egypt. Our king has collected very large treasures of silver, gold, precious things, and valuables such as no king has ever collected. His yearly revenue is about 100,000 gold pieces, the greater part of which is derived from the merchants who come hither from various countries and islands.<sup>3</sup>

The fame of the city was known well beyond al-Andalus. The German nun Hrotswitha of Gandersheim (ca 940-1002), who was close to diplomatic circles, called Cordoba “the new imperial city, the glittering ornament of the world, shining in the western regions.”<sup>4</sup>

In al-Andalus men of the aristocratic class, whether Muslim, Jewish or Christian, surrounded themselves with cultivated people and supported young, gifted talent. The Muslims had a special attachment to the beauty of the Arabic language. They had a rich oral tradition where poetic and linguistic ability were valued. Arabic was also the language of the Muslim sacred texts – the Qur’an and the Hadith – and understood to be God’s preferred language. Most Andalusis, no matter their religion, became fluent in Arabic in order to succeed in business. A refinement in Arabic diction and expression was a prerequisite for advancement in public service. Writing and reciting poetry were not only valued in elite circles, but were also popular within some of the lower classes. Arabic poetry was used in the everyday business of the

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3. Ibid., 31.

4. Joseph F. O’Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 116.

court; official government correspondence was often written in poetry.<sup>5</sup> Poetry was also used in the religious sphere, in secular entertainment, and in describing battles.

Al-Andalus stood above the rest of the Muslim cultural centers because of the sheer volume and intensity of its literary outpouring, with participation of people from all three major religions.<sup>6</sup> The tenth century was a period of intense cultural borrowing among the Muslims, Jews, and Christians. The best and brightest scholars were attracted to al-Andalus. An educated person of that era would also have had knowledge of Greek philosophy, mathematics, and science, which the Muslims had preserved in the Middle East. In particular, the teachings of the Greek philosopher Aristotle became important to all three religions. The next chapter describes the Muslim incorporation of the Greek heritage.

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5. Gerber, 63.

6. Ibid., 62.

## CHAPTER 2

### EARLY HISTORY OF THE MUSLIM WORLD

To put the Muslim invasion and rule of Medieval Spain from 711 to 1031 C.E. (the end of the Spanish Umayyad period) in perspective, it is important to understand the early history of the entire Muslim world.

The Muslim world grew rapidly from its humble origins in Arabia after the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632. By 641, the Muslims had control over Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and had defeated the large Sassanid Persian Empire. By 656, they had conquered Cyprus and Tripoli in North Africa, and had established rule in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Sind. By 750 they had expanded into Spain and North Africa in the west and to the Indus River in the east.<sup>1</sup> As would be expected in such a large empire, there were many Muslim tribal groups or dynasties that were often in competition with one another. The Umayyad dynasty in Damascus, Syria, was the center of the empire from 661 to 750. It was during this time that the invasion and initial settlement of Spain took place by Arab-born Muslims and North African Berber Muslims. In 750, the Abbasid dynasty overthrew the Damascus Umayyad dynasty at the center of the empire. The Abbasids tried to kill all the Umayyads, but one escaped and made his way to Spain. This young man, Abd al Rahman I, would transplant the Umayyad dynasty to Spain.

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1. Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History* (New York: Random House, 2000), xiv - xvi.

The Abbasid dynasty, making Baghdad its capital, became the cultural center of the empire. The zenith of Abbasid power was during the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786-809).<sup>2</sup> He has name recognition today because he is the caliph in the story, *Arabian Nights*. He encouraged a great cultural renaissance in Baghdad and an exchange of information with other cities of the empire. He also enjoyed diplomatic relations with the Christian Frankish King Charlemagne. When Charlemagne was anointed the Emperor of the Western Roman Empire by Pope Leo III in 800, Harun al-Rashid sent a live elephant as a gift for Charlemagne's palace complex.<sup>3</sup>

The genesis of the intellectual achievements of medieval times was based on the exposure of the Muslims of Baghdad to the works of the ancient Greeks and Muslim recognition of the importance of this information. When the Arabs conquered Syria and Iraq, they came into contact with Syriac-speaking Christians who were familiar with the intellectual and scientific heritage of Greek antiquity that included astronomy, astrology, calendrical calculations, mathematics, medicine, biology, philosophy, ethics, civics, and other fields. The Greek philosopher Aristotle had introduced the concepts of using empirical research and using observations of the natural world to explain why things happen as opposed to using only religion as a way to explain things. Not only were the Muslims interested in translating these

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2. Ibid., xvii.

3. David Levering Lewis, *God's Crucible: Islam and the Making of Europe, 570 to 1121* (New York: Norton, 2008), 297.

documents, but they also analyzed the information and continued to expand on the knowledge they gained. The Muslims in the East also transmitted what they learned from the Indians, Persians, and Chinese.<sup>4</sup> From the Hindus of India they gained knowledge of many mathematical concepts such as the numerical system that we now call Arabic numerals as well as the idea of a decimal point value. Paper-making was introduced into Iraq from China. Caliph Harun al-Rashid realized the importance of paper as an important technology for recording, preserving, and transmitting information and instituted its use in Baghdad. This would not only help facilitate the sharing of scholarly information, but also enhance governmental administration. The use of paper spread rapidly in the empire; however, the production of it remained in the eastern provinces for some time.<sup>5</sup> The Persians contributed much — from a style of government to a special glazing on pottery. Generally speaking, ideas and technologies were transmitted gradually and each generation improved on what the previous generations had accomplished.

The Aristotelian corpus was translated into Arabic, mainly in Baghdad. Some literal translations were made in the 770s during the rule of the Abbasid Caliphs al-Mansur and al-Mahdi.<sup>6</sup> Caliph al-Mamun (r. 813-833), created the

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4. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, 7, 139, 279, 287, 299, 319, 323, and 333.

5. Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2002), 93.

6. Glick, “Science in Medieval Spain: The Jewish Contribution in the Context of the Convivencia” in *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*, ed. Vivian B. Mann, Thomas F. Glick, and Jerrilynn D. Dodds (New York: George Braziller, 1992), 103.

“House of Wisdom” in 830 to continue intellectual development and the translation of documents into Arabic. More refined versions of the Aristotelian corpus were produced in the early 800s, especially by Hunayn ibn Ishaq (808-873). He and others working with him also translated one hundred of Galen’s medical and philosophical treatises into Arabic.<sup>7</sup> By the tenth century, early Arab Aristotelians like Abu Nasr al-Farabi (ca. 878-950)<sup>8</sup> were able to refine the corpus to be consistent with the techniques of Aristotelian criticism that the Muslims had acquired. By the middle of the eleventh century most of Aristotle’s important books were available to Arabic-speaking scholars.<sup>9</sup>

Ideas were transmitted, exchanged, and further developed throughout the broad Islamic empire from India to Spain. As the information spread throughout the empire, great universities with impressive libraries would be built in various cities. In particular, the repercussions would be felt in Cordoba and other cities in Spain by the tenth century.

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7. John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford History of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 331-333.

8. *Ibid.*, 271.

9. Glick, “Science in Medieval Spain,” 104.

## CHAPTER 3

### EARLY HISTORY OF SPAIN

In order to understand what Spain was like when the Muslims invaded in 711, it is important to take a brief look at early Spanish history. The Iberian Peninsula has served as a natural crossroads and has been populated by many diverse peoples. Its location is a primary factor. It is located at the southwestern edge of Europe and the northwestern edge of Africa. Its eastern and southeastern shores are on the Mediterranean Sea and at its southern tip is the Strait of Gibraltar, the passageway to the Atlantic Ocean. The western boundary of the peninsula *is* the Atlantic Ocean.

#### **Earliest Known Groups of People**

Some of the ancient people of the land were called Iberians who were thought to have come from Africa. The Celts, an Indo-European people, entered the peninsula by crossing the Pyrenees Mountains. They settled in the northern and western reaches of the peninsula between 900 and 600 B.C.E.<sup>1</sup> The Celts had a more advanced civilization than the Iberians had. They were using iron weapons, horses, and chariots – as opposed to the bronze weapons of the Iberians - and this enabled them to dominate the indigenous population. As a result of intermarriages between these groups, geographers and historians began referring to the peninsula as Celtiberia.<sup>2</sup>

Other groups were also interested in settling in Iberia. The Phoenicians started trading posts along the Mediterranean coast around 800 B.C.E. The Greeks began to

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1. O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, 27.

2. Ibid., 27.



establish colonies in the seventh century B.C.E. The Tartessians, a people of African origin, also created a powerful kingdom in Iberia. In the sixth century B.C.E. the Carthaginians overthrew the Tartessians. Carthage developed a commercial empire in Sicily and southern Spain over the next several centuries. Eventually this provoked the competitive interests of the Romans, leading to fighting between the two powers. The Romans destroyed Carthaginian rule in Spain around 200 B.C.E. and continued fighting the native population in the far north and west until finally dominating the entire peninsula around 14 C.E.<sup>3</sup>

### **Roman Rule and the Impact of Christianity**

O' Callaghan writes that the Roman conquest brought the Hispanic peoples into the mainstream of European civilization and for the first time the peninsula was unified under one government.<sup>4</sup> Six hundred years of Roman rule brought aqueducts, bridges, roads, laws, and an administrative government structure. The Romans also spread Christianity during the course of the fourth century.

During the first several centuries of the Common Era, the government in Rome considered the Christian sects to be “superstitio,” meaning that they were considered politically subversive. The Christian sects were competing with various Jewish sects and pagan religions to be accepted as legitimate. A radical change occurred in the fourth century after Roman Emperor Constantine’s putative conversion to Christianity. With the Edict of Milan in 313, he gave Christianity equal standing with other

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3. Ibid., 27.

4. Ibid., 28.

competing religious sects. Constantine desired political unity of the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire and saw Christianity as a means to help achieve this. Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea in 325 to try to develop a consensus regarding the nature of God as Christianity understood it and the relationship between the Father and the Son. Ultimately, it was the divinity of Christ and the concept of the Trinity that were accepted at the Council and thereafter defined “normative” Christianity. The original Nicene Creed was formulated which described the relationship between the Father and the Son as devised of the same substance or of one being. The Arian Christian doctrine, which in simple terms is a belief in one God that does not recognize the person of Jesus as one with the Father, was condemned. Another result of the Council of Nicaea was the beginning of legislative measures which would have a negative impact on Jews.

Emperor Theodosius I followed with his decree in 380 which made Christianity the only legally recognized form of religion in the Roman Empire. Those who followed other religions were considered heretics and subject to negative imperial action. In 381, Theodosius followed this with another law and gathered the Council of Bishops at Constantinople to reaffirm the teachings of the Council of Nicaea with some modifications.<sup>5</sup>

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5. Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. “Theodosius” (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) 444.

## **Jews Facilitated Trade in the Roman Empire**

The Jewish settlement on the Iberian Peninsula was an ancient one. Jewish migration increased during Roman times from approximately 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. throughout the Mediterranean, with many settling in Hispania at least by the second century C.E.<sup>6</sup> Some of the Jews were successful merchants and traders and were well-connected throughout the Mediterranean. At its height under Emperors Trajan (r. 98-117) and Hadrian (r. 117-138), the Roman Empire maintained a communications network through its road system that facilitated the exchange of trade and information among the widely dispersed Jews. In the early days of the Roman Empire, the rulers realized that the Jews were an important economic and cultural force throughout the empire. The Jews were often treated as an autonomous and self-governing people, and lived in organized communities. Hispania was one of the wealthiest provinces of the Empire in the third century and Jews contributed to that success.

However, there were already some mixed feelings about the Jews. Even before the Roman Empire officially converted to Christianity, there was concern among church leaders that some pagans were more interested in converting to Judaism than to Christianity. Spanish ecclesiastical legislation was adopted at the

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6. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain*, 2.

Council of Elvira in 306 to try to limit specific social interactions between Jews and Christians.<sup>7</sup>

Trade patterns were disrupted as the Roman Empire began to decline in the fifth century and conditions became increasingly chaotic and lawless. The people of Hispania became less prosperous as the overall economy of the Empire declined. There was a trend toward ruralization as cities and industrial production diminished.

### **Rule of the German Visigoths**

The German Visigoths crossed the Pyrenees Mountains in the early fifth century C.E., but it took several centuries for them to expand their rule over the peninsula. There were approximately 200,000 Arian Christian Visigoths who would attempt to rule over millions of Latin-speaking Trinitarian Christians.<sup>8</sup> As Arians, the Visigoths did not have a religious conflict with the Jews' belief in one God as the Trinitarian Christians did. The Visigoths also realized that the Jews were an important part of the society and economy. In the beginning, the Goths asked the Jews to help them negotiate with the indigenous majority. Eventually the Goths would recognize the superiority of the Roman civilization to their own and in time they adopted the Latin language and much of the Roman legal system.

There was considerable competition for power in Visigothic Spain. The monarchy was a weak institution. There were infighting and factionalism among the Visigothic nobles. Each succession from one king to another was marked by violence.

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7. Ibid., 5–6.

8. Ibid., 8.

In addition, the church was trying to exert its power. The church has variously been described by some historians as weak and by others as a strong institution. Individual clergy tried to influence the succession process and often had their own political or religious agenda. What the nobles and clergy did have in common was that they both exploited the peasants.

Scholars wish that there was more information available from this time period to better understand the relationships among the Visigoth kings, the church, and the Jewish communities. Scholars have differed over the reasons for some of the anti-Jewish policies, e.g., the desire for Christian religious unity, economic greed for Jewish property, or political payback when the Jews did not support a particular king in the succession process. However, there is no doubt that political power was an important factor for both the kings and the church in their actions. Bernard Bachrach asserts that the various Jewish communities may have been powerful enough to help certain kings gain power. He asserts that it was the kings against whom the Jews had worked who instituted the stricter anti-Jewish policies.<sup>9</sup>

Most scholars regard King Reccared's conversion to Trinitarian Christianity from Arian Christianity in 589 as marking a shift in attitude toward the Jews. He ruled from 586 to 601. At the Third Council of Toledo in 589 he asserted that Trinitarian Christianity was the official religion of the kingdom and that the king had

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9. Bernard S. Bachrach, "A Reassessment of Visigothic Jewish Policy, 589-711," *The American Historical Review* 78, No. 1. (February 1973): 22.

responsibility for both temporal and spiritual matters. However, Bachrach writes that King Reccared helped the Jews when it was in his political interests to do so.<sup>10</sup>

King Sisebut (r. 612-621) was the first to sponsor the most severe anti-Jewish legislation. He decreed that Jews must convert or leave the land. The following Visigothic kings also had strong anti-Jewish policies: Sisenand (r. 631-636), Chintila (r. 636-640), Chindasuith (r. 642-653), Recessuinth (r. 649-672), Erwig (r. 680-687), Egica (r. 687-702), and Roderick (r. 710-711).<sup>11</sup> However, of the eighteen kings who ruled Spain from 586 until 713, Bachrach writes that at least half of the monarchs pursued policies that varied from benign neglect of the Jews to support of the Jews.<sup>12</sup> There are also questions about whether there was uniform enforcement of the laws across the kingdom. Local and regional areas had some degree of autonomy. Unfortunately though, the laws enacted at the various Councils of Toledo with approval by the kings would become the law of the land and part of the official Canon Law of the Catholic Church. Jane Gerber writes that these laws “served as legal precedents in other parts of Europe, even though they had been specifically devised to address local conditions....”<sup>13</sup>

The Jews were a clearly identifiable group because of their tendency toward community isolation and by the fact that their religious practices were so different

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10. Ibid., 15-16.

11. Ibid., 15-16.

12. Ibid., 34.

13. Gerber, 11.

from those of the Christians. This made it easier for others in the population to blame the Jews whenever there were problems. There were always elements in the population who would readily join in with the anti-Jewish policies. Some of the kings and clerics definitely used this to their advantage.

Gerber writes that anti-Jewish activities increased toward the end of the seventh century after a series of natural disasters left Spain's agriculture and economy in shambles. Bad harvests, plagues of insects, and a scarcity of food reduced the population during King Erwig's reign (r. 680-687), eventually leaving the country in ruins.<sup>14</sup>

By the end of the seventh century, the Visigoths were still a small percentage of the total population. There were approximately 400,000 Visigoths among at least five million Hispano-Romans, Jews, Greeks, Galicians, Basques, and Celts.<sup>15</sup>

The Visigoth King Egica (r. 687-702) would accuse the Jews of working with outsiders to try to overthrow the Visigoths. However, it would be the heirs of the Visigoth King Witiza (r. 702-710), unhappy that the Visigoth King Roderick had control in the south, who would work with the Byzantines to allow a small group of

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14. Ibid., 16.

15. David Levering Lewis, *God's Crucible: Islam and the Making of Europe, 570 to 1121* (New York: Norton, 2008), 111.

Muslims to pass into Spain through the coastal outpost of Ceuta in 711.<sup>16</sup> This was the beginning of the Muslim invasion.

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16. Gerber, 16.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE MUSLIM INVASION OF SPAIN AND RULE DURING THE EARLY YEARS 711-756

The Muslim invasion and conquest that began in 711 would bring radical changes to the Iberian Peninsula. A new type of society would be created.

Even though Christian Visigoth Spain may have looked powerful from the outside, it was rotting from the inside. As discussed in Chapter 3, there was much infighting among the Visigoth nobles and the church clergy, and the country was at an economic low point. In addition, the Visigoth kings and church clergy had been particularly cruel to the Jews as well as to the Christian peasants, especially during the last several decades. When the Muslim conquest began in 711, it worked to the Muslims' advantage to incorporate some of the disadvantaged people of the kingdom like the Jews and the peasants into their civilian forces. The Jews and peasants would maintain political control following military victories in each city as the Muslims moved on to the next battle and the next city. The Jews did not have any powerful outside protectors so it was to their advantage to be as adaptable as possible. They were rewarded for this and were favored by the Muslims over the Christians. In addition, the Hispania population in general had been excluded from the superior elite who could participate in the military. Therefore, they were not expected or trained to

defend the land. After the fighting stopped in a particular area, they would often help the Muslims keep order in the cities.<sup>1</sup>

The Muslim invasion began when the Arab Governor Musa ibn Nusair of North Africa sent his top officer, the Berber Tariq ibn Ziyad, to invade Visigothic Spain. Tariq entered near the port of Ceuta with a large number of North Africa Berber soldiers. O'Callaghan writes that there were approximately 12,000 soldiers.<sup>2</sup> David Lewis writes that the number was between 7,000 and 12,000 Berbers, 20 Arab officers, and 700 black Africans.<sup>3</sup> At any rate, they encountered King Roderick, the last Visigothic King, in July 711 near the Guadalete River at a place now called Medina-Sidonia in the province of Cadiz. Against tremendous odds, Tariq's Berber forces killed Roderick and defeated his troops. O'Callaghan writes that this was a turning point that worked to the Muslim advantage.<sup>4</sup>

David Lewis writes that the Visigoths in other parts of Spain did not realize the threat that the Muslims posed nor were they able to organize themselves sufficiently to push the Muslims back. One of Tariq's lieutenants captured Cordoba without much resistance. When Tariq and his Berbers rode into the structurally-fortified hilltop city

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1. D. Lewis, *God's Crucible*, 126, 128, and 129.

2. O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, 95.

3. D. Lewis, 119.

4. O'Callaghan, 92.

of Toledo, it was nearly deserted, with only the lower classes of the town's people remaining.<sup>5</sup>

Not to be outdone by his lieutenant Tariq, Governor Musa ibn Nusair himself led his own invasion in June 712. Musa brought his son, 'Abd al-Aziz, to be second in command, together with other distinguished officers. The troops consisted of approximately 18,000 Arab Muslims mainly from the Yemenite tribe of the Kalbites.<sup>6</sup>

They initially headed to Seville where they encountered about three months of resistance before they took the city. After the city fell in the winter of 712-713, Musa ibn Nusair left the Jews to manage Seville.<sup>7</sup> Then Musa's troops advanced to Merida where they met serious resistance. Merida had special meaning to the church clergy and Visigothic nobility. 'Abd al-Aziz's troops reunited with Musa's to finally conquer Merida in July 713. Musa encouraged Merida's Christians to leave the city in peace if they so desired. He organized a municipal government, trusting the inhabitants of the old Jewish quarter to take the helm.<sup>8</sup> 'Abd al-Aziz continued his advances and added the cities of Coimbra and Santarem to his conquests in 714. These cities are located in present day Portugal.

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5. D. Lewis, 127.

6. Ibid., 127.

7. Ibid., 128.

8. Ibid., 129.

From 711-714, the Muslims had taken most of the southern half of the Iberian Peninsula for the Dar al-Islam (House of Islam). However, Musa ibn Nusair and Tariq ibn Ziyad realized that resistance groups were forming beyond the northern Duero River and Ebro River valley. Musa ordered his men to continue their advances, temporarily contradicting the orders of the Damascus Caliph al-Walid for Musa and Tariq to report back to Damascus. Musa and Tariq conquered Zaragoza in the Ebro Valley. Tariq continued into the provinces of Leon and Castile, taking the towns of Leon and Astorga in the far northwest. Following the Ebro River into Asturias, Musa's troops took the city of Oviedo and went as far north as the Bay of Biscay by the summer of 714.<sup>9</sup> However, later Muslims would not be able to hold these northern outposts.

Musa ibn Nusair and Tariq ibn Ziyad did return to Damascus in 714 with many great treasures to show the elderly Caliph al-Walid. Al-Walid died soon after and the new ruler Sulayman marginalized Musa and Tariq for various political reasons. It is also believed that Sulayman had Musa's son 'Abd al-Aziz killed in 716 in Seville.<sup>10</sup>

At that time the Damascene Caliphs were most interested in finishing off the Byzantine capital of Constantinople and did not want the distraction of al-Andalus. However, the attempt to penetrate Constantinople did not work and Sulayman's successor, Umar II (r. 717-720), ordered the troops home. After this defeat, the

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9. Ibid., 132.

10. O'Callaghan, 94.

caliphs reassessed the strategic importance of using al-Andalus as an entry point to the north.<sup>11</sup> Caliph Hisham I (r. 724-743) authorized the al-Andalus governors to continue to advance into what is now southern France.<sup>12</sup> In 732 the Muslim soldiers were defeated at the Battle of Poitiers. At Caliph Hisham I's command, other forays continued to be made into southern France until 739.<sup>13</sup> However, Berber unrest at Zaragoza in 739 redirected the al-Andalusi governor's attention to matters at home.<sup>14</sup>

### **Muslim Factionalism During Early Rule**

For the first forty-odd years after the invasion and settlement, the various Muslim political factions had to learn how to govern the Spanish territory. By 716 Cordoba had become the seat of the Muslim government. There was a rapid succession of emirs or governors appointed by the governors of North Africa and/or by the caliphs in Damascus. None of these appointees were particularly talented and most did not stay in office very long. Thus there was not a strong central government. Some of the governors also fueled the fires of tribal rivalry.

The Muslims of Arab lineage thought they were racially superior to the Berbers and gave themselves the best lands. The Berbers had only recently converted to Islam. But the fact remained that the Berbers had been necessary to conquer Spain

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11. D. Lewis, 136.

12. Ibid., 165.

13. Ibid., 175-177.

14. Ibid., 185.

and were still needed to police the region. Berber Muslims also outnumbered the Arab Muslims.

The Berbers in both Morocco and al-Andalus revolted in the early 740s. Two factors contributing to the insurrections were high taxes and ethnic resentments. In North Africa, another factor was the adoption by the Berbers of a fundamentalist form of Islam called Kharijism. The Kharijite doctrine held, among other beliefs, that all Muslims are equal. The Berbers wanted to receive their fair share of the spoils of war rather than Muslims of Arab descent always receiving the best.

The Moroccan Berbers defeated an army of about 30,000 Syrians sent against them by the Caliph in Damascus. Some 7,000 Syrians took refuge in Ceuta and asked the governor of al-Andalus to give them asylum.<sup>15</sup> Reluctantly the governor let them into al-Andalus in 741. He thought he could use them against the Berbers who were revolting in al-Andalus against the Arab-born Muslims. While the Syrians did help calm the Berber revolt, they refused to leave Spain after that task was completed and eventually deposed the governor.

The infusion of Syrian Muslims into al-Andalus added to the Muslim factional tensions. The Syrian Qay tribal group was a natural enemy of the Yemenis who had accompanied Musa ibn Nusair into al-Andalus. The Yemenis, called the *baladiyyun*, had a distinctive South Arabian and Yemeni tribal character. Some order was restored in 742 when the Caliph of Damascus sent a new governor who allotted the Syrians

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15. O'Callaghan, 97.

land on which to settle, subject to the obligation of performing military service. The plan was to disperse the Syrians geographically throughout al-Andalus. Even though this prevented the capital city of Cordoba from being overwhelmed by Syrians, it did cause more sectionalism in the Andalusian state.<sup>16</sup>

This overall disorganization and chaos made it possible for the Umayyad tribal group to seize power in 756.

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16. D. Lewis, 191.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE UMAYYAD DYNASTY IS TRANSPLANTED FROM DAMASCUS TO AL-ANDALUS

In 743 the long-reigning Umayyad Caliph Hisham I died of old age. He had held the vast Islamic empire together at the center since 724. He was followed by a succession of weak rulers. The reign of the Umayyads in Damascus, Syria, was coming to an end. They had ruled the Muslim world since 661.

In 750 a dynastic revolution in Damascus occurred with the Abbasids routing the Umayyads. The Abbasids, who practiced a more conservative form of Islam, moved their caliphate to Baghdad and were greatly influenced by the more advanced Persian culture.

The Abbasids attempted to kill all the members of the ruling Umayyad family, but one of them escaped. Abd al-Rahman I, a grandson of the Caliph Hisham, survived by making his way first to North Africa and then on to Spain. The Kalbites (Yemenites) saw him as their champion and became his army. Even some Qays supported him. Abd al-Rahman advanced on to Cordoba and in 756 defeated its governor, Yusuf al-Fihri. Abd al-Rahman made al-Andalus an independent kingdom and the new home of the exiled Umayyad dynasty.<sup>1</sup>

#### **How the Muslims, Especially the Umayyads, Viewed Jews and Christians**

The Muslims had mixed feelings about the Jews and Christians. Of course, they believed their own religion to be superior. However, the Qur'an considers the

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1. O'Callaghan, 101.



Jews and Christians to be fellow Peoples of the Book (Ahl al-Kitab). Like Muslims it was believed that the Jews and Christians had received a divine revelation and that it was contained in their sacred writings in the Hebrew Bible (especially the Torah) and the New Testament (especially the Gospels). In addition, some of the stories about the Jewish and Christian prophets were contained in the Qur'an, e.g., stories regarding Abraham, Moses, and the person of Jesus. But the Muslims believed that they had received the final and correct revelation. However, the Muslims did not compel either group to give up its religion as long as its devotees submitted to Muslim political authority. The Jews and Christians were allowed to pay a tax to be one of the protected people (*dhimmis*). However, they were considered second-class citizens and many restrictions were put in place for them. Collectively, the restrictions on *dhimmis* were known as the Pact of Umar, but these regulations were not followed in all places and times in the same way. Bernard Lewis writes that even though these regulations were attributed to Umar I (r. 634-644), it is thought that most of the measures were introduced or enforced by the Umayyad Caliph Umar II (r. 717-720) of Damascus.<sup>2</sup>

Christians who adopted Muslim customs and languages were called Mozarabs. Those who converted to Islam were called Musalimun. Their children born into the faith were called Muwalladun. They were not subject to the tribute tax. However, the Muwalladun were held in contempt by the Arabs and were on the lowest rung in

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2. B. Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 25.

Spanish Muslim society. The Muslims by birth had the upper hand. At first, the Muslims generally did not encourage conversion because they relied on the tribute taxes to help finance their government. However, in the tenth century many Christians *did* convert of their own free will and became more assimilated with Muslim culture.<sup>3</sup>

### **General Boundaries of Al-Andalus**

From approximately 750 to 1031 al-Andalus comprised about 80% of the Iberian Peninsula (present day Spain and Portugal). The map in the Appendix shows the northern dividing line between Muslim and Christian territory to be the Duero River and the Ebro River valley. However, at various times the northern dividing line was rather fluid with both the Muslims and Christians making military forays into each other's territory.

There were still Christian kingdoms north of the Duero River and west and east of parts of the Ebro River – Asturias, Leon, Castile, Navarre, Aragon, and Catalonia. Allegiances shifted frequently during the seventh through ninth centuries. It was not uncommon for a Muslim faction to align itself with a Christian ruler in order to defeat another Muslim faction. In addition, the different Christian kingdoms were not united and infighting occurred among them, too.

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3. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, 22-24.

## **The Umayyad Emirs in al-Andalus – Experiences and Characteristics**

In order to understand the world that Abd al-Rahman III would eventually inherit in 912, it is important to look at how his predecessors reacted to the events around them and their characteristics as leaders that would help shape the society and the man he would become.

Each of these leaders operated in a less than perfect world. It is easy to see how both scholars and lay persons with a definite pro-Muslim or pro-Christian viewpoint can pick and choose events to support their perspective. In reality, it was a complex environment. It is important to recognize that these emirs accomplished much; however, there continued to be internal conflicts as well as fighting between Muslims and Christians along the northern border of al-Andalus. A more sophisticated culture was able to develop during periods when there was an enlightened leader who had a long reign and who could maintain a relative internal peace. Relative is the key word, because there was never total harmony.

Abd al-Rahman I, also known as the Falcon of Quraysh, ruled from 756 to 788. As the grandson of the Damascene Caliph Hisham, he had been groomed to be a caliph. An interesting note about his appearance is that he had red hair which he had inherited from his mother who had been a Christian Berber slave.

Abd al-Rahman I created an independent kingdom in Al-Andalus with Cordoba as the capital. In spite of formidable opposition from other Muslim factions as well as Christian factions, he succeeded in establishing an orderly government. He

had a vision of unifying a community comprising the various Muslim factions together with the Christian and Jewish *dhimmi* populations. This was also a pragmatic decision, because the Muslims were outnumbered by the indigenous population. He was able to achieve a measure of co-existence among the groups. He was partial to the Jews because they provided great assistance during the consolidation of Umayyad rule. The Jews had experience in governing their own communities and organizing international mercantile operations as demonstrated by their experiences during Roman and Visigoth times. They were experienced in negotiating between groups of people and were not usually seen as a political threat. They would teach the Muslims how to govern their empire.

The relative internal peace of those years allowed for agriculture and trade to increase, thereby increasing state revenues. Abd al-Rahman I introduced a new form of farming that depended on irrigation. The Muslims introduced the Syrian hydraulic water wheel systems, called *noria*, for irrigation that would be enhanced over time. The Muslims improved the canals, aqueducts, and underground water conduits known as *qanats* which the Romans had built. Because water was so important to their way of farming, the Muslims made many overall improvements as it regarded moving water and determining water rights.<sup>4</sup> Abd al-Rahman was also known for the introduction of flora and fauna from his native Syria and other countries. He began construction of the great mosque in Cordoba, which was influenced by Roman,

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4. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, 253-260.

Visigothic, Byzantine, and Eastern Muslim architecture. The ceilings were built to be forty feet high. They were supported by Roman columns and capitals that were topped by double-stacked semicircular horseshoe arches. Horseshoe arches were already being used elsewhere; however, the mosque architects created a unique design and use for them at Cordoba.<sup>5</sup> The double-stacked horseshoe arches were composed of alternating red brick and white stone stripes that are still aesthetically pleasing to this day.

Abd al-Rahman I laid the foundation of greatness for Cordoba that Abd al-Rahman III and al-Hakam II would take to new heights in the tenth century. The Umayyad rulers in al-Andalus did not publicly or directly challenge the authority of the Abbasid Caliphs in Baghdad for the first 200 years of their rule. They continued to commemorate the Abbasid Caliphs in public prayers as the true descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. At that time in the Muslim world, it was believed that there could only be one legitimate successor to the Prophet Muhammad. He would be called the Commander of the Faithful and would rule the entire Islamic world. In 909 the Fatimid Muslims in North Africa declared their dynasty to be the one true Caliphate and Ubayd Allah, who took the name al-Mahdi (r. 909-934), named himself the one true Caliph.<sup>6</sup> In 929 Abd al-Rahman III would name himself the one true Caliph. Clearly there were tensions among the Muslim dynasties.

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5. D. Lewis, 274.

6. Esposito, 45.

In the next several centuries of Umayyad rule the throne passed from father to son, with several of the emirs enjoying long reigns. Hisham I (r. 788-796) succeeded his father, Abd al-Rahman I. He enjoyed a relatively peaceful internal reign and was renowned for his learning, piety and charity. He invited the involvement of jurists from the Islamic Malikite School, who offered a rigorous interpretation of the Qur'an and laws that were hostile to innovation and rational speculation. In time, the Malikites came to dominate the juridical and theological thought of the kingdom and wielded great influence in public affairs.<sup>7</sup> (This was a more conservative and rigid approach to Islam than Abd al-Rahman II and III would later follow.) Hisham I also sent yearly army expeditions to attack the Christian kingdoms of Asturias and Navarre in northern Spain.

Hakam I, son of Hisham I, ruled from 796 to 822. He faced numerous conspiracies and rebellions and he reacted in a very cruel and tyrannical way to try to bring order. At first his own uncles challenged his authority; one even asking the Christian Charlemagne for assistance. Hakam I used brutal force in Toledo against the Mozarabs, Jews, and Muwalladun who rebelled against the heavy taxation placed upon them. In Cordoba the Malikite jurists, who had enjoyed favor during his father's reign, were severely restricted. They were planning a conspiracy in 805, but Hakam found out and crucified 72 of their leaders.<sup>8</sup> Hakam I's large bodyguard consisted of

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7. O'Callaghan, 103.

8. Ibid., 104.

Sudanese Negroes, Franks, and Galicians who were placed under the command of a Christian count who was responsible for collecting the taxes. The Cordoban citizens, especially the Muwalladun, revolted against the heavy tax burden and their mistreatment by the royal bodyguards in 818. Hakam put the rebellion down with great barbarity.<sup>9</sup>

In the early ninth century the Muslims in the East succeeded in breaking Byzantine naval control of the Mediterranean Sea. This allowed for great commercial movement among all parts of the Islamic world. A commercial and industrial class of Muslims, Jews, and Christian traders facilitated this trade. The merchants, who were also interested in scholarship, used the commercial networks to promote both trade and scholarship. This resulted in a more urbanized civilization. This commercial movement brought great wealth to al-Andalus, especially in the urban areas.

Abd al-Rahman II, son of Hakam I, was an able ruler who was able to meet the new challenges during this period of transition. He ruled from 822 to 852. Abd al-Rahman II reorganized the government to meet the needs of a wealthier and more complex society. He changed it from a decentralized garrison-type of government to a more centralized government. He concentrated power in the person of the emir, ruling through a tightly controlled hierarchical bureaucracy, with centralized political and economic controls. The treasury was the most important department.<sup>10</sup>

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9. Ibid., 104.

10. Glick, 29.

Abd al-Rahman II borrowed this hierarchical concept of government from the way the Umayyad Muslims of Syria had ruled their kingdom, which they had previously learned from the Persians. With only a few changes his style of government survived until the end of the Spanish Umayyad caliphate. Most of his rule was a period of relative internal peace.

Abd al-Rahman II was learned and pious and quickly gained renown as a patron of scholars, poets, and musicians. Due to the strides being made in astronomy, medicine, and other areas by the Abbasids in Baghdad, which were transmitted across the Muslim world, there was also an increased interest in science and scholarship in al-Andalus. In addition, Abbasid and Persian fashions and mannerisms became popular. Abd al-Rahman II's court became the cultural center of western Islam.

Important artisan skills were also developed. Archaeologists have found evidence that between 825 and 925 the horizontal loom was developed and the people of al-Andalus began to use silk thread. They developed a thriving weaving industry. They developed the capacity to produce glazed pottery and pottery with different colors, which was introduced from the east. This pottery was different from what was already in use in Spain. Multi-colored textiles appeared around the same time as the pottery. The Andalusis were also using advanced techniques in glass-making. The



construction of well-built military fortifications also occurred during this time period.<sup>11</sup>

Abd al-Rahman II would send army expeditions into the Christian areas of Asturias, Barcelona, and the Spanish March. During his rule, the Norsemen tried to attack Seville and Cadiz in 844-845 by sailing up the Guadalquivir River.

Abd al-Rahman II sent an army to drive them away. In order to protect against future attacks, Abd al-Rahman III developed a navy. He had shipyards constructed and a fleet of ships posted to guard the river approaches to Seville. From 848 to 849, the fleet was also used to reestablish Umayyad rule over the Balearic Islands.

Abd al-Rahman II's ambitions, however, did not extend beyond the western Mediterranean. The Byzantine Emperor Theophilus (r. 829-842) sought his alliance in 839 against the Abbasids of Baghdad. O'Callaghan writes that the emir declined to enter an alliance saying that he hoped Allah would eventually restore the Umayyads to their rightful position as rulers of the Muslim world.<sup>12</sup>

Toward the end of his reign, there were uprisings by the Mozarabs of Cordoba. Some of the Mozarabs deliberately courted death in the hope of gaining the crown of Christian martyrdom by openly denouncing the Prophet Muhammad and the Islamic religion. Blasphemy of the Prophet was a serious offense and punishable by death. O'Callaghan writes that two known representatives of the Christian community

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11. Juan Zozaya, "Material Culture in Medieval Spain," in *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*, ed. Vivian B. Mann, Thomas F. Glick, and Jerrilynn D. Dodds (New York: George Braziller, 1992), 159-160.

12. O'Callaghan, 109.

Eulogius, a priest, and Paulus Alvarus, a learned layman, documented the nature of the resistance and claimed that the Christians were harassed. In 850 a person named Priest Perfectus publicly denounced the Prophet Muhammad “as an agent of the devil, an adulterer, and a liar.”<sup>13</sup> Muslims have strong feelings about any disparagement of the Prophet Muhammad. Priest Perfectus was put to death for defamation of the Prophet and became the first Spanish Christian martyr. Other Christians soon followed suit.

Some Christians saw Abd al-Rahman II’s death in 852 as divine retribution for his persecution of Christians. His son and successor, Muhammad I (r. 852-886), introduced stringent measures to suppress the continuing rebellion. Muhammad I had Eulogius put to death. After this the Mozarabs lost their fervor. The hostility of the Muwalladun continued, though, and was a serious problem in other cities as well.

Muhammad I sent a large army expedition to Asturias in 878. The Christian ruler Alfonso III won a great victory against him. It is said that Muhammad I asked for a truce, one of the first times an emir had made such a request.<sup>14</sup> This encouraged the Christians and Alfonso III kept up his raids into al-Andalus. However, the most dangerous threat to the Umayyad regime came from the southernmost part of

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13. Ibid., 110.

14. Ibid., 113.

al-Andalus in the Bobastro fortress in an area now called Malaga. Umar ibn Hafsun, a Muwalladun descended from a Gothic count, carried on guerilla warfare against the government and came close to destroying it.<sup>15</sup>

After the death of Muhammad I, his son al-Mundhir (r. 886-888) devoted his short reign to the defeat of Ibn Hafsun without success. The next ruler was Abd Allah (r. 888-912), brother of al-Mundhir. It is believed that Abd Allah killed his brother. He finally defeated Ibn Hafsun in 904, but the rebellion was not yet fully crushed.<sup>16</sup>

Several of the Christian kingdoms were starting to pose more of a threat. Chaotic conditions enabled Christians to get a few strongholds. Wilfred the Hairy, count of Barcelona (r. 837-898) broadened his dominion to include several Catalan counties.<sup>17</sup> He divided and bequeathed these territories to his many heirs, which ultimately hindered unification of the Catalan counties for many years and prevented them from becoming strong enough to challenge the Muslims.

Further west a new Christian dynasty emerged in the kingdom of Navarre. Sancho I Garces (r. 905-926), founder of the Jimena dynasty that ruled Pamplona for centuries, came to power with help from Alfonso III.<sup>18</sup>

Abd Allah died in 912. He had not solved the many crises and the Umayyad dynasty was bankrupt. However, the Christians could not organize themselves well

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15. Ibid., 113.

16. Ibid., 114.

17. Ibid., 115.

18. Ibid., 115.

enough to challenge the Umayyads. Thus there was a power vacuum. This was one of those fateful moments in history when it was uncertain which group would be the one to bring some order to the region.

It would be Abd Allah's grandson, Abd al Rahman III, who would be the one to reorganize the Umayyad dynasty and bring it to its culminating position as a powerful kingdom.

## CHAPTER 6

### ABD AL-RAHMAN III 912-961

Abd al-Rahman Ibn Muhammad, known as Abd al-Rahman III, lived from 891-961 and ruled from 912-961. He was of mixed race; it was said that he was three quarters Hispano-Basque and one quarter Arab. It was said that he had blue eyes and fair hair like his Christian grandmother from Pamplona. It was said that he dyed his hair black to look more like the ideal Muslim Arab leader.<sup>1</sup>

Abd al-Rahman III brought order to the kingdom. He offered pardons to all rebels who submitted to his authority and punishment for those who did not. The Andalusí tribes of Arab origin renewed their allegiance and helped him finish off the uprising by Ibn Hafsun, who died in 917, by defeating Ibn Hafsun's four sons in 928 in Bobastro.<sup>2</sup>

Abd al-Rahman III also had to deal with the increasing power of the Fatimid Muslim dynasty in North Africa. The Fatimids built a new capital on the coast of Tunisia in 909. From there they spread west and soon threatened the coastal towns that faced al-Andalus. Abd al-Rahman III responded by strengthening his own coastal fortifications and establishing bases on the Moroccan coast at Melilla (927), Ceuta (931), and Tangier (951).<sup>3</sup> From those locations he forged alliances with the Berber chiefs. A year after a Fatimid force from Sicily burned the Andalusian city of Almería

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1. Richard Fletcher, *Moorish Spain* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992), 53.

2. O'Callaghan, 117.

3. *Ibid.*, 119.

in 955, the Caliph built a new naval force. When the Fatimids saw they could make no further progress in the west, they turned to the east and conquered Egypt in 969, making Cairo their capital in 972.<sup>4</sup>

Abd al-Rahman III was known for his tolerance in religious matters and encouraged a spirit of co-existence. He came closest of any Spanish medieval ruler, Muslim or Christian, to achieving the spirit of *convivencia*, the word used by historians Pidal and Castro to describe the idealized co-existence of Muslims, Jews, and Christians in Muslim Spain. He was the most tolerant of all the Umayyads who ruled in Spain. He worked with the Mozarabs and Muwalladun to reduce their resistance. He allowed the Christians and Jews to practice their religions without harassment. By reconciling with the Mozarabs and Muwalladun, Abd al-Rahman III hastened their assimilation into a more homogeneous society. Glick cites Richard Bulliet's Islam conversion tables indicating that approximately 80% of the population converted to Islam in the tenth century.<sup>5</sup> It is thought that most people converted for economic and prestige reasons. This pattern also reshaped the society in that the old converts came to be outnumbered by the new converts, adding the

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4. O'Callaghan, 119.

5. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, 22-24. Glick is quoting from Richard W. Bulliet's *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press, 1979).

possibility of a new tension for the future. It made al-Andalus less of an Arab society.<sup>6</sup>

Abd al-Rahman III's treatment of Jews was much better than in most other Muslim kingdoms in Spain and in other countries. Many Jews participated in court life. His strategy was to reconcile the followers of the different religions and the various ethnic groups who lived under his rule and blend them into one kingdom. His rule was based on the collaboration of various national/ethnic/religious groups within his kingdom: Arabs, Berbers, Jews, and Christian descendants of the Iberio-Hispanic population. He offered his subjects equal opportunities to participate in public affairs and to rise in government service. He frequently rotated important court, Army, and civil administration posts among the people. He also put former slaves in government positions. Abd al-Rahman III ran an efficient government at both the central and the provincial levels. His consistency in governmental affairs and the length of his rule contributed to his many successes.

Abd al-Rahman III wanted his kingdom to be the one true caliphate. In January 929 he officially named himself the Caliph and Prince of all Believers.<sup>7</sup> This came after the defeat of Ibn Hufsun's sons and during the time of resistance against the Fatimids, who, as previously noted, had also made a claim in 909 that their tribal dynasty was the one true Caliphate. Abd al-Rahman III claimed absolute and

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6. Glick, 23.

7. O'Callaghan, 118.

infallible authority in both spiritual and temporal matters. By claiming to be the true successor to the Prophet Muhammad, he thought of himself as the sole leader and guide of the world-wide Muslim community and the interpreter of the will of God as expressed in the Qur'an.<sup>8</sup> He also adopted the honorific name of Defender of the Religion of God, among others. At this point he became the one who was commemorated in public prayers in al-Andalus. This exalted him above the rank of ordinary people and, in his mind, above the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad. In truth, Abbasid temporal power was waning at this time. When Abd al-Rahman III named himself the one true Caliph it increased the jealousies of the Abbasids in Baghdad and the Fatimids in North Africa.

Abd al-Rahman III adopted the Persian and Abbasid custom for the ruler to render himself inaccessible to the masses. Elaborate ceremonial court procedures were developed. To further emphasize his inaccessibility, he constructed a great palace outside of Cordoba at Madinat al-Zahar and transferred all the government departments to that site. This inaccessibility as well as the large expenditure for riches would begin to alienate the average citizen.

Abd al-Rahman III ruled through a hierarchy of slaves and greatly increased the number of North African Berber mercenaries to bolster Umayyad military efforts on the northern front. In his last days, slaves from Eastern Europe known as Sakiliba (Slavs) held various important positions and had increased in numbers. This caused

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8. Ibid., 118.



resentment among other groups in the administration and would eventually contribute to the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate in 1031.<sup>9</sup> Abd al-Rahman III died at the height of his power in 961.

His scholarly son, Caliph al-Hakam II (961-971) continued the grand life. One of his accomplishments was to build up the libraries in Cordoba. It is said that the royal library alone comprised at least 400,000 books. He kept a staff of copyists to reproduce books that he received from as far away as Persia.<sup>10</sup> He continued the patronage of scholars, especially the astronomer Maslama of Madrid who relocated to Cordoba.

Al-Hakam II received emissaries from the king of Navarre, the regent of Leon, and the counts of Castile, Galicia, and Barcelona, who came to render homage and tribute to the ruler of what had emerged as the greatest cultural center in Europe.

Like his father, he continued to import Berber soldiers and ordered military forays into Christian territories. Al-Hakam II's death caused a dynastic crisis because his heir was still a child. In addition, the intense jealousy among the many ethnic groups in Cordoba and their places in the social order would be a major contributor to the eventual fall of the Umayyad Caliphate in 1031.

The rich cultural atmosphere that Abd al-Rahman III made possible is described in this chapter as well in Chapters 8, 9, and 10. In addition to Cordoba,

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9. E. Michael Gerli, ed. *Medieval Iberia: An Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Abd al-Rahman III, Caliph of Cordoba." (New York: Routledge, 2003.)

10. Fletcher, 70-71.

there were smaller centers of advanced civilization in Seville, Toledo, Granada, Malaga, and Lucena. By this time a great deal of the advanced scientific, mathematical, astronomical, medical, philosophical and other intellectual work being done by the Abbasids in Baghdad had reached al-Andalus. Abd al-Rahman III and Hasdai ibn Shaprut encouraged and funded Andalusí scholars to translate, study, and further develop this corpus of knowledge. Abd al-Rahman III wanted to make al-Andalus independent of the eastern Abbasid Baghdad authority in all areas: intellectual, religious, and military. His vizier Hasdai ibn Shaprut helped him accomplish this because he had a similar desire for Jewish spiritual independence from the eastern Jewish intellectual and religious authorities.

Abd al-Rahman III encouraged the industry of paper-making to develop in the city of Xativa in Valencia.<sup>11</sup> The Chinese first taught the people of Baghdad how to produce paper in the eighth century. The use of paper in the Muslim world helped to facilitate the transmission of ideas and the spread of books for the massive libraries.

The movement of scientific ideas often depended upon the networks of organized patterns of communication and the establishment of schools. For example, the astronomer and teacher, Maslama of Madrid (d. ca. 1007) created a school of astronomers which his disciples and their students continued.<sup>12</sup> He adapted Iraqi al-Khwarizimi's astronomical tables to al-Andalus. Maslama trained a generation of astronomers who would make great strides in the eleventh century on the

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11. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, 280.

12. Glick, 302-303.

construction and use of astrolabes. Each generation expanded on the previous generation's work. Eventually the astrolabe would be used on ships during the Portuguese voyages of discoveries. The work done in al-Andalus would reach Latin Europe and stimulate later work by Copernicus and Galileo.<sup>13</sup>

In Spain, the Latin and Visigothic traditions had also produced some valuable scientific works before the Muslim invasion and important elements of this were incorporated into the work of the al-Andalusis scientists.

The splendid architecture of the Umayyad period is widely recounted. Palaces and mosques were influenced by Roman, Visigothic, Byzantine, and eastern Muslim architecture. Al Hakam II continued the expansion of the Cordoba Mosque with its rows and rows of striped double-stacked horseshoe arches. However, he focused on expanding and beautifying the part that only the rulers could use. This alienated the average citizen and was one more contributing factor that would lead to the eventual fall of the Umayyad caliphate.

Abd al-Rahman III's architectural achievement was building the grand palace of Madinat al-Zahra on the slopes of the Sierra de Cordoba. Today the excavation work and partially reconstructed ruins show the scale and opulence of the palace city. It had colonnaded great halls, geometric gardens, and cascading fountains.<sup>14</sup> At this and other excavation sites, archeologists have found building materials from both

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13. Glick, "Science in Medieval Spain," 83.

14. D. Lewis, 325.

al-Andalus and foreign countries and have noted the advanced skill of the Andalusis in using the materials. From the ruins of the palace they have found well-preserved tools and other objects made of high quality steel. They have found evidence of exquisite craftsmanship in using bronze, brass, iron, ivory, marble, glass, and precious stones. They have also found porcelain bowls of Chinese design.<sup>15</sup> In addition, not only were sophisticated norias (water wheels) used for functional purposes but they were also used for decorative purposes on royal lands.

What is important about Abd al-Rahman III and Hasdai ibn Shaprut is that they created an environment where intellectual and cultural talent could be nurtured. Not only did they benefit from the advanced knowledge coming from the Muslim East, they worked proactively to put an educational and communications structure in place to continue the adaptation of new techniques and to conduct further analysis of the scientific information collected. They put the people in place whose contributions would benefit generations to come.

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15. Juan Zozaya, "Material Culture in Medieval Spain," in *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*, ed. Vivian B. Mann, Thomas F. Glick, and Jerrilynn D. Dodds (New York: George Braziller, 1992), 160-162.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE JEWS OF AL-ANDALUS (SEPHARAD)

Chapter 3 described the history of the Jews in Hispania through the Visigothic period. At times the Jews were highly valued as merchants and for facilitating trade with other countries thereby increasing the revenues for their government. They were also subject to the anti-Jewish policies of the Visigothic period. The anti-Jewish resolve of the monarchy and church was particularly intense in the final two decades of Visigothic rule. Some historians have said that the Jews may have viewed the Muslims as liberators.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, from the beginning of the Muslim invasion, the Jews cooperated and collaborated politically with the Muslims. The Jews played an important role in cities where their numbers were significant, such as Cordoba, Merida, Ecija, Jaen, Toledo, and Cuenca. After the Muslims conquered a city, they would make arrangements with the indigenous population to hold the city for them as they continued onward with the invasion. Often the Jews were the leaders of those managing the cities on behalf of the Muslims. David Lewis writes that “entire regions of the newly conquered realm were later secured by wholesale relocation of Jews to sparsely populated places along the Mediterranean coast (Malaga, Granada, Almeria,

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1. D. Lewis, 203.

Alicante) and to urban centers whose Catholic character they diluted by their numbers (Murcia, Pamplona, Guadalajara, Salamanca, Zaragoza).”<sup>2</sup>

The Jews of al-Andalus — or Sepharad, as they called it — were in close contact with other thriving Jewish communities located around the Mediterranean Sea. The Muslims admired their good business and administrative skills. The Jews would show the Muslims how to administer their kingdom. As time passed, they did it so well that several would rise to the high office of vizier.

The Jews were well represented in a variety of professions just as the Muslims were. Some examples included work in the industrial crafts, farming, medicine, civil service, trade, and banking. They were encouraged to participate in all aspects of life. The Islamic world encouraged profit-seeking and the mercantile life. After all, the Islamic faith grew out of a society where trading was the main way of life. This was in contrast with the ways the Jews would be treated in Europe in later centuries where they were limited to professions in which the rulers used them to interact with the population-at-large in unpopular ways such as money-lending and tax collection.

Much is known about the trade in the Mediterranean world due to the preservation of the private commercial correspondence of Jewish merchants. The documents survived in the Cairo Geniza. A geniza was a room in a synagogue where papers and objects on which the name of God was written were discarded. They could

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2. Ibid., 203.

not be burned or otherwise destroyed for fear of committing the sacrilege of destroying paper or objects upon which the name of God had been written.<sup>3</sup>

While some Jews had important roles to play in Muslim society, they were never considered equal to the Muslims. However, they were not the only *dhimmi* group — all non-Muslim “Peoples of the Book” were — so they were not targeted for negative treatment more than any other group was.

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3. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, 137.

## CHAPTER 8

### HASDAI IBN SHAPRUT

Hasdai lived from 915 to 970. He served as vizier or minister of state for both Abd al-Rahman III (early 940s-961) and al-Hakam II (961-970). He was not the first medieval Jew to become prominent in public life in the Muslim world. Several Jewish figures emerged in Iraqi Abbasid public life around the same time. However, Hasdai is the first Jewish courtier about whom a great deal is known and “whose role was so central in launching a cultural movement that [he] helped create a new era.”<sup>1</sup> His Arabic name was Abu Yusef Hasdai ibn Shaprut. Once he became famous, he was commonly called Abu Yusef.

Hasdai was born in Jaen to a wealthy family. His father Rabbi Isaac b. Ezra Ibn Shaprut moved his family to Cordoba and provided his son with a well-rounded education (medicine, languages, and religious studies). Hasdai studied from the Arabic translations of Greek medical texts and other works. Rabbi Isaac was known for his piety and devotion to the Jewish faith. He established a synagogue in Cordoba. He was the benefactor to many Jewish scholars and writers who devoted their lives to the study of Torah and literature.<sup>2</sup> Hasdai would follow his father’s example in his care of the Jewish community and in promoting scholarship.

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1. Gerber, 46.

2. Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973), 159.



### **Physician, Translator, Diplomat, and Vizier**

The Caliph Abd al-Rahman III became aware of Hasdai, the physician, when the latter provided medical services to the Caliph and his family in the early 940s. Hasdai was known for his discoveries of antidotes for poisons. The Caliph noted his intelligence and ability to get along well with people. The Caliph put him in charge of customs, without giving him the title of minister, so as not to upset his Muslim constituents. It would turn out that Hasdai and Abd al-Rahman III would develop a common desire: each wanted his community to have intellectual and religious independence from its respective Eastern center. Each wanted to make al-Andalus, as known by the Muslims, and Sepharad, as known by the Jews, the center of religious authority.

Hasdai became the government official extraordinaire whom the Caliph trusted as an advisor, the statesman dealing on behalf of the Caliph with the outside world, and the leader for the Jewish communities with the authority to settle legal matters. Hasdai knew most of the primary languages of importance in the western Mediterranean world (Hebrew, Arabic, Latin, and Romance). His knowledge of languages served him well as the customs officer responsible for taxing trade ships that were entering and leaving the Spanish ports.<sup>3</sup> Medieval Spain was heavily involved in the Mediterranean Sea trade and was often the destination for luxury items. His knowledge of languages served him well in his statesman duties for the

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3. Ashtor, 160-162.

Caliph. He interacted with delegations from the Byzantine Empire and Italy as well as from a Jewish community in the Crimea known as the Khazars. Because the occasional alliances Muslim rulers formed with Christian powers could irritate the sensibilities and provoke the animosity of the Islamic religious establishment, it was not uncommon to make discreet use of Jews or Christians as diplomats. The Christian Archbishop Recemund of Elvira<sup>4</sup> and the Jewish Hasdai often served as diplomats on behalf of the Caliph.

In the late 940s, the interests of the Christian emperor of Byzantium, Constantine VII (r. 913-959), began to coincide with those of the Caliph's. Both of the rulers showed a special interest in the arts and sciences and were equally unaffected by the traditional theological inhibitions that kept Christendom and the Dar al-Islam apart.<sup>5</sup> In addition, they both felt antagonistic toward the Abbasids in Baghdad and the Fatimids in North Africa. The Byzantine Empire was being attacked by the Abbasids. Likewise, the Umayyad Caliph's goal was to be totally independent of Abbasid direction. To open these delicate negotiations with Constantine VII the Caliph needed someone with the appropriate language and diplomacy skills. Hasdai was selected for the task.

Typically, diplomatic delegations would be welcomed with great ceremony and valuable gifts would be exchanged. Emperor Constantine VII gave the Caliph a rare first-century Greek manuscript by Dioscorides, *De Materia Medica*, considered to

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4. Fletcher, 62.

5. Gerber, 48.

be a classic textbook for pharmacology. The Emperor also sent a monk named Nicholas, who knew both Greek and Latin, to Cordoba to assist in the translation. Nicholas and Hasdai were part of a team that first translated the document from Greek into Latin and then from Latin into Arabic. This helped al-Andalus begin to function as a science center independent of Baghdad. Hasdai's reputation grew as a result of this... "[n]ot merely because he had demonstrated linguistic skill, but because his achievement furthered Spain's autonomy, a cultural and political aim that was important to both Muslims and Jews."<sup>6</sup>

Hasdai would also be entrusted with several other challenging diplomatic assignments that involved the German emperor Otto I (r. 963-973) and the Christian kingdoms to the north, such as Burgundy and Leon. In his role as physician, Hasdai treated King Sancho the Fat of Leon for obesity in 964.<sup>7</sup>

### **Jewish Leader at Home and Abroad**

As vizier, Hasdai was given the authority and autonomy to manage the affairs of the Jewish community, such as its internal legal disputes. His community also expected him to be concerned about the welfare of Jews in the countries that he visited on behalf of the Caliph. When meeting with foreign diplomats, he inquired about the Jewish communities. If he had heard of Jews being discriminated against, he would make it a negotiating point when meeting with the diplomats from those places. If he were in a Christian country, he would remind them that in Islamic al-Andalus the

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6. Gerber, 48.

7. Fletcher, 70.

Caliph allowed the Christians to practice their religion without interference. Given Hasdai's reputation throughout the region, Jews from other countries would write to him when they encountered problems. It is known that he helped Jews living in southern Italy and Toulouse in what is now southern France. Gerber writes that the Jewish community believed that God had put Hasdai in such a privileged position in order for him to help the Jews of the world. He was considered a prince of Israel and was called ha-Nasi, the prince, by his fellow Jews.<sup>8</sup>

As news reached him that a sovereign Jewish kingdom existed in what is now southern Russia, Hasdai went to great efforts to begin a correspondence with King Joseph of Khazaria. To make the initial contact, he had to navigate carefully through various diplomatic channels.

The Khazars had been nomadic pagan Turkish tribes for several centuries in a hard to reach area in Central Asia where the Byzantine and Muslim borders met. By the seventh century C.E., their land holdings had spread to the Crimea and contained several cities composed of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian settlers. The Khazars were often caught in the middle between the warring armies of Byzantium and Islam and were pressed by both to convert. During waves of Byzantine persecution in the eighth century, the Khazars had often given refuge to Jews. The Khazars took advantage of their proximity to all three religions and studied each to select the religion that best met their spiritual needs. The decision was made to convert to Judaism some time in

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8. Gerber, 49.

the eighth century.<sup>9</sup> By the ninth century, Khazaria covered much of what is now southern Russia in a vast area surrounded by the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, the Volga, and the Dnieper. The square mileage of the Khazarian Kingdom was close to the size of the current continental United States.

Hasdai carried on a detailed correspondence with King Joseph in which the two leaders described their kingdoms to each other and then discussed facts or clues that might help them calculate the date of the Messiah's coming. This topic was of great interest to Jews during the medieval period. News of this sovereign Jewish nation resulted in pride and bolstered self-esteem for Jews everywhere. Jews kept Hasdai's elegant correspondence and circulated it for centuries as a source of pride.<sup>10</sup>

As described in the next chapter, Hasdai was also revered for his role in helping to launch a period of great cultural achievement that would later be known as the Jewish Golden Cultural Age.

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9. Ibid., 51.

10. Ibid., 50.

## CHAPTER 9

### CENTER OF JEWISH LEARNING AND INDEPENDENCE FROM THE EAST

There was a long history of Jewish learning in Iraq stretching back hundreds of years. The Eastern rabbinical academies compiled the Babylonian Talmud from around 550 to 700 C.E. and their leaders, called the gaonim, were the ultimate interpreters of Jewish law for the entire diaspora during that period. The two most famous academies were the Yeshivah of Sura, originally located in southern Iraq, and the Yeshivah of Pumbeditha (also spelled Pumbedita) located in northern Iraq. Traveling merchants and scholars brought donations to the academies for their upkeep and facilitated the exchange of information about the application of Jewish law to various life situations. Jews in the diaspora depended on Baghdad to calculate the Jewish religious calendar. However, once there was a better understanding of astronomy in al-Andalus (Sepharad), the Spanish Jews could do the calculations for themselves.

The decline of the importance of the academies in the east was due to a number of factors. There was unrest in Iraq at different times throughout the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries due to battles between Islamic warlords. This caused chaotic conditions and impoverished the people. The Sura academy, once preeminent, closed in the ninth century and then reopened in the tenth century in Baghdad. The appointment of the great scholar Saadya Gaon (892-942) to lead the academy in 928 revitalized it. However, after Saadya's death, the Sura academy declined and finally

closed in 1034.<sup>1</sup> Saadya is remembered fondly for keeping the Torah alive. Many of the students left and took their knowledge of the Torah with them, establishing yeshivot in other lands, including Spain.

Also in the ninth century, when Sura was in eclipse, the Pumbeditha academy became the predominant Babylonian academy. During the tenth century there were many rivalries between scholars regarding who should lead the academy. Its students also migrated to other lands to establish schools. The Pumbeditha academy would also close in the twelfth century. However, the Pumbeditha academy would be remembered for two of its great teachers, Sherira ben Hanina (906-1006), better known as Sherira Gaon, and his son Hai ben Sherira (939-1038), better known as Hai Gaon.<sup>2</sup>

While Hasdai respected the leaders of the Sura and Pumbeditha academies and corresponded with them regularly, he was aware of the decline of the academies. He worked to fill the vacuum and bring a new era of independence and cultural autonomy for the Jews of Sepharad. When the Sura Talmudic academy was temporarily closed, Hasdai procured its library. He invited Jewish scholars from Baghdad to migrate to Spain. He asked the immigrant scholar from Sura, Moses ben Hanoch (d. 965), to found an academy of learning in Cordoba around 948. Moses created a Jewish center

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1. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, s.vv. "Pumbeditha" and "Sura" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 661.

2. *Ibid.*, 555.

of learning in Cordoba that rivaled that of Baghdad.<sup>3</sup> A document from the Cairo Geniza shows that Hasdai, while working for al-Hakam II, was able to declare Spanish Jewry to be independent of the religious authority of Baghdad.<sup>4</sup> Hasdai laid the foundation for the preeminence of Spanish Jewry in the centuries after him when the Babylonian academies diminished and closed.

Even though the Sephardic leaders were religious Jews, they were also fully integrated into the Islamic culture. Like the Muslims, the Jews had a great respect for the Arabic language. They acquired an excellent knowledge of the Arabic language and linguistics.

The aristocratic Jewish class was also well versed in Greek culture and contributed to its further development. Most of the philosophical and scientific classics composed by the Sephardic scholars until the twelfth century, including some of the most profoundly Jewish texts, were written in Arabic.

Jews and Muslims in Spain also grappled with how to reconcile the contradictions of Aristotle's rationalistic thinking with their own revealed religions. Not only did they share a common vocabulary and intellectual concerns they often arrived at similar answers to theological issues. For the Jews, the writings of Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) in the twelfth century would help to integrate rationalism with religion. He was considered the greatest son of Sepharad as well as one of the

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3. Gerber, 52.

4. Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 210.



greatest Jewish philosophers.<sup>5</sup> He was born in Cordoba in 1135, but his family was forced to flee in 1148 after the Almohads swept into Spain. Eventually he would end up in a suburb of Cairo where he would serve as the court physician to the tolerant Sultan Saladin. He wrote in Arabic and admired the Muslim philosophers, especially the Persian Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (980-1037) and Cordoban-born Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (1126-1198). By the end of the thirteenth century, the entire Arabic philosophical corpus (including commentary by Jewish authors like Maimonides, who wrote in Arabic), had been translated into Hebrew.<sup>6</sup>

There was a similarity between Arabic and Hebrew linguistic patterns. Jews often wrote Arabic in Hebrew letters. In addition, there emerged a strong interest in Hebrew linguistics and grammar which had begun earlier in Baghdad and North Africa. In al-Andalus the Jews emulated Arabic poetry by adopting Arabic rhyme and meter, among other features. This new dimension to poetry resulted in the development of a rich outpouring of secular and religious Hebrew poetry. Hasdai was considered to be an important innovator/facilitator of what would later be called the Jewish Golden Cultural Age that lasted from approximately 950 to 1150. Samuel ibn Nagrila (993-1055) would also be considered an important representative of this age. Born and raised in Cordoba, he was a scholar and prolific poet, and would eventually become the vizier of the Granada city-state. During the Golden Age, Jewish traditions

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5. Gerber, 79.

6. Glick, "Science in Medieval Spain," 104.

were integrated with Arabic and Islamic culture which resulted in the creation of something dynamically new. Gerber writes that “the Jewish people would not again experience such a thorough-going synthesis of Judaic culture with foreign elements until the modern era.”<sup>7</sup> It was above all the innovations of poetry, primarily in the Hebrew language, which would mark this time. Music, song, dance, and the visual arts were also important. Al-Andalus was not alone in encouraging the flowering of poetry but it was the most important center. The Jews who enjoyed the new culture comprised an international class of merchants and craftsmen who were also well-grounded in Hebrew. In Baghdad, Kairouan, Muslim Sicily, or Cairo, poetic entertainment was also a part of leisure activity. Entertainment productions traveled from city to city.<sup>8</sup>

Once the news of the intellectual life in Cordoba began to be known, gifted scholars from North Africa and Egypt followed in the footsteps of the artisans and merchants who had come earlier to Spain. What Hasdai ibn Shaprut began under the patronage of Abd al-Rahman III and al-Hakam II would continue for generations after their deaths.

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7. Gerber, 44.

8. Ibid., 62.

## CHAPTER 10

### TRANSMISSION OF SCIENCE IN SPAIN

The movement of Chinese, Indian, Persian, and Greek ideas passed from east to west. The Greek Aristotelian cosmology became the foundational basis for scientific explanation. The Muslims in Baghdad not only translated the works of the Greeks, but they also synthesized the information with the addition of new elements in the form of criticism, theoretical innovations, and the addition of new observations. They created something new.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the same type of scientific analysis and discovery occurred when the information and theories arrived in Medieval Spain. In addition, ideas from the Romans and Visigoths were also incorporated into the synthesis. The work in Spain was conducted by Muslims, Jews, and Christians and is a good example of the *convivencia* among the three groups.

Glick and other scholars have written that most of the organized scientific activity in al-Andalus was begun in the tenth century under the patronage of Abd al-Rahman III and Hasdai ibn Shaprut. Scholars have also written that some of it was transmitted to Christian Spain in the same century. While the historian Americo Castro argued that medieval Spanish culture acted as a passive medium through which the science passed quickly without impact or change<sup>2</sup>, Glick argues that

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1. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, 300.

2. Glick, 298-299.

Islamic Spain did play an important active role in continuing the scientific discovery process.<sup>3</sup>

Glick states that demographics played an important role in the development of organized scientific activity. He notes that the conversion of so many Andalusis to Islam in the tenth century provided sufficient manpower to support those in the learned class and to institutionalize an educational system.<sup>4</sup>

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the process of scientific interchange depended upon the development of networks of scientific schools within the various disciplines. Maslama of Madrid's network of mathematicians and astronomers is a prime example of organized science in al-Andalus. The historian Sa'id al-Andalusi, an eleventh-century author who wrote about the scientific output of various civilizations, noted that Maslama was the best mathematician in the late tenth century and early eleventh century.<sup>5</sup> Maslama studied Ptolemy's *Almagest*, summarized the Iraqi al-Battani's astronomical tables, and refined the works of Iraqi al-Khwarizmi. His students worked within the disciplinary framework that he established. His students were widely dispersed in the eleventh century in many of the important taifa (city-state) capitals. They continued the network, becoming teachers to other students. The development of the Toledan Tables was one of the great achievements of

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3. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, 298-306.

4. Glick, 297.

5. Glick, 302.

Andalusi astronomical work in the late eleventh century with contributions from the respected al-Zarqal (1025-1100).<sup>6</sup>

Less formal patterns of communication were noted in the Andalusí school of agronomists of the mid-eleventh and early twelfth centuries. The school was first formed in Toledo, where Ibn Wafid (d. 1075) was employed in the royal garden of al-Ma'mun. After the Christian conquest of the city in 1083, Ibn Walid's student Ibn Luengo (d. 1105) and his colleague Ibn Bassa moved to Seville. There they came into contact with other Sevillian agronomists as well as with al-Tignari of Granada.<sup>7</sup>

The great twelfth-century school of Aristotelian philosophers in Seville also had its communication networks. The most important person of the school was Ibn Tufayl (d. 1185). He was linked to his teacher Ibn Bajja (d. 1139) and to other contemporaries such as Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (d. 1198) and Ibn Zahra (d. 1162).<sup>8</sup>

Abd al-Rahman III and Hasdai ibn Shaprut put an educational structure in place to support scholarly and cultural advancement. They put the people in place whose contributions would benefit generations to come. What they had brought to such a crescendo culturally and politically was shifting north as the Christians pushed further southward into Muslim territory. The Christian clergy were amazed to find a

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6. Glick, "Science in Medieval Spain," 85 and 90.

7. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, 302-305.

8. Glick, 304.

culture so much more sophisticated than their own.<sup>9</sup> It is to their credit that they recognized this and built upon it rather than destroying it. The Christians, in turn, emulated the same processes of discovery and translation.

Translation work directed by the Christians began in Toledo. King Alfonso VI of Castile made Toledo his capital in 1085. Under King Alfonso VI and his descendants, especially King Alfonso X, Toledo would become a scholar's paradise and the European capital of translations in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. However, it was the Jews who played the most important role in the translation processes because many of them were trilingual, knowing Hebrew, Arabic, and a romance language. They were already experienced in translating from Arabic into Hebrew and in writing in Judeo-Arabic (Arabic written in Hebrew characters).<sup>10</sup> They had created a flexible medium for scientific and philosophical expression. This experience made it possible for them to create a virtually new scientific language in Latin and the vernacular languages.<sup>11</sup> They also translated the entire Aristotelian corpus into Hebrew. When the study of philosophy declined in the Islamic world after the death of Averroes, it would be the Hebrew versions that would become the source material for Europe.<sup>12</sup>

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9. Richard Rubenstein, *Aristotle's Children: How Christians, Muslims, and Jews Discovered Ancient Wisdom and Illuminated the Middle Ages* (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2003), 14.

10. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, 308.

11. Glick., 308.

12. Glick, "Science in Medieval Spain," 107.

In Toledo the Christian Archbishop Raymund of Toledo (fl. 1125 to 1151) organized translation teams to review documents written in Syriac, Aramaic, Arabic, Hebrew and Greek and to translate them into Latin. The teams consisted of Jews, Christians, and Muslims.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the Qur'an was translated into Latin in 1143 by Robert of Ketton and two others working with him; however, it was intended to demonstrate the heretical views of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>14</sup> King Alfonso X, the Wise (1254-1284), became the preeminent Christian cultural patron of the Middle Ages. He especially appreciated the translation work of the Jews and directed them to further develop his native Castilian language and to translate Arabic documents into both Castilian and Latin.<sup>15</sup> He is also known for concentrating the work of the translation scholars in Toledo and improving and standardizing research procedures.<sup>16</sup> However, at the same time he was implementing legal codes that restricted the Jewish community.<sup>17</sup>

The educational structure set in place by Abd al-Rahman and Hasdai laid the foundation for scientific and philosophical discovery to continue in Spain. The Christians would emulate the Muslim model. The contributions by Muslim, Jewish, and Christian philosophers, scientists, and translators resulted in a richness of cultural

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13. Menocal, *The Ornament of the World*, 145.

14. D. Lewis, 370.

15. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, 308-309.

16. Glick, 307.

17. Gerber, 100 and 104.

diffusion and exchange in al-Andalus and enabled the ideas to be passed on to Europe. This is an example of *convivencia* at its best. This happened despite the fact that battles were going on between Muslim factions and between Muslims and Christians as they tried to advance into each other's territories.



## CHAPTER 11

### POLITICAL CHANGES AFTER ABD AL-RAHMAN III AND AL-HAKAM II

Abd al-Rahman III died in 961 and when his son, Caliph al-Hakam II, died in 971, the only heir was a child. There were succession difficulties among three of al-Hakam II's officials. In 981 one of these men, Muhammad ibn Abi Amir al-Ma'afari, who called himself al-Mansur, was named the "mayor of the palace" in al-Andalus. Fletcher writes that al-Mansur, known in Latin as Almanzor, was able to maintain a relative internal sense of order, but his actions would lead to chaos after his death in 1002.<sup>1</sup> Al-Mansur spent much of his time leading frequent and intense battles against the Christians in the north. His ferocity increased the Christians' desires to defeat him and to move into Muslim territory. To the dismay of many of his subjects, he hired Christians as mercenaries and imported more Berbers from North Africa into his army. He succeeded in disrupting the ethnic balance of power among the different groups in al-Andalus. After his death, fighting amongst the Muslim factions intensified. It would be the Berber Almoravids from North Africa in 1031 who would officially end the centralized Umayyad caliphate.

In the aftermath of the Umayyad collapse, many people moved to the individual city-states (also called taifas, petty kingdoms, and party kingdoms) and took their Cordoban cultural spirit with them. Of the more than thirty city-states, some

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1. Fletcher, 75.

became quite independent and, within limits, powerful.<sup>2</sup> Toledo, Seville, Granada, Lucena and other large cities competed with each other from both a military and a cultural perspective. Cordoba, as one of the city-states, continued to be a cultural center. Lucena was a prosperous city with many Jewish inhabitants. The Jews were especially productive during this period in developing new kinds of and uses for poetry as the Jewish Golden Cultural Age continued. Samuel ibn Nagrila (called the Nagid after his appointment to head of the Jewish community) gained eminence as the Jewish vizier to Muslim King Badis of the Granada city-state. He was also the King's commanding officer of the army and was successful in battle. He was a great poet who often described his battles in poetry. After Samuel's death in 1056, his son Joseph was named first minister to King Badis. However, in 1066 there was an anti-Jewish pogrom in which Joseph, in particular, was targeted. He and other Jews were killed.<sup>3</sup>

By 1090, the Almoravids had fully annexed the taifa remnants of al-Andalus. Their attempts to impose a more conservative and fundamentalist form of Islam among the Andalusis met with resistance and civil unrest. Later an even more repressive Muslim Berber regime from North Africa, the Almohads, would overthrow the Almoravids in 1148.

As the conservative Berber regimes pressed northward, large numbers of Mozarabs, Jews, and Muslims were incorporated into the northern Christian

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2. Gerber, 53.

3. Fletcher, 96.

kingdoms. At the same time, Christians emigrated from northern Europe to participate in the exciting cultural atmosphere. This influx of people resulted in a population growth in the Christian kingdoms. The next phases of the Christian Reconquista of Spain that would be so detrimental to the Muslims and Jews were being unwittingly readied.

## CHAPTER 12

### CONCLUSION

What made this period of intense cultural flourishing possible in tenth century Muslim Spain among three religious groups who appeared to look at the world very differently and did not totally trust each other? In studying this time and place in the medieval Islamic world when there was such an incredible explosion of knowledge and culture across the Mediterranean, several important factors come to mind regarding what made it possible. First it was necessary to have leaders who could recognize a more sophisticated culture or cultural elements in someone else's civilization and not be threatened by it. History has shown us that this is more difficult than it would appear to be. Second, the leaders had to be able to discern how new cultural elements could be incorporated to enhance their domain without causing fear among their own people. Third, times of relative internal peace with tolerant rulers made it easier for the transmission of ideas between countries to occur and for new ideas to be incorporated within a country.

After recognizing a new and more sophisticated culture or cultural element than their own, leaders then had to make a decision whether to incorporate it into their own society, ignore it, or destroy it. The Muslims in the East had the ability to recognize more sophisticated cultural elements when they encountered the Byzantines (Greek knowledge), Persians, Indians, and Chinese. The Visigoths recognized the superiority of the Romanized culture of Hispania after they overtook the country. The

Umayyad rulers in al-Andalus, whose origins were from the Muslim East, continued to recognize and incorporate more advanced notions. The Christian King Alfonso VI and his descendants, especially King Alfonso X, were able to see and embrace the advanced cultural elements in al-Andalus in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries. In contrast, the fundamentalist North African Berber Almoravid and Almohad tribes were shocked by the culture they found in al-Andalus and tried to destroy it. The European Christian Crusades into the Middle East were another example of wanton destruction. It is ironic that these barbaric Christians were so intent on destroying the civilization that had already planted the seeds that would form the basis for the later European Renaissance.

What was it about the Umayyad Muslim leader Abd al-Rahman III and his talented Jewish vizier Hasdai ibn Shaprut that was so special? Was it because the right leaders were in power at the right time in the right place? They both brought a world-view perspective to their efforts. They were both willing to step outside the more orthodox separateness of their religious communities and interact with other groups. Each had an inquisitiveness to encourage the exploration of Aristotelian rational thought which was a direct challenge to using religion to explain everything. This, in and of itself, could have stirred up a fundamentalist revolution as it continues to do so in the world today. These two men dared to step outside the ordinary bounds of their societies for both commercial and scholarly reasons. They made the most of

the great mixing of cultures in the Mediterranean world. In today's lingo, we might say that both men were willing to think outside the box.

Abd al-Rahman III came from a line of Umayyad rulers who valued scholarship and were tolerant of other groups for the most part. The three rulers who accomplished the most, Abd al-Rahman I, Abd al-Rahman II, and Abd al-Rahman III were the most tolerant and also enjoyed long and relatively peaceful reigns within their territory. However, relative is the key word because there was never total harmony between the Muslim factions within the territory and there were external threats from the Christian kingdoms in the north as well as from other Muslim tribal groups.

Abd al-Rahman III's personal characteristics and the environment in which he grew up seemed to play a very important role in what he became as a ruler. He may have been as tolerant as he was of other religions and races because he himself was of mixed race, which also included a mixed religious heritage (Muslim and Christian). It is said that he was three quarters Hispano-Basque and one quarter Arab. He seemed to model himself and his style of governing after Abd al-Rahman II (822-852), his great-great-grandfather.

Like Abd al-Rahman II, he approached the challenges of his day in innovative ways and supported scholarship and artistic culture. He allowed the Christians and Jews to practice their own religions without much interference. He was able to bring order to a chaotic environment where different factions were fighting each other.

He had an approach to government that encompassed all the groups of his kingdom. In addition, he ran a very efficient government. His consistency in ruling and the length of his rule contributed to his success. In these ways he was similar to Abd al-Rahman II.

Abd al-Rahman III was aware that he needed to be careful when conducting state business with other countries that were not Muslim-led. He knew it would upset some conservative Muslim sensibilities in al-Andalus. That is why he included trusted Christians and Jews as part of his diplomatic corps.

His vizier Hasdai ibn Shaprut also had an impressive lineage and heritage. Hasdai was fortunate to have come from a line of successful Jews who had their own rich culture. His personal characteristics and the environment in which he grew up prepared him for the important roles he would play later in life. Hasdai was the son of the educated, influential, and wealthy Rabbi Issac b. Ezra ibn Shaprut. The Rabbi was known for his concern for the Jewish community and religion, and served as a benefactor to many Jewish scholars and writers. He made sure Hasdai received a well-rounded education with private tutors that included subjects such as medicine, languages, religious studies, poetry, and writing. Hasdai learned the languages commonly used in al-Andalus such as Hebrew, Arabic, Latin, and Romance.

Hasdai is remembered fondly by the Jews as a promoter of Jewish life in Sepharad and in the Jewish world. He began a new era in scholarship that would later be known as the Jewish Golden Cultural Age. His skill as a vizier and diplomat

brought many advantages to Abd al-Rahman III's kingdom and to all the people of al-Andalus.

Abd al-Rahman III and Hasdai ibn Shaprut created an educational structure in medieval Spain where intellectual and cultural talent could thrive. They put the people in place whose contributions would benefit generations to come. They encouraged further development of the ideas and technology coming from the Eastern Muslim world. Muslims, Jews, and Christians participated in this endeavor. When the Christians came to dominate northern Spain, they were amazed by the culture found. They then imitated the scientific discovery process and translation team concept that was in place in al-Andalus to continue the transmission of information and theories to Europe. This would form the foundation for the European Renaissance.

Both Abd al-Rahman III and Hasdai ibn Shaprut benefited immensely from the way they were raised by their families and the societies that their ancestors created. They used their remarkable talents to build upon what had already been created. We might imagine them saying, as Isaac Newton did in 1676,...”If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”<sup>1</sup>

How can we use the courageous examples set by Abd al-Rahman III and Hasdai ibn Shaprut in today's world? Not only does there have to be a willingness to step outside the real and imagined boundaries of our societies and reach out to the

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1. Jean-Pierre Maury, *Newton: The Father of Modern Astronomy*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992), 117.



other side, but there has to be a willingness for each person to step outside of his/her own personal comfort zone. There has to be a willingness to act for the larger common good.

In modern times, we saw a courageous example in the political acts of Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin in the 1970s. The outcomes of the 1967 Six Day War, the 1973 Yom Kippur War (October War), and the continued violence left Israel, Egypt, the other Arab states, the United States, and the United Nations searching for ways to end the violence. To everyone's surprise and/or shock in 1977, President Anwar al-Sadat made a bold political move and announced that he intended to visit Israel and speak to the Knesset. He arrived in Israel on November 19, 1977. He was given a hero's welcome by the people of Israel who lined the streets of Jerusalem waving the Egyptian flag. He addressed the Knesset on November 20, 1977. His intention was not to negotiate a separate peace with Israel, but to try to decrease the level of animosity between the two countries and to set an example that might be followed by the other Arab states in their relations with Israel. The other Arab nations were furious and did not join him in his efforts toward peace. In addition, Sadat and Begin both had to deal with the discontented parties in their own countries and risked their political positions. The Camp David Accords, which created a framework for later steps, was signed in December 1978 by Sadat, Begin, and President Jimmy Carter. A more comprehensive Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty was signed in March 1979. Sadat and Begin improved the relationship

between Egypt and Israel, but ultimately it did not result in the regional peace they had hoped for. However, they need to be remembered for the enormous political risks they took to step out of their own communities and reach out to the other side for the overall good of the region. Sadat would pay dearly for this. He was ostracized by the Arab world and would be assassinated in 1981. Even though internal Egyptian politics was the main reason for the assassination, his overture for peace with Israel was a contributing factor. Sadat and Begin made important contributions to the long search for peace in the Middle East. They were the right men in the right place at the right time who did the right thing.

Not many of us will rise to the level of an Abd al-Rahman III, Hasdai ibn Shaprut, Anwar al-Sadat, or Menachem Begin. What can we do in our smaller lives to bring people together who have differences due to religion, ethnicity, race, or culture? I think that it is important that we teach the children of the United States these values. It is also important for them to hear about all the positive contributions that the Muslims and Jews have made to Western civilization which is too often perceived as only a Christian civilization. In today's world, all Americans must open up their minds and learn about the positive aspects of the history of the Muslims and Jews. Let us strive for a mutual, respectful co-existence with others, making it a goal to reach for the idealism captured in the word *convivencia*.

## APPENDIX 1

### MUSLIM SPAIN FROM APPROXIMATELY 750 – 1031



Muslim al-Andalus comprised about 80% of the Iberian Peninsula. The grayish line on the map shows that the northern dividing line between Muslim and Christian territory was the Duero River and the Ebro River valley; however, it was a fluid dividing line. The Christian kingdoms of Asturias, Leon, Castile, Navarre, Aragon, and Catalonia were in the north.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 108. Note that O'Callaghan incorrectly labels the map 711-1031 in his book. The invading Muslims did not reach the northern boundaries in 711 and actually went beyond the northern boundaries in 714. But later Muslims had to retreat. It was around 750 that the delineation between the Muslim and Christian territories was clearer. That is what is reflected in this map.

## APPENDIX 2

### CHRONOLOGY OF IMPORTANT DATES

| <b>Dates</b>         | <b>Medieval Spain before the Muslims</b>                              | <b>Actions of the Romans &amp; Visigoths</b>  | <b>Other parts of the Muslim World</b> | <b>Muslims in Spain (Al Andalus)</b> |
|----------------------|---|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| 200 B.C.E – 200 C.E. | Many Jews migrate to Iberian Peninsula.                               |   |  |                                      |
| 200 – 14 B.C.E.      | Romans conquer Iberian Peninsula.                                     | Romans conquer Iberian Peninsula.   |  |                                      |
| 306 C.E.             | Council of Elvira limits some interactions between Jews & Christians. |   |  |                                      |
| 313 C.E.             |   | With Edict of Milan, Roman Emperor Constantine gives Christianity equal standing in the empire.   |  |                                      |
| 325                  |   | Council of Nicaea is convened by Constantine. Accepts concept of Trinity and the Divinity of Christ. Legislates measures against the Jews.                          |  |                                      |
| 380                  |   | Roman Emperor Theodosius I issues an edict stating that Trinitarian Christianity is the only legally recognized religion in the Empire. Legislates measures against |  |                                      |

| Dates                   | Medieval Spain before the Muslims                        | Actions of the Romans & Visigoths   | Other parts of the Muslim World  | Muslims in Spain (Al Andalus) |
|-------------------------|--|---|--|-------------------------------|
|                         |  | the Jews.   |  |                               |
| 476                     | Chaotic conditions and decline in trade and the economy. | Downfall of the western Roman Empire.   |  |                               |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> century |  | Visigoths invade and in time establish rule based on Roman law.   |  |                               |
| 570                     |  |   | Birth of the Prophet Muhammad.   |                               |
| 589                     |  | Visigothic King Reccared converts from Arian Christianity to Trinitarian Christianity. He and the church convene the Third Council of Toledo which establishes Christianity as the official religion. |  |                               |
| 612                     |  | King Sisebut is the first to sponsor severe anti-Jewish legislation.  |  |                               |
| 621 - 711               |  | Half of the Visigothic kings enact and implement aggressive anti-Jewish policies; half of the kings are more tolerant.  |  |                               |
| 632                     |  |   | Death of the Prophet Muhammad.   |                               |
| By 641                  |  |   | Muslims control Syria, Palestine, & Egypt and defeat the Persian Empire. |                               |

| Dates            | Medieval Spain before the Muslims | Actions of the Romans & Visigoths   | Other parts of the Muslim World  | Muslims in Spain (Al Andalus)                                      |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| 644 - 650        |                                   |   | Muslims conquer Cyprus & Tripoli and establish Muslim rule in Iran, Afghanistan, and Sind.         |  |
| 661-680          |                                   |   | First Umayyad Caliph Muawiyah moves his capital from Medina to Damascus, Syria.                    |  |
| 661 – 750        |                                   |   | <b>Umayyad dynasty centrally rules the Muslim empire from Damascus (D).</b>                        |  |
| 680-683          |                                   |   | Rule of Caliph Yazid I.  |  |
| 683-685          |                                   |   | Accession of Marwan I.   |  |
| 685-705          |                                   |   | Rule of Caliph Abd al-Malik.   |  |
| 680 – 711        |                                   | Visigothic Kings Erwig, Erica, and Roderick are very anti-Jewish. A series of natural disasters at the end of the seventh century leaves Spain's agriculture and economy in shambles. |  |  |
| 705-717          |                                   |   | Rule of Caliph al Walid I in D. Muslim armies continue the conquest of N. Africa and invade Spain. |  |
| 711              |                                   |   | Muslim invasion of Spain.  | <b>Muslim invasion of Spain.</b>                                   |
| 711-<br>ca. 718  |                                   |   |  | Invasion period & early settlement.                                |
| 716              |                                   |   |  | Cordoba becomes capital of al-Andalus.                             |
| ca. 718 –<br>756 |                                   |   |  | Battles between Muslims and Christians continue. Also factionalism |

| Dates     | Medieval Spain before the Muslims | Actions of the Romans & Visigoths | Other parts of the Muslim World  | Muslims in Spain (Al Andalus)  |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|
|           |                                   |                                   |  | among Muslim tribal groups as well as among Christian kingdoms.            |
| 717-720   |                                   |                                   | Rule of Caliph Umar II in D.   |  |
| 720-724   |                                   |                                   | Rule of Caliph Yazid II in D.  |  |
| 724-743   |                                   |                                   | Rule of Caliph Hisham I in D. Orders Muslims in Spain to continue conquest into what is now southern France.   |  |
| 732       |                                   |                                   | Spanish Muslims are defeated at the Battle of Poitiers in southern France. This stops Muslim expansion into Europe beyond Spain.                               | Spanish Muslims are defeated at the Battle of Poitiers in southern France. |
| 743       |                                   |                                   | Rule of al-Walid II in D.  |  |
| 744-749   |                                   |                                   | Rule of Marwan II in D.  |  |
| 749-750   |                                   |                                   | <b>Abbasid dynasty overthrows the Umayyads in Damascus.</b>  |  |
| 750 – 754 |                                   |                                   | All but one member of the ruling Umayyad family is killed. (Abd al-Rahman I)   | Umayyad Abd al-Rahman I escapes from Abbasids and makes his way to Spain.  |
| 756-788   |                                   |                                   |  | <b>Abd al-Rahman I sets up an independent Umayyad kingdom in Cordoba.</b>  |
| 750-754   |                                   |                                   | Rule of Abbasid Caliph Saffah.   |  |
| 754-774   |                                   |                                   | Caliph al-Mansur, the Victorious, establishes the Abbasid Caliphate on a solid foundation with help from his large family. He begins the translations of Greek |  |

| Dates   | Medieval Spain before the Muslims | Actions of the Romans & Visigoths | Other parts of the Muslim World  | Muslims in Spain (Al Andalus) |
|---------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
|         |                                   |                                   | knowledge. <sup>1</sup> He encourages poetry. <sup>2</sup>   |                               |
| 762     |                                   |                                   | <b>Baghdad (B) becomes capital of Abbasid dynasty by Caliph al-Mansur.</b>   |                               |
| 775-785 |                                   |                                   | Caliph al-Mahdi continues the work of the translations and encourages other cultural activities like poetry and song. <sup>3</sup> He reconciles various factions in the empire. He sponsors yearly military expeditions against the Byzantines. <sup>4</sup> He continues & consolidates his father's achievements. |                               |
| 785-786 |                                   |                                   | Rule of Caliph Hadi.   |                               |
| 788-796 |                                   |                                   |  | Rule of Emir Hisham I.        |
| 796-822 |                                   |                                   |  | Rule of Emir Hakam I.         |
| 786-809 |                                   |                                   | The rule of Caliph Harun al-Rashid is the zenith of Abbasid power. He encourages a great cultural renaissance and the sharing of ideas with other cities of the empire. <sup>5</sup> He sponsors   |                               |

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1. Glick, "Science in Medieval Spain," 103.

2. Hugh Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World: The Rise and Fall of Islam's Greatest Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press of Perseus Books Group, 2005), 118.

3. Ibid., 116 and 253-254.

4. Ibid., 54-55.

5. Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History* (New York: Random House, 2000), xvii.



| Dates   | Medieval Spain before the Muslims | Actions of the Romans & Visigoths | Other parts of the Muslim World   | Muslims in Spain (Al Andalus)  |
|---------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
|         |                                   |                                   | yearly military expeditions against the Byzantines. In contrast, he sends Charlemagne an elephant when he is anointed Emperor of the Western Roman Empire.  |                                |
| 809-813 |                                   |                                   | Rule by his first son Caliph Amin.  |                                |
| 811-819 |                                   |                                   | Great Abbasid Civil War orchestrated by the two sons' advisors. Baghdad is left in ruins.   |                                |
| 813-819 |                                   |                                   | Second son Caliph al-Mamun remains in Merv until 819, which causes unrest and a weakening of the empire. He returns to Baghdad in 819. <sup>6</sup>   |                                |
| 813-833 |                                   |                                   | Caliph al-Mamun supports the work of translating & analyzing Greek science and encouraging other cultural pursuits. Arabic is still the language of high culture and most people are Muslims. However, the society is less of an Arab society and more of a Persian society. <sup>7</sup> |                                |
| 822-852 |                                   |                                   |   | Rule of Emir Abd al-Rahman II. |
| 833-842 |                                   |                                   | Rule of Caliph al-Mutasim is the beginning of Turkish domination over the Caliphate. He creates his own personal corps of Turkish slaves. To  |                                |

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6. Kennedy, 110-111.

7. Ibid., 243-244.

| Dates   | Medieval Spain before the Muslims | Actions of the Romans & Visigoths | Other parts of the Muslim World   | Muslims in Spain (Al Andalus) |
|---------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
|         |                                   |                                   | reduce tensions, he moves his soldiers to his new capital of Samaara.   |                               |
| 836-892 |                                   |                                   | <b>Samaara is the capital of the empire.</b> <sup>8</sup>   |                               |
| 842-847 |                                   |                                   | Caliph al-Wathiq encourages scientific inquiry. <sup>9</sup>  |                               |
| 852-886 |                                   |                                   |   | Rule of Emir Muhammad I.      |
| 847-861 |                                   |                                   | Caliph al-Mutawakkil supports tradition rather than scientific inquiry. <sup>10</sup> He encourages poetry. He is assassinated by his Turkish generals.           |                               |
| 861-862 |                                   |                                   | Rule of Caliph al-Muntasir.   |                               |
| 862-866 |                                   |                                   | Rule of Caliph al-Mustain.  |                               |
| 865     |                                   |                                   | Second siege of Baghdad between supporters of Mustain and Mutazz. Chaos at the center of the empire leads to the collapse of caliphal authority in the provinces. |                               |
| 866-870 |                                   |                                   | Rule of Caliph al-Mutazz.   |                               |
| 869-870 |                                   |                                   | Rule of Caliph al-Muhtadi.  |                               |
| 870-872 |                                   |                                   | Rule of Caliph al-Mutamid   |                               |
| 872-892 |                                   |                                   | Unrest continues in the Abbasid empire.   |                               |
| 886-888 |                                   |                                   |   | Rule of Emir al-Mundhir.      |
| 888-912 |                                   |                                   |   | Rule of Emir                  |

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8. Ibid., xvii.

9. Ibid., 244 and 257.

10. Ibid., 245 and 257.

| Dates   | Medieval Spain before the Muslims | Actions of the Romans & Visigoths | Other parts of the Muslim World   | Muslims in Spain (Al Andalus)                               |
|---------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
|         |                                   |                                   |   | Abd Allah.  |
| 892     |                                   |                                   | <b>Caliph al-Mutadid reestablishes Baghdad as the capital.<sup>11</sup></b>   |   |
| 892-902 |                                   |                                   | Caliph al-Mutadid patronizes science and philosophy. Scholarly life centers around the elite. <sup>12</sup>   |   |
| 902-908 |                                   |                                   | Rule of Caliph al-Muktafi.  |   |
| 908-932 |                                   |                                   | Caliph al-Muqtadir is deposed due to mismanagement & financial crisis. <sup>13</sup>  |   |
| 909     |                                   |                                   | Muslim Fatimids seize power in Ifriqiyyah, Tunisia. They declare themselves to be the one true Caliphate.   |   |
| 932-934 |                                   |                                   | Rule of Abbasid Caliph al-Quhair in Baghdad.  |   |
| 912-961 |                                   |                                   |   | <b>Rule of Abd al-Rahman III.</b>                           |
| 929     |                                   |                                   |   | <b>Abd al-Rahman III names himself the one true Caliph.</b> |
| 934-940 |                                   |                                   | Rule of Abbasid Caliph al-Radi.   |   |
|         |                                   |                                   | <b>From this point the Abbasid caliphs do not wield empire-wide military power but are merely a symbolic authority. Real power now resides with the local rulers.</b> |   |

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11. Ibid., xvii.

12. Ibid., 243-244.

13. Ibid., 295.

| <b>Dates</b>                    | <b>Medieval Spain before the Muslims</b> | <b>Actions of the Romans &amp; Visigoths</b> | <b>Other parts of the Muslim World</b> | <b>Muslims in Spain (Al Andalus)</b>   |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| 961-971                         |  |  |  | Rule of Caliph al-Hakam II.  |
| 983                             |  |  | Fatimids move their capital to Cairo.  |  |
| 981-1002                        |  |  |  | Al-Mansur, a former official of al-Hakam II's, becomes leader.                           |
| 1031                            |  |  |  | The N. African Berbers, the Almoravids, end the centralized Umayyad caliphate.           |
| 1031-1090                       |  |  |  | Culture centers in city-states (taifas) continue.  |
| 1090                            |  |  |  | The Almoravids fully annex the taifas and impose a stricter form of Islam.               |
| 1147-1148                       |  |  |  | The Almohads, an even more repressive N. African Berber tribe, overthrow the Almoravids. |
| 1085                            |  |  |  | Toledo becomes the Christian King Alfonso VI's capital.                                  |
| 12th-13 <sup>th</sup> centuries |  |  |  | Toledo becomes translation capital with participation of Christians, Jews, and Muslims.  |

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