

The eastern regions of Al-Andalus before the conquest by Catalonia-Aragon: An overview

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ABSTRACT

This article sets forth a highly schematic synthesis of current knowledge on the history of the eastern regions of Al-Andalus, particularly Tortosa, Valencia and the Balearic Islands, before they were conquered by the Crown of Aragon between the 12th and 13th centuries. After presenting the informational records on this region, we shall describe the main features in the construction of a society and a political order grounded on Arab-Berber immigrants and the creation of a new agrarian ecosystem. Finally, we shall offer observations of the nature of the legal power and the forms in which authority was exercised.

KEYWORDS: Al-Andalus, Islam, Middle Ages, historiography, conquests

Making the lands conquered from Al-Andalus by the Catalan-Aragonese monarchy and aristocracy between the mid-12th and mid-13th centuries a retrospective subject of historical study is a dubious and not highly recommendable undertaking. First of all, from the strictly formal standpoint, we can warn that the vast political-administrative units of Al-Andalus did not have the same geographical boundaries as the territorial entities that emerged after the conquest. For example, speaking about a “Muslim kingdom” of Valencia as the forerunner or prior configuration of the Christian kingdom of Valencia is a serious distortion of reality, albeit one that is useful – like all alterations of this kind – for ideological elaborations and for sowing confusion.¹ Naturally, nor does it make any sense to refer to a “Muslim kingdom” of Tortosa or Mallorca, even though the latter’s status as an island helps to create a false impression of continuity. Apart from this, the territorial scope of the authority exercised by the powers that were eventually settled in these cities was diffuse and highly variable over time, as was the guise of these authorities (governors, emirs, *mulûk*, corporations of notables). This is in very eloquent contrast with the precision and stability of the territorial boundaries defined afterward by the conquerors, who ultimately acted with the logic of a profoundly “spatialised” social order, the feudal system.^{2*}

The second reason is much more important. We can only gain a rational perspective on the issue if we start with the fact that physical places have no history of their own apart from the people who inhabit them.³ And in the case at hand, the conquests represent precisely not only the imposition of the social order of the winners, but also population replacements with differing impacts depending on the zone (until the final expulsion in 1609, many more Andalusis remained in the kingdom of Valencia than in Tortosa, and virtually none stayed on the islands), yet always on a large scale. The spread of Christianity and the Catalan language (Aragonese-Castilian in some areas in northwest Valencia) was sustained solely in their carriers, the colonists who emigrated from Catalonia, Aragon and other northern kingdoms. In contrast, the native population was homogeneously Muslim and Arab-speaking. They were not “Valencians” or “Mallorcans”; rather they were part of a country and a civilisation that had spread around much of the Iberian Peninsula which called itself Al-Andalus. If we must call them something, then, it should be Andalusis.

The most appropriate, albeit inaccurate, term to refer to the lands that joined the Crown of Aragon after it fought to win them back between 1148 and 1258 is Sharq al-Andalus. This means “Eastern Al-Andalus” and it designated, though somewhat vaguely, the region that extends from Tortosa to Almeria and reached as far inland as Albarracín and Cuenca. The so-called “eastern islands of Al-Andalus” are not clearly included in Sharq al-Andalus, and Lleida was more identified with the “Upper March” (ath-Thagr al-A‘lâ), which also included

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Tortosa, even though its position at the far eastern end of the frontier sometimes earned it the name of “Eastern March” (ash-Sharqî) or “Extreme” (al-Aqsâ). The imprecise extent of the Sharq therefore hardly dovetails closely with the scope of the Catalan-Aragonese conquests. Likewise, the name does not correspond to any specific administrative division or to any explicitly formulated social or population specificity, although the Arab authors used it profusely as one of the main geographic referents in Al-Andalus. Ultimately, what we are discussing is Al-Andalus and a part of its geography that essentially shared the same features as the whole.

Given the scope and diversity of the places that may be borne in mind, we should note that in this paper we shall focus primarily on the central regions of the Sharq (Tortosa and Valencia) and the eastern islands.

A GLANCE AT THE SOURCES

While Al-Andalus does not form part of the history of Catalonia or the Crown of Aragon (or the history of Spain, despite the attempts by some historiographers in the 19th and 20th centuries and the incomprehensibly surviving acceptance of the terminological outrage “Muslim Spain”), it is logical that the nature of the information records available to us (Arabic texts, archaeological information and numismatics) have ultimately been “foreign” to medievalism, beyond the expected technical difficulties inherent in dealing with them. Unlike Western Christian-Latin societies, Andalusí civilisation has left us hardly any archival documents, largely because of the destruction wrought by the conquest, but also because of the very nature of the Muslim state which, despite its heavily bureaucratized nature, did not grant the indefinite conservation of documents the importance it had in feudal society, especially when justifying rights and privileges. To examine the case at hand – eastern Al-Andalus – we could say that the exceptions are few and far between and that, save a pair of cases, they are not originals but copies or translations compiled by the Christian conquerors. The textual sources, all of them written in Arabic, of course, are more literary and not always published, and even less often translated. Many works have also disappeared. Recently we have witnessed the discovery or rediscovery of texts that were taken to be lost, such as the *Muqtabis* II-1, a compilation of information from the years 796-847 which mentions the Berbers of Valencia and the attack waged by Charlemagne’s son on Tortosa, and the *Kitâb Tâ’rîh Mayûrqa*, an account of the Catalan conquest of Mallorca written shortly after the deeds by Ibn ‘Amîra, which was found ten years ago in the library of a *zawiya* in Tindouf.⁴

Likewise, the Arabic texts available are not at all homogeneous. One familiar genre somewhat comparable to Western chronicles or annals is the great narrations of political history, often linked to the main dynastic powers established in Al-Andalus (Umayyads, Almoravids, Al-

mohads). The problem is that they mainly focus on the cities and regions where the authorities around which the literary production revolved had a prominent presence, basically the corridor of Seville-Córdoba-Toledo-Zaragoza. They largely ignore the eastern part of the country, the Sharq al-Andalus, which is barely mentioned. Thus, the great series of Umayyad annals compiled in the different volumes of Ibn Hayyân’s *Muqtabis* offers only laconic and desultory information, such as the appointment of governors or the passage of some military expedition. For the 11th to 12th centuries, the most important work of this kind with reference to the eastern region is unquestionably the so-called *Bayân al-Mugrib* by Ibn ‘Idârî, which was composed in around 1312 with a wide array of the oldest materials but has never been subjected to systematic overall editing.⁵ More specific to the Arab-Muslim literary tradition are the numerous geographic works, including the ones by Ibn Hawqal (10th century), Ahmad ar-Râzî (also the 10th century, but known only through the late mediaeval Romance translations), al-‘Udrî (11th century), az-Zuhrî (12th century), Yâqût (12th to 13th centuries) and later al-Himyarî, who nonetheless drew from many of the lost texts by al-Bakrî (11th century). However, far and away the most comprehensive and accurate description of Sharq al-Andalus is the one written by al-Idrîsî in his *Kitâb Rujâr* (Book of Roger), composed in the mid-12th century on commission from Roger II, the Norman King of Sicily. Still, it only runs a few pages long.

A series of texts closely related to the intellectual practices of the educated Muslim classes includes the historical-literary anthologies and biographical dictionaries of scholars, many of them jurists (*‘ulamâ’, fuqahâ’*), who ended up lending their services to the Andalusí authorities as secretaries or viziers. By far the most interesting works of this kind for the eastern region are the ones written by Ibn al-Abbâr, who was born in Valencia in 1199 and was the author of the *Hullat as-Siyarâ’* and the *Takmila* (there is no general critical edition of the latter), in which the characters from Sharq al-Andalus are over-represented for once.⁶ The information contained in these compilations is fundamental for performing prosopographic and genealogical studies that are useful for illuminating the relationships between legal power and the urban educated classes.⁷ This is a highly estimable virtuality given the impossibility of using the existing epigraphic testimonies to draw up prosopographies similar to the kind allowed by Roman inscriptions, for example, because of both their scarcity and their purpose, which was essentially funerary in the case of stone tablets.⁸

Apart from the chronicles, geographic works and bibliographic dictionaries, in recent years there has been rising interest in another kind of text, one that has been relatively unknown until recently and to some extent helps to offset the absence of archival documents, namely legal texts, and more specifically, compilations of inquiries (*fatâwâ*, sing. *fatwâ*) addressed to legal scholars, either

regarding trials or on the request of plaintiffs or local *cadis* (Islamic judges). Through these inquiries and the legal opinions accompanying them, we now have the chance to learn about important features of the social practices which are not properly documented in the classical literary sources, such as how the legal-religious apparatus worked, the rules on marriage and inheritance, exchanges and transactions, money handling, the management of amortised assets (*habûs*, *sing. hubs*), disputes on irrigation and water, agrarian contracts, service rentals, problems involving the urban police and the negotiation of loans. The most important compilation is unquestionably the one drawn up in the 15th century by the Maghrebi jurist al-Wansharîsî, the author of the monumental collection of *fatâwâ* handed down by muftis in Al-Andalus and the Maghreb since the 9th century. Once again, the problem is the extraordinarily minor representation of jurists from Sharq al-Andalus.⁹

The dearth of textual information in Arabic justifies systematic mining of the information that can be gleaned from the Latin documentation generated during the conquest and the early days of Christian colonisation, even though only a minor part of these documents can be used retrospectively. At least in this field, the eastern lands of Al-Andalus conquered by the Crown of Aragon have a notable advantage. The order of magnitude of the 13th century documentation conserved on the kingdoms of Valencia and Mallorca versus the information on the Castilian occupation of Guadalquivir Valley and Murcia brook no comparison: tens of thousands compared to hundreds. The texts from the Christian epoch, as demonstrated by Pierre Guichard, provide highly valuable clues to taxation and the forms of community organisation existing before the conquest.¹⁰ And despite the breadth of the analyses performed by this author, we are still far from exhausting the possibilities of the Latin documentation. No serious study on the urban structures, forms of rural population or irrigation networks could possibly ignore the information contained therein. Even the so-called *repartiments* (sharing-out records) have not yet been exhaustively exploited for this purpose. The Christian documentation also provides a linguistic record of prime importance: the largest stock of place names from the Andalusí period. It is not only a fundamental reference for studying the uses of the land but also an indispensable tool for identifying and locating traces of names that enable us to prove the reconstruction of the settlement processes and distribution of groups linked by kinship and clan or tribal identity.¹¹

The other major bulk of information comes from archaeological practice. This archaeology was initially monumental in nature, and still is to a large degree, mainly centred on studying fortifications, since no large courtly and religious complexes are conserved in the former Sharq al-Andalus with the exception of the caliphal *ribât* of Guardamar and a few palaces in Murcia. Therefore, castles are far and away the most popular subject of exca-



Figure 1. Treasure of Masdenverge (Montsià). Caliphal pieces concealed in around 1025-1050. Source: exhibition catalogue for *L'Islam i catalunya*, Barcelona, Institut Català de la Mediterrània – Museu d'Història de Catalunya – Lunwerg Editores, 1998.

vations, not so much as part of research projects but as the result of political initiatives involving the restoration and preparation of the sites as museums. In fact, the main sets of movable materials, particularly ceramics, come from the so-called “management archaeology”, from professional interventions that have mainly been carried out in urban settings. Most of them are still unpublished, as is the documentation on the structures and building sequences recorded during the excavation process.¹²

Despite that, the vast number of fortifications existing, especially in the region of Valencia, most of them somewhat mediocre, has made it possible to perform comparative morphological studies without excavations, which include a large number of cases. This practice, which A. Bazzana and P. Guichard combined with the exercise of “extensive archaeology” involving large-scale surveying, has enabled us to rather quickly have not only proposals on types of castles but also descriptions of the territorial units made up by the residential nuclei or hamlets (*qurâ*, *sing. qarya* > *alqueria* cat.), the collective facilities, the hydraulic devices, the farmlands, and of course the fortifications which, nonetheless, have lost the central role that they originally had been attributed in our understanding of the spatial structures.¹³ Therefore, it has unquestionably been useful in beginning to organise and make sense of a very broad, disperse set of information within the framework of general hypotheses. However, it has also inevitably posed limitations that more “intensive” studies on the land help us to gradually rectify. One clear example is the detailed cartography of irrigated spaces developed by what is known as “hydraulic archaeology”.¹⁴

The last set of data that must be borne in mind is supplied by numismatics. With the catalogues and current

corpus of coinages we are gradually gaining more exhaustive knowledge of the types of Andalusí coins, which not only offers invaluable information on the political dynamics and mechanisms of the legitimisation of the emirs of the *taifas* (*mulúk at-tawâ'if*) in the 11th century, which is very poorly documented in the chronicles, but also on the very conditions in which coins were used and produced, particularly with the estimates of the volumes of issuances derived from die-account calculations. Likewise, the ever larger record of coins discovered alone or in treasures that were deliberately hidden must be borne in mind, as they are undeniably important when examining problems on the issuing authorities' capacity to intervene in the flow of exchanges and to impose tax payments.¹⁵

THE IMPOSITION OF A NEW ORDER

In the year 711, Târiq b. Ziyâd, a Berber head of the Nafza confederation, a client (*mawlâ*) of the new Arab governor of Ifríqiya and the Maghreb, crossed the strait and defeated the king of the Visigoths. When the governor Musâ b. Nusayr heard about the extent of the victories of the Berber army, he also travelled to Hispania to consolidate the conquest and control the advance of his client. Just as they had done in eastern Byzantium and the Sassanid Empire, the Muslim forces managed to quickly dominate the peninsular peoples through a strategy that was grounded upon the agreed submission of the urban centres. However, we are only aware of the content of one of these capitulations, albeit through different versions: the one that Theodemir, a Visigothic aristocrat in southeast Hispania, signed before ʿAbd al-ʿAzîz, the son of Musâ b. Nusayr. The pact safeguarded the personal status and immunity of the lands of Theodemir and his peers. In exchange, they pledged to guarantee the payment of the tributes from seven or eight cities (this varies in the different versions remaining), including Orihuela, Alicante, Mula, Lorca and others which are more difficult to identify, such as Elda and Elx. For many years, the territory formed by these cities running along the valley of the Segura River would be called by the Visigothic name Tudmîr in the Arabic texts.

Shortly thereafter, ʿAbd al-ʿAzîz b. Musâ himself became the governor of Al-Andalus, but he was assassinated in 716. From then on, the Arab governors succeeded each other at a disconcerting pace, accompanied first by the ongoing antagonism between the large tribal factions into which the Arab contingents were grouped (Qays and Kalb) and secondly by the political marginalisation of the Berber groups and their increasing severance from the profits that they should have been allotted for their participation in the conquest. Therefore, it is logical that the major Berber revolt that broke out in the Maghreb in 740 would soon spread to the peninsula and would seriously compromise the authority exercised by the governor on behalf of the Umayyad caliphate. However, the defeat of

a large Arab army sent by Damascus against the Berbers of the Maghreb and the flight of the survivors to Ceuta put contingents into the hands of the governor which after crossing the strait were decisive in tamping down the uprising in Al-Andalus. The newly arrived Arabs moved to different areas in the country that were allocated to the different sections (*jund/s*) into which the army was divided according to the garrison encampments of the Middle East from which they had come. The only settlement in the eastern region was made by part of the *jund* from Egypt in Tudmîr (the contingent was made up of Arab tribal warriors who used to live in Egypt but were not actually Egyptians themselves). Upon this settlement, Khattâb, the son of one of the Arab chiefs, married Theodemir's daughter, leading to the extinction of the Visigothic line. This must unquestionably have helped to consummate the end of the political vestiges of the 713 treaty in the south-east Iberian Peninsula.

The defeat accentuated the Berbers' distance from the centres of power in Al-Andalus and these groups' consequent move to zones that were somewhat uncontrolled. However, nothing is known about the eastern region during this period. We have to wait a few more decades, after the proclamation of ʿAbd ar-Rahmân b. Muʿawiya, a survivor of Abbasid movement's destruction of the Umayyad dynasty in Damascus, as emir of Córdoba in 756.¹⁶ The rise of this dynastic authority (*dawla*) in Al-Andalus had to grapple with difficulties which would be reflected in the eastern region of the peninsula. In 778, an Abbasid Arab agent named as-Siqlabî disembarked on the coasts of Tudmîr with the goal of organising a revolt in the Sharq. We know that he had the support of a local Berber army, but when he was attacked by the emir of Córdoba he had to seek refuge in a zone that the texts called "the mountains of Valencia".

The known allusions to the people of the region of Valencia in the 8th and 9th century mention only Berber elements. One quite explicit testimony was written towards the end of the 9th century by the Eastern geographer al-Jaʿqûbî in which he notes that the region of Valencia, bisected by the Júcar River, was inhabited by Berber tribes out of the reach of the Umayyad power in Córdoba. Other texts report on a war between the Berbers of Valencia and those of Santaver (near Cuenca) in around 782, and especially on the revolt of the brothers Sulaymân and ʿAbd Allâh, the sons of ʿAbd ar-Rahman I, against their other brother, Hišâm, who had risen to the emirship as their father's successor. After the first of the rebels was defeated in Toledo and Tudmîr, he was obliged to seek refuge "among the Berbers in the region of Valencia, protected by the difficulty of the roads in this country". When Sulaymân died in combat with the Umayyad forces, his brother and ally managed to secure an agreement with the emir to recognise a kind of autonomous governance over the region of Valencia, which would remain in place between 802 and 824; in the future he would be known by the name of ʿAbd Allâh al-Balansî. The *Muqtabis* says

quite precisely that the Berbers in the region of Valencia were on his side.¹⁷

It is not certain whether Valencia was the effective seat of this regional power. The references to *Balansiya* at this time refer more to the region as a whole, while the “capital” was called by the specific name of *Madīnat at-Turâb*, the “city of earth”. The archaeological record reinforces the impression of an accentuated urban decline, of a city that was practically abandoned. Perhaps *Xàtiva* and even *Alzira* (al-Jazīra Shuqr, “the island of the Júcar”) were more important before the time of the caliphate. When the *fitna* (“division”) uprisings which threatened the unity of the emirate spread throughout all of Al-Andalus in the late 9th century, the inhabitants of the fortifications of Valencia were the ones who called on a powerful Berber chief from the mountainous zone of Cuenca to exercise his authority in the region.¹⁸

Unlike what we see in Valencia, in the Ebro Valley we can identify a greater diversity of politically organised settlements. After the frontier with the Franks called the Upper “March” (ath-Thagr al-A^llâ) was stabilised towards the end of the 8th century, the texts reveal the predominance of Arab clan groups from Yemen allied with smaller Berber contingents through ties of clientelism. One regional particularity is the prominence achieved by groups of Muslim *muwalladûn* (descendants of local Christian converts) of neither Arab nor Berber extraction. Despite this, as Xavier Ballestín has pointed out, this does not imply that they had specific social behaviour: their political dealings were in no way different to that of the Yemenite or Berber groups. And generally speaking, what all the groups sought was to prevent the Umayyad authority in Córdoba from interfering with their autonomy and the struggles among them. The opposition to the emir gave rise to an episode similar to that of Valencia, when the rebel chief Bahlûl b. Marzûq, most likely Basque in origin, seized Tortosa and briefly set up a power nucleus opposed to the Umayyad emirate.

The political situation on the eastern coasts of the peninsula, only controlled intermittently and partially by the emirs of Córdoba, made it possible for autonomous groups of seafaring Berbers and Arabs to be established, sometimes called *bahriyyûn* (“people of the sea”). They worked in trade (Ahmad ar-Râzî mentions the export of saffron from Valencia and Tortosa), the transport of people, piracy and incursions against the Christians of Sardinia, Corsica and the coasts of Provence and Italy. Their activity apparently began in Tortosa in the early years of the 9th century. In 829, Sulaymân b. ‘Afiya at-Turtûshî led his ships to conquer Sicily accompanied by a Berber chief from the region of Valencia, Asbag b. Wakîl al-Hawwârî, known as Fargalûsh and unquestionably tied to a clan living on the lower banks of the Júcar River. It should be noted that this expedition was undertaken to support the conquest of the island on behalf of the Aghlabid dynasty in Tunis, without either the consent or the approval of the Umayyads in Córdoba. The same *bahri-*

yyûn who had been in Tortosa and participated in the Sicilian enterprise later founded the prominent autonomous nucleus of Bajjâna (Pechina) —the origin of the city of Almería— in 884. These seafaring men managed to conquer Crete and dominate the routes in the Aegean, but even larger in scope was the creation of an entire network of port settlements between the Maghreb, Sicily and Al-Andalus (with enclaves on the Christian coasts, such as the famous *Fraxinetum* in Provence) based on alliances with the people of the sites they frequented between the early 9th and mid-10th centuries. As al-Bakrî suggests, their involvement in the migratory displacements of the Berber clans to the peninsula is extremely likely.¹⁹

This is the context in which we must situate the episode of the conquest of Mallorca and the other islands in 902. The operation was not conducted by an emir’s army; rather it sprang from the initiative and association of the autonomous seafaring groups from the Sharq, just like all the other Andalusi naval expeditions until the caliphal fleet was set up during the reign of ‘Abd ar-Rahmân III. The enterprise was led by ‘Isâm al-Khawlânî, a military chief of Yemenite lineage who did, in fact, have the endorsement of the emir of Córdoba. The Umayyad *dawla*, however, was not yet prepared to directly administer the islands and had to recognise this person as the governor (*wâlî*). In fact, ‘Isâm al-Khawlânî owed his power to the consent of his associates and to the right of conquest and, as Guichard has observed, he exercised it similarly to the regiment that the Andalusi *bahriyyûn* had set up in Crete during their occupation of the island (827-961). The establishment of Córdoba’s direct control over the eastern islands would take several decades and emerge as part of the dynamic of stable implementation of Umayyad authority over all of Sharq al-Andalus.²⁰

In effect, once the rebel groups from other regions that rose up during the *fitna* crisis that shook up the emirate (886-929) were systematically reduced, ‘Abd ar-Rahmân III embarked upon the military occupation of the eastern region and finally subjected it to Umayyad authority after two centuries characterised by dissidence. It is true that in 889 the inhabitants of Tortosa had addressed the emir ‘Abd ‘Allâh to ask that he appoint a governor, and that the city had had three of them by 900, but this was an anomalous situation (according to Ballestín, the arbitration of an internal conflict) and had no immediate continuity. All sources seem to indicate that the Umayyad control over Tortosa was once again lost during the first decade of the 10th century, and in fact military operations were once again needed in 924-929 to re-establish it.²¹ In parallel, after several initial attacks in the regions of Tudmîr and Valencia in 924, the crucial operations in the Sharq got underway in 928 with the conquest of Alzira and other subordinate fortresses. The 929 expedition witnessed the fall of Sagunt and *Xàtiva*, with their “elevated castles with surprising structures” as noted by Ibn Hayyân. The same year, ‘Abd ar-Rahmân III was proclaimed caliph at Córdoba. After that, we have reports of the ap-



Figure 2. La Suda or the fortress of Tortosa, which was built during the times of the caliphate of Abderraman III (10th century). The Gothic windows date from after the Christian conquest. The entrance to the castle crosses a Muslim cemetery where archaeological remains have been found that are now part of the collection held by the Tortosa Town Hall. La Suda is currently used as tourist accommodations.

pointment of the *wâlî/s* of the *kûra/s* (“administrative districts”) of Lleida, Tortosa, Valencia and Tudmîr, which were periodically renewed – as they were everywhere – in order to avoid the formation of local networks of clientelism, a clear display of the efficient exercise of central authority. However, we should not lose sight of the importance of the role played by military officers and magistrates of Berber extraction in the submission of the eastern peninsula and the islands to Umayyad power.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW SOCIETY

One characteristic feature of these peripheral regions which were poorly controlled by the Umayyad *dawla* of Córdoba until the time of the caliphate is the steep decline in the urban nuclei inherited from the ancient world. The case of Tarragona is a good example: it had been the largest city on the eastern part of the Iberian Peninsula but was totally abandoned after the Muslim conquest. Guichard stresses precisely this phenomenon, noting the

proof in the toponyms: *Valentia* became *Madînat at-Turâb*, “the city of earth” or “sand”, a name evoking dust and abandonment that would endure until the 10th century; *Saguntum* was now called *Murbâtir*, an Arabic term derived from the Latin *muri veteri*, which unquestionably referred to a nucleus in ruins. Archaeology fully confirms this impression. Researchers have been unable to document hardly any signs of occupation in Valencia before the 10th century, and there are even fewer in Dénia and Alicante. Only Tortosa, according to the textual references, seemed to show some degree of urban activity and functions, although it was nonetheless a fragile and unimportant town. The de-urbanisation of the 8th and 9th centuries is significant testimony of the end of the social and political order of late antiquity.²²

The appearance of urban life in Sharq al-Andalus is nothing more than a direct result of the implementation of the new state power. One quite striking aspect of this process is unquestionably represented by the establishment of new cities, which could already be seen in the early example of the founding of Murcia in 831 by ‘Abd

ar-Rahmân II – the most powerful of the emirs – as the administrative centre of the country of Tudmîr. Another example is Almeria, which was created in 955 to replace the adjacent autonomous seafaring town of Bajjâna. However, the most common phenomenon was the occupation of the former sites of cities by representatives of the political apparatus and their retinues, groups that tended to gradually generate specific (“urban”) activities around them through their ability to manage periodic tax revenues. During the time of the caliphate, Valencia thus began to become more urbanised. The governors made it their habitual residence – despite the defensive advantages of Xàtiva – and ordered government headquarters to be built that would permanently transform the remains in the old Episcopal area of the city: the *qasr* or palace (the existence of which is reported in the early 11th century). Shortly thereafter, still in the 10th century, a *sûq* (souk) was built around it made of a row of rectangular shops. The creation of this market area is highly significant since it reveals a slight surge in trade, perhaps driven by the supply of goods to the garrison, a discrete governing bureaucracy and the first magistrates’ families. We know, for example, that in 939 the oldest known member of the Banû Jahhâf died in Valencia, a prestigious family line that is considered part of the Arab Ma‘âfir tribe which yielded many cadis for the city without ceasing to play an important role in political life as a whole in Sharq al-Andalus for generations.²³

In the case of Tortosa, the state presence was accentuated by the construction of the shipyards ordered by ‘Abd ar-Rahmân III and executed by the governor, as reported in an inscription from 945, as well as the new main mosque built ten years later as a sign of the entrenchment of the caliphate’s power. However, the city’s frontier location, with all the complications derived from it, must have required the caliph to eliminate the tax charges which weighed heavily upon the inhabitants by 941. In any event, all of these measures display the desire to secure a centre that proved crucial in sustaining the terrestrial and maritime frontier of Al-Andalus. Just like Tortosa, Dénia was also chosen by ‘Abd ar-Rahmân III as the site of the state shipyards, but as yet not a true city rather a small port nucleus, as testified by ar-Râzî, which might have been used as a base for the expedition to the islands in 902. The construction of two large naval dockyards on the coasts of the Sharq is coherent with the caliph’s interest in taking effective control of the eastern islands, which he would use as the base for the Ummayyad fleet, especially with the goal of stopping the expansion of the rival Fatimid caliphate that was now solidly established in the centre of the Maghreb. The site chosen as the capital of the island, the small and practically abandoned Roman city of Palma – just like other nuclei discussed above – shed its ancient name and became known as *Madîna Mayûrqa*. Apparently mosques, *fundûq*/s (caravanserais) and baths were built during the period when ‘Isâm al-Khawlânî governed, but the modest *qasr* identified in the



Figure 3. Original stone tablet from the shipyards of Tortosa by ‘Abd Allâh b. Kulayb (333 H/944-945 AD). Source: exhibition catalogue for *L’Islam i catalunya*, Barcelona, Institut Català de la Mediterrània – Museu d’Història de Catalunya – Lunwerg Editores, 1998.

subsoil of the Almudaina was probably built once the direct representatives of the caliph’s power had moved there by the mid-10th century.²⁴

The urban seats of caliphal authority, most of them small in size, were not built over lands devoid of people, nor did they signal the onset of any agricultural expansion process initiated by them. Quite to the contrary, their location precisely sought proximity to the networks of settlements of a certain size clustered around consolidated farmlands and recognised places of exchange, which is, after all, what made regular tax intervention possible. On the other hand, in no way can we deny the paramount importance of the Berber immigrants in setting up these population networks. We have already seen – and Guichard has studied it extensively – how the information from Arabic texts repeatedly documents a heavy Berber presence in the Sharq during the 8th and 9th centuries, which was particularly associated with war operations. However, Miquel Barceló has warned that it would be erroneous to deduce a strictly military dimension to this presence. The vast toponymic tribal and clan record on the eastern part of Al-Andalus is a fundamental tool in determining the breadth and provenance of the immigrant groups. The clans and lineages affiliated with the tribal confederation of the Nafza particularly stand out, as do the Hawwâra, Miknâsa, Majîla and Zanâta. Even though they were in the minority, there was also a significant Arab presence which is recognisable in the tribal names of dozens of lineages established in the regions of

Valencia and Tudmîr (Ansâr, Lahm, Qays, Kinâna, Khawlân and Yahsub). Apart from the valuable information on the overall scope of the practices of clan affiliation of the Arabs and Berbers, the extensive record of place names beginning with *Beni-* enables us to trace a cartography of the settlements that resulted from the migratory process through which we can note their link to certain ways of organising the agricultural space which reveal the peasant nature of the groups that predominated in these establishments.²⁵

The date that these toponymic complexes were established cannot be late, nor, as Barceló has proven, is it credible that they have to do with the military presence of the Almoravids and Almohads during the 12th century. A famous Latin text from 1097, written in the office of the scribe of Ramon Berenguer III, makes an early donation to the monastery of Sant Cugat del Vallès of a dense concentration of 30 *qurâ* (hamlets) near the *ribât* Kashkâllû (near the current town of Sant Carles de la Ràpita); their names are listed, and most of them begin with *Beni-*. The most interesting part of this document is that it offers a precise *ante quem* date for an entire set of toponyms in which we can identify recurring associations of Berber names (with a few Arab clans interspersed) which are repeated in many locations around Valencia and the islands. According to the logic of this reasoning, Barceló himself notes that the groupings found on the islands must have been the outcome of connections already established on the eastern part of the peninsula before the occupation of Mallorca in 902. We can therefore state that Berber settlement in Sharq al-Andalus had been consolidated throughout the 9th century. In the end, the migratory process was more compatible with a sea crossed regularly by the *bahriyyûn* than one dominated by the caliph's fleets or those of other state authorities.²⁶

The native population does not figure prominently in this scenario dominated by the Arab-Berber colonists. Obviously, this does not mean that the eastern regions of Al-Andalus were uninhabited until then, although there was a substantial population decline on the islands during the centuries prior to the disembarkation of 'Isâm al-Khawlânî which, in the case of Ibiza, did seem to have arrived at veritable extinction. The population density must have been quite scant on the eastern coasts of the peninsula, as suggested by the sketchiness of the archaeological record and the steep decline in the urban nuclei from late antiquity. Right now we are not poised to venture reasonable quantitative estimates, but in any event the gaps must have been sufficient for the Berber and Arab immigrants not to have to face significant competition with local groups for the same resources, a circumstance which, according to Barceló, must have been crucial in the decision to migrate. The lack of concurrence would be facilitated by the selective nature of the occupation of the space as practised by the Berbers. This is coherent with the entire set of agrarian practices that they brought with them which, as we shall see, marked a radical departure from

the Mediterranean agrarian ecosystem in the Roman tradition.²⁷

The Muslim conquest did not give rise to systematic exercises of population replacement, but it did lead to a rapid integrative assimilation of the native groups, which in the Sharq al-Andalus must have immediately lost their specific social profile. Two very powerful dynamics converged in this process: alliance and conversion. Regarding the former, we must start with the fact that the Berber and Arab lineages practised marriage strategies that sought to capture nubile young women from other kinship groups while retaining their own young women, to the extent possible, through endogamic alliances and, in some cases, polygamy.²⁸ The success of the lineage – prestige, size, wealth, prospects for lasting over time – depended heavily on this ability. Therefore, the indigenous groups found themselves extremely vulnerable, as this kind of practice was not part of their social structure, so a profusion of alliances with the new arrivals would clearly lead to a drop in their numbers, especially in the case of the Christians, who could not expect any sort of reciprocity in the release of marriageable women.

Conversion to Islam was fostered by many factors. We have just seen the first; the second no less powerful factor was taxation: remaining Christian meant severe penalisation in the amount of taxes to be paid.²⁹ However, we should bear in mind that the conversion processes did not operate according to the modern concept that links religious practice to individual conscience and thus makes it a strictly private affair.³⁰ Quite the contrary, conversion had to take place via socially recognised forms that involved entire groups of people. The principle was the clientele relationship through which the converted individuals accepted the patronage of the head of a family line or Muslim clan. In consequence, their integration into the community of believers was tantamount to adopting their social behaviours and, more particularly, the behaviours related to marriage, kinship and onomastics.

The dynamics of assimilation would unquestionably achieve extraordinary efficacy, as demonstrated by the absence of Christian-Latin traces in the existing records. This absence contrasts strikingly with the efforts and, in many cases, manipulations (not always extra-academic) aimed at constructing a historiographic fiction in which the Mozarab Christians became the factor in the transmission of a supposed Romance language prior to the Catalan-Aragonese conquests. In the region of Valencia today, the political returns derived from the artificial maintenance of permanent tension around linguistic identity have endowed them with institutional coverage and public projection that would be unthinkable in other circumstances. Without this social impunity, we could not understand the extremes of extravagant falsification which have been reached when fabricating the Mozarabs, yet without the referent of authority which they have had for a long time in the continuist principles of traditional Spanish medievalism.³¹

Upon rigorous examination, the first thing we should say about the presence of Christian groups in Sharq al-Andalus is that numerically they must have been quite small and always limited to the urban nuclei where their churches were located. However, the presence of bishops in the region is purely episodic, since they are only documented in the 11th century, in the cities of Dénia, Valencia and Tortosa. Thus, we know about Paternus, the Bishop of Tortosa, who was later the Bishop of Coïmbra after the conquest of this city by Ferdinand I of Castile and León in 1064. The itinerant life of this prelate – who was no exception – seems a telling symptom of the mobility of the Christian communities. The handful of Christians who might have lived in Dénia or Valencia in the 11th century almost certainly came from other places in Al-Andalus or descended from the captives and mercenaries living in there; they were not the unlikely survivors from the previous centuries, which, as we have seen, were marked by the abandonment of the urban nuclei in the Sharq.³² Another factor worth noting about the Christians of Al-Andalus is the complete Arabisation of their language. This has recently been underscored by Cyrille Aillet: Latin (as well as the Andalusí romance dialects) had disappeared from everyday speech, from the most frequently used texts and even, most probably, from parts of the liturgy.³³ In the early days, the Mozarabs (from the Arabic *musta'rab*, 'like an Arab') had been subjected to linguistic assimilation, and we have serious indications for all of Al-Andalus that despite the religious identity they maintained, their social structure tended to converge with those of the other Andalusí.³⁴ In any case – and this must be stressed – the communities on the eastern part of the peninsula were characterised by clear social and political irrelevancy, an absence of rootedness and a fleeting existence. While there is no indication of the existence of Mozarabs in Tortosa at the time of the conquest (1148), the definitive end of the Christian community in Valencia unquestionably dates from before the mid-12th century.

OCCUPATION OF THE SPACE AND AGRARIAN SYSTEMS

As we have just seen, kinship in Al-Andalus was the foundation of social relations; consequently, it determined the population distribution and forms of settlement. The basic unit was the *qarya* (hamlet), the residence of a lineage, often extended by the presence of other families split off from their original groups or new lineages that had joined the original group. Each *qarya* was usually associated with an irrigated area that contained the most substantial and predictable part of agrarian production. The selection and modification of these areas through the construction of terraces and hydraulic devices stemmed in part from the need to acclimate species and varieties from the monsoon environment, spread by the agents of Muslim expansion, the Arab and Berber colonists, but espe-



Figure 4. Bronze candelabrum from a cache found in Dénia (11th century). Source: exhibition catalogue for *L'Islam i catalunya*, Barcelona, Institut Català de la Mediterrània – Museu d'Història de Catalunya – Lunewerg Editores, 1998.

cially by the introduction of the farming practices that accompanied the new plants and through artificial irrigation in the warm season, which allowed the ancient Mediterranean agricultural calendar to be expanded and thus created niches of intensive agriculture delimited by the layout of the irrigation channels.³⁵

The irrigated fields were set up according to the imperatives of water management, which unquestionably defined the area that could be cultivated and conditioned its physical structure. However, these were not universal or timeless solutions applied equally by all farming societies. An extensive and proven set of studies performed in all the eastern regions of al-Andalus (lower Ebro River, Balearic Islands and Valencia) has enabled us to precisely describe the distinct methods of the Andalusí hydraulic systems. The first is the compactness of the irrigated areas, which was determined by the rigidity of the main irrigation channels, which left strict, lasting traces. This fundamental characteristic is coherent with a controlled use of water which never exhausts the flow available and enables the ecological functionality of the water courses to be maintained according to criteria that clearly aim to mini-

mise the risk inherent in water dissipation (droughts, swamps, landslides, etc.). The second characteristic is the overall logic of the layout of these spaces, which closely overlapped with the network of settlements. This entire order must have reflected agreements which necessarily accompanied the initial establishment of the farming groups that built them because of their need to regulate water distribution, take advantage of the transformed environments and ensure access to forest resources.³⁶ In fact, the evidence gathered demonstrates that irrigation and the maintenance of the cultivated areas that depended on it were due to the autonomous organisation of the farming communities, not to the orders emanating from a central authority, as suggested by Karl Wittfogel's thesis on "eastern despotism".³⁷

This finding requires us to seriously question the problem of the relationship between cities – the seats of state power, regional focal points of its influence – and the large periurban irrigated farmlands (cat. *hortes*, cast. *huertas*) particularly in the case of the *madīna* of Valencia, the most important one about which we are just beginning to learn more. In effect, for many years it has been a fairly common belief that the caliphate – the golden age of a powerful central state – was the period when the *horta* of Valencia was built. Likewise, the generic idea that urban development must have been the precondition for the formation and expansion of the surrounding irrigation networks is also widely accepted in the historiography. In other words: the city predated the farmland. And it is true that the cities in Al-Andalus tended to be surrounded by irrigated plains, but it is no less true that there were *hortes* with no large urban centre nearby, such as the *horta* of Gandia, associated with the hamlets of Bairén Castle in the Andalusī period. Thomas F. Glick managed to demonstrate that the organisational, technical and morphological characteristics of the irrigated farmlands of Valencia in no way reflected the decisive intervention of a centralised power; rather they reflected local efforts carried out by the farming communities themselves. More recent studies not only confirm this assessment but also describe the Andalusī *horta* of Valencia as a set of regularly irrigated plots of land clearly separated by broad interstices that were occasionally watered, not watered or even left fallow. These plots were associated with different *qurā* (hamlets) and were connected to the large irrigation channels and main canals that supplied their corresponding portions of water. The network of irrigation channels and the network of settlements were articulated organically.³⁸ Thus, it seems more logical to invert the traditional causality and propose that the niches of agricultural intensification generated by the deployment of hydraulic devices, with their high level of productivity and population densification, preceded the establishment of forms of authority and the entire array of means (taxes, land appropriation, market control) used to turn the products of farming activity into wealth. This does not mean that the urban powers did not have the capacity to influence the

organisation of the farmlands at a later date; however, this capacity was limited.

While the Arabic texts suggest that the basic structure of the large-scale hydraulic systems on the Valencian plain existed as early as the late 10th century, perhaps with a few exceptions, recent archaeological studies have revealed that the system of the Rovella irrigation channel – apparently the most ancient one – must have been built at least during the time of the emirate (before 929).³⁹ Ultimately, as Enric Guinot has observed, the sequence in which the main hydraulic networks were deployed in the *horta* of Valencia must have been an effect of the parallel process of establishing farming settlements. In its fundamental features, this process can be associated with the installation of predominantly Berber clan groups, as can be seen through the toponyms of the *qurā* and the different irrigation channels. When *madīna Balansiya* truly began to operate as an urban nucleus in the early 11th century and to intervene in its rural setting, the irrigation network must have already been quite a consolidated reality barely susceptible to modification.

The construction of well-defined irrigated agrarian areas determined the configuration of the networks of hamlets and the agreements that organised them. The clearly territorial institution of the Muslim *jamā'a* ('community'), governed by representatives from the lineages (councils of "elders") who dealt with the problems of land or irrigation channels, managed the uncultivated areas and undertook the construction of mosques, granaries and collective fortifications, emerged from these agreements. Certainly the Arabic texts – with the exception of a few legal consultations – do not pay much attention to communal peasant structures organised according to a tribal – not in the ethnic sense – social logic which, however, achieved a great deal of visibility in the narratives and records from the time of the conquest: from the capitulation of Ascó, Flix, Móra and Tivissa in the 1150's until the numerous surrender documents from Valencia's *jamā'a*s in the mid-13th century.

LEGAL POWER AND THE EXERCISE OF AUTHORITY

The local communities' relationship with the state was primarily based on taxation and mediated by money. The legal authority monopolistically issued coins and introduced them in society through demands for taxes and payment of its employees (army, magistrates, bureaucracy). Taxes, which were the essential content of the state, tended to remain within the limits prescribed by the Islamic laws that legitimised their authority, even though there is proof of major abuses during certain periods. However, the contrary can also be found, given the frequency of periods of weakness in the power apparatuses. Therefore, we can find two clearly differentiated and somewhat independent political levels with parallel existences and dynamics: the locally organised groups or sub-

jects (mainly peasants) and the state apparatus, which was abstractly identified with the term *sultân* by the 10th century and with the term *makhzan* in the Almohad period.⁴⁰

The Umayyad caliphate established in Al-Andalus by ʿAbd ar-Rahmân III in 929 arranged the effective exercise of authority over the community of believers (*umma*) with claims to genealogical legitimacy (the Umayyads, successors of the first caliphs, were part of the Quraysh tribe, the Prophet’s tribe). However, in practice, the unity of effective authority and legitimacy was difficult to sustain indefinitely within the dynastic line, as revealed by the ascent to power of Muhammad ibn Abî ʿĀmir, called Al-Mansûr, “the victorious”, in 978. Even though he secured control of the state for himself and his family line, Al-Mansûr, who bore the title of *hâjib*, never tried to replace the Umayyad dynasty and instead exercised power on behalf of the legitimate caliph, who was completely removed from the tasks of governing. Despite the rise of the caliphal state under the Amirites, particularly clear in the destruction of Barcelona in 985 and the incursion into its territory in 1003, the practice of separating the actual power from the recognised holders of authority fostered the outbreak of the second *fitna* (1009-1031), which irreversibly broke the unity of state sovereignty.⁴¹

In effect, the 1009 crisis gave rise to the emergence of a bundle of regional powers established in diverse cities in Al-Andalus. Some jurists from the time called them *mulûk at-tawâʾif* (“fragmented sovereignties”, according to the translation proposed by M. Barceló), an expression which originates the current term “*taifas*” and the inaccurate “kingdoms of *taifas*” or “party kings”.⁴² The holders of these de facto powers could be either Andalusi notables from the old Arab family lines (and Arabised Berbers) or the heads of Berber cavalry contingents that had served the caliphate, but in Sharq al-Andalus they were a group of servants who held key positions within the state administration at the service of the Amirites, those who managed to take over the governing apparatus. These officials, called *saqâliba*, were former Palatine slaves of European descent (especially Slavic), most of them eunuchs, who had gradually become the administrative and military frame of the caliphal state: Khayrân in Almería; Labîb and later Muqâtil (or Muqâbil) in Tortosa; Mubâarak and Muzaffar, former “heads of the irrigation channels administration”, jointly in Valencia; and Mujâhid in Dénia. A power of this kind was briefly established in Xàtiva, and we can also glimpse it on the islands.

Generally speaking, these experiments did not last long. The fact that many of their leaders’ lacked the ability to procreate, necessary to form a dynasty, was not an unimportant factor in their lack of continuity. Indeed, the greatest degree of political success was attained by Mujâhid, a former slave who was able to sire children; he soon managed to get the Balearic Islands to join his state and organised an expedition aimed at bringing down Sardinia. When Mujâhid died in 1045, the government was passed to his son Iqbal ad-Dawla, as per custom. To the

contrary, in Valencia the death of Mubâarak and the uprising that ensued fostered the proclamation of a grandson of Al-Mansûr, ʿAbd al-Azîz, in 1021, summoned by the former employees of the Amirite lineage. In Tortosa, the *saqâliba*, whose succession is largely unknown, remained until 1060, when this *taifa* was absorbed by the Hudite emirate of Zaragoza. The Banû Hûd dynasty had been started in Lleida by an Andalusi military chief with Yemenite Arab roots. From Zaragoza, their power spread all along the Ebro valley, and in 1076 they even annexed the faraway southern *taifa* of Dénia (but not the islands, where the former governors had removed themselves from obedience to Iqbal ad-Dawla in the 1050s), from which it was separated by Valencia. The extensive Hudite emirate was divided shortly thereafter, in 1081, but Dénia, and Tortosa with it, remained part of a bipartite Banû Hûd *taifa* until 1092.⁴³

The main effect of the implosion of the state apparatus was that the taxes which used to be sent to the seat of the caliphate now remained in the regional capitals. Thus, mercenary military forces, many of them Christian, were assembled, and new governing apparatuses were set up with tax administrators, secretaries and legal scholars. The emirs, especially Muqâtil of Tortosa, began to exercise patronage with the twofold objective of securing prestige and ensuring proper literary formation for his senior officials. The capitals of the *taifas* also attracted a large number of merchants and craftsmen, most of whom were fleeing from Córdoba in the quest for new centres where taxes concentrated and wealth circulated. Ibn Hayyân narrates how these immigrants filled Valencia with notable constructions, palaces and gardens, but the most remarkable accomplishments came from the direct initiative of the emirs: in Dénia, Mujâhid ordered the citadel built, while in Valencia, ʿAbd al-ʿAzîz reformed the fortress and ordered the Almunia (*munya*) built, a sumptuous palace with gardens and ponds, separate from the *madîna* on the other side of the Guadalaviar River. The 11th century truly marked the onset of the development of urban centres in eastern Al-Andalus, clearly captured in the construction of walls and suburbs, as can be found in the cities of Mallorca and Valencia. However, the growth was not limited to the capital cities (Tortosa, Valencia, Xàtiva, Dénia and Mallorca), since the second tier of towns, including Alzira, Orihuela, Lliria, Onda and Morvedre (Sagunt), also began to attain fully urban traits, including fortifications, markets, officials and magistrates.

Both the intellectual and literary patronage and the princely architecture built in the headquarters of the new authorities should be understood within the context of a quest for legitimacy. Guichard and Clément have observed how the powers that emerged from the downfall of the caliphate tried to earn prominence through an accumulation of signs of sovereignty that would somehow offset their small size and the suspicion of illegality that burdened them. One important aspect of this dynamic of

affirmation lay in the honorific name or title (*laqab*) adopted by the governors, invoked Fridays in the sermons (*khutba*) at all the major mosques within their domains and prolifically reproduced in the legends that appeared on coins. Based on the principle that the sole legitimate power in the community of believers was the caliph, honorific titles may have indicated a fictitious delegation of power from the vanished caliph through the use of the expression *ad-Dawla*, as in Iqbal ad-Dawla (“fortress of the dynasty”) of Dénia, or the indirect participation of a faraway or indeterminate caliph through the phrase *bi-llâh* (“for God”), adopted by Al-Mansûr and often by the most powerful emirs as well, such as the Hudites of Zaragoza. Despite this, Fèlix Retamero argues that the question of legitimacy was not decisively important in the process of reconstructing the political order. The main problem facing the new states was related to their ability to force stable political submissions and to organise solid tax collection networks.⁴⁴

Ibn Hayyân’s account of the government of the eunuchs Mubârak and Muzaffar in Valencia (1009-1018) suggests that greater proximity to taxpayers enabled the new powers to act more rigorously when collecting taxes. The rise in taxes must have reached such an extreme that many peasants, incapable of covering the payments, had to abandon their *qurà* (hamlets). The emirs themselves or



Figure 5. Gryphon from Pisa. It may have reached the Italian city after the pillaging of Mallorca during the Pisan-Catalan expedition of 1114-1115. Source: exhibition catalogue for *L’Islam i catalunya*, Barcelona, Institut Català de la Mediterrània – Museu d’Història de Catalunya – Lunweg Editores, 1998.

their “henchmen” must have appropriated the lands and turned them into private farms (*diyâc*); afterwards, the former inhabitants must have returned as mere sharecroppers. Without denying the underlying truth of this description, Guichard holds that there is no reason to believe that the forms of land possession changed significantly, since the peasants in the farmlands of Valencia continued to live in the *qurà* as always until the Christian conquest. Apparently, the *diyâc* prefigured the *rahl* farms documented at the time of the conquest which are only found in eastern Al-Andalus (Tortosa, Valencia, Murcia and the Balearic Islands). In all cases, the *qurà* in the agrarian areas are notably more numerous, larger (and more populous) and better situated. The large possessions acquired by the “aristocracy” of the state servants occupied a clearly secondary position among all rural structures and never gave rise to a true alteration in the social order.⁴⁵

Apart from this, we should add that there is no information about predatory tax practices in the *taifas* of Tortosa and Dénia-Mallorca, meaning that the abuse in Valencia in the times of the *saqâliba* may have just been episodic. Unquestionably, the tax demands did not remain unaltered everywhere and must have been subjected to variable changes in intensity and scope; however, they never broke with a “permanently asserted framework of legality”, as Guichard says.⁴⁶ If quantitatively the heightened tax demands had no devastating effects, in qualitative terms we could claim, concurring with Barceló and Retamero, that the mechanics of the taxation process of the *mulûk at-tawâ’if* were the same as those of the caliphate.⁴⁷ Therefore, not even the multiplication of sovereignties that succeeded the Umayyad state or the deficit of legitimacy that burdened them led to significant changes in the social and political order.

The real problem was of another nature. The political fragmentation decisively accentuated the military weakness of the Andalusí powers compared to the rising forces of the Christian principalities to the north and the expansive dynamic characteristic of their feudal society which was in the process of crystallising. The *taifas*’ inability to stop pressure from the Christians was resolved in a submission which took the form of periodic payments of tributes called *parias* (from the verb *barî’a*, ‘to predominate’). Tortosa was paying them by 1040-1050, and Valencia 15 to 20 years later at the most. The counts of Barcelona and Urgell, and by extension all of Catalan aristocracy, were the main beneficiaries, as they began to handle vast sums of gold coins minted in Sharq al-Andalus, including electron pieces (an alloy of gold with silver and copper) called “gold from Valencia” or *de roballs*.⁴⁸ The King of Leon and Castile also benefitted from the Valencian *parias* after appearing before the city – which was protected by the walls built by ‘Abd al-Azîz – in 1065 and massacring its defenders in the open. However, beyond political subordination and tributary extortion, the eastern emirates of Al-Andalus could not be conquered by

the Christians at the same speed as those located in the centre and west of the peninsula. When Toledo fell into Castilian hands in 1085, the Ebro valley (as far north as Tudela, Huesca, Barbastro and Lleida) was still part of Al-Andalus. The frontier of the Catalan counties advanced very slowly, in fact (Cervera, 1026; Àger, 1048; Camarasa, 1050; Balaguer, 1105), and the four sieges of Tortosa between 1086 and 1097 all failed. Despite the importance of their effects, the creation of an outpost principality in Valencia by El Cid (1094-1102) and the Pisan-Catalan occupation of Mallorca (1114-1115) were fleeting accomplishments compared to the slow but steady progression of the Christian borders.

The outrage of the submission of the *taifas*, and above all of the Castilian conquest of Toledo, particularly spotlighted the legal-religious apparatus embodied by the experts in Islamic law (*fuqahâ*, sing. *faqîh*, and *‘ulamâ*, sing. *‘âlim*), an educated class interposed among the dynastic complexes and subjects, the repository of the juridical and literary knowledge that ensured the reproduction of the Muslim-inspired political institutions. The legal scholars were aware that the unstoppable Christian encroachment seriously threatened the survival of Al-Andalus and that to stop it they had to first restore political unity among the believers (*umma*) and secondly summon a military force that could compensate for the lack of professional Andalusí soldiers. They soon found a tool in the Almoravids, a movement of Saharan livestock husbandry tribes catalysed by the religious doctrine of the *murâbitûn* (coherent with the interpretations of the Malikite school followed by Andalusí and Maghrebi experts) and by the construction of a dynastic authority that then spread around much of the Maghreb.⁴⁹ *Fuqahâ* and *‘ulamâ* issued condemnatory writings against the *mulûk at-tawâ’if* and called on the Almoravids to restore political unity. A jurist from Tortosa, ‘Abd al-‘Azîz b. ‘Alî, was part of the delegation of *fuqahâ* from Al-Andalus who asked emir Yûsuf b. Tashfîn for aid. However, the scholar Abû Bakr at-Turtûshî, born in Tortosa in 1059, played a more prominent role in this process. Just like al-Gazâlî – the great Persian thinker – he had emigrated to the East to complete his training and wrote a decisive letter that legitimised the Almoravid emir’s occupation of Al-Andalus and deposing of the sovereigns of the *taifas*. This exhortation to Yûsuf b. Tashfîn to persevere in the pathway of justice and welfare was somehow a draft of the main work by at-Turtûshî, which won him fame all over the Islamic world, the *Sirâj al-mulûk* or *Lantern of the Princes*, where he set forth the enlightened urban classes’ ideas on how a sovereign should conduct himself.⁵⁰

The eastern regions of Al-Andalus were gradually incorporated into the Almoravid *dawla* between 1092 (Dénia) and 1115 (Mallorca). The historiographic cliché portrays the implementation of the new power as a rupture with the political traditions of Al-Andalus, marked by a supposed “puritan intolerance” of the “African fanatics”.

It is true that Saharan governors were installed in the cities, but the institutions themselves did not change. In Xàtiva, for example, a series of shops and properties were still required to handle public emergency expenditures and payments of the salaries that the *taifa* emir ‘Abd al-‘Azîz (1021-1061) had instituted.⁵¹ Likewise, most of the administrative apparatus and legal-religious posts remained in the hands of Andalusí scholars. The governors took part in the appointments, but the local educated classes still controlled the posts. Likewise, the image of religious fanaticism often attributed to the new dynasty is dubious. The disappearance of the *taifas*’ literary courts, Guichard notes, was not due to any political programme per se but to a logical effect of the suppression of the centres of power that had produced them. In fact, such a hedonist poet as Ibn Khafâja of Alzira had been serving the Almoravid princes sent to Valencia since 1105. Important proof of the absence of political discontinuity comes from the fact that the judicial administration remained linked to the same families as before: the Banû Jahhâf and the Banû ‘Abd al-‘Azîz families of Valencia extended even their magistracies to the minor urban centres of Cocentaina and Elx.⁵²

When the Almoravid state, shaken up by the Almohad revolt in the Maghreb, was declining and was no longer able to offer the Andalusí people either political cohesion or military defence, these same families moved to the forefront of the rebellions and took on the local powers in numerous cities, such as the *cadî* Abû Marwân b. ‘Abd al-‘Azîz in Valencia in 1145. Soon, however, authority was granted to a prestigious Andalusí military chief from the Ebro River frontier, Muhammad b. Mardanîsh, most likely because of the mistrust triggered among the *cadis*, *fuqahâ* and *‘ulamâ* by the progression of the Almohad movement in Al-Andalus, which was clearly hostile to the legal scholars’ social privileges. While Tortosa (1148) and Lleida (1149) were conquered by the Catalans and the Almoravid lineage of the Banû Gâniya established its own sovereignty on the islands (which lasted until 1203), Ibn Mardanîsh built an extensive emirate in Sharq al-Andalus stretching from Lorca to Peníscola, and he managed to hold onto it in the face of the Almohads until his death in 1172. This was possible mainly because of the remunerated protection of the northern kingdoms and the support of the Christian mercenaries funded by the Muslims’ taxes, something that earned them contempt and accusations of tyranny by some scholars. Besides this, Ibn Mardanîsh remained as a *de facto* power, avoided all forms of religious legitimisation and observed normal relations with the legal-religious apparatus that put him at the helm of the state.⁵³

Finally, not even the incorporation of the Sharq into the Almohad sovereignty led to a real rupture in the political order. The Almohad movement was unquestionably inspired by an agenda of radical transformation targeted particularly against the legal-religious oligarchy, illegal taxation and the recourse to infidel troops, but its

consolidation as a state led it to gradually fall into the same “vices” they had originally condemned, so doctrine ended up becoming mere formality. Thus, there were no major changes. The Almohad state needed tax agents, secretaries, *cadis*, market inspectors and trained officials to occupy these posts, so it should come as no surprise that in Valencia, the Mardanišhi state structure and even the very family of the deceased emir would readily join the new regime.⁵⁴

CONCLUSIONS

The eastern regions of Al-Andalus occupied a politically peripheral position in the Umayyad state set up in Córdoba, which managed to exercise stable control over them only after the proclamation of the caliphate in 929. The formation and development of real urban nuclei with the consequent formation of commercial networks, the promotion of ostentatious architecture and the proliferation of intellectual and literary activities, had a strictly political cause in that they were the direct and sudden result of the multiplication of sovereignties upon the fall of the caliphal state in 1009. However, such a sudden eruption of cities would not have been possible without the colonisation process and the creation of a new agrarian ecosystem mainly developed by Berber and, to a lesser extent, Arab tribal groups between the 8th and 9th centuries.

The frequent dynasty and regime changes that followed the end of the Umayyad caliphate did not heavily influence the organisation of the social structure, nor did it entail any change in the nature of the political order. The solidity of the legal-religious apparatus, reliant on an educated class of state servants and magistrates in which certain family lines tended to be perpetuated, offset the congenital weakness of dynastic powers, which were lacking structural connections with society, and made institutional continuity possible. What it could not offset was these powers' inability to deal with the implacable advance of Christendom. In fact, the most efficient response in terms of the possibilities within their reach can be found in peasant community structures, that is, the *jamâ'a*s, especially those in Valencia. Unlike the communities on the islands, which were immediately destroyed by the conquerors, these *jamâ'a*s had systematically fortified themselves after the fall of the Ebro valley when the country had become a frontier exposed to periodic Christian incursions and cavalcades. The atomised local organisation of defence posed the Catalan-Aragonese king and aristocracy with a more complex problem than bringing down a centralised state power. The resolution necessarily entailed a multitude of negotiations which ultimately served as the foundation for the lasting survival of an important fraction of native Muslims after the conquest.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- [1] A significant anecdote can properly illustrate this point. Not too long ago, one of the anti-Catalan groups in the city of Valencia tried to reach an agreement with prominent members of the local Islamic community to commemorate the millennium of the Kingdom of Valencia, which would have come into being in 1009 upon the fall of the caliphate and the emergence of a regional authority (the so-called “*taifa*”), so the kingdom instituted by James I after the conquest of 1238 would be merely the prolongation of a “Valencian” political reality prior to the Catalans (and Aragonese). See P. HUGUET. “Memoria histórica antes de Jaume I”. *Las Provincias*, 14 February 2009 [online]: <http://www.lasprovincias.es/valencia/20090214/cultura/memoria-historica-antes-jaume-20090214.html>.
- [2] On this particular issue, see J. MORSEL. *L'Histoire (du Moyen Âge) est un sport de combat... Réflexions sur les finalités de l'Histoire du Moyen Âge destinées à une société dans laquelle même les étudiants d'Histoire s'interrogent*. LAMOP, Paris 2007 [online:] <http://lamop.univ-paris1.fr/lamop/LAMOP/JosephMORSEL/index.htm>.
- [3] Fundamental observations by M. BARCELÓ. “Negre i roig. Els contextos historiogràfics per a l'estudi de la societat andalusina de Menorca i la seva destrucció”. In: M. BARCELÓ and F. RETAMERO (ed.). *Els barrancs tancats. L'ordre pagès al sud de Menorca en època andalusina (segles X-XIII)*. Institut Menorquí d'Estudis, Mahon 2005, pp. 13-50.
- [4] IBN HAYYÂN. *Crónica de los emires Alhakam I y 'Abdarrahman II entre los años 796 y 847 (Almuqtabis II-1)*. Translation by M. 'A. MAKKÎ and F. CORRIENTE. Instituto de Estudios Islámicos y del Oriente Próximo, Zaragoza 2001; IBN 'AMÎRA. *Kitâb Tâ'rîh Mayûrqa. Crònica àrab de la conquesta de Mallorca*. Translation by N. ROSER and G. ROSSELLÓ. Presidència de les Illes Balears and Universitat de les Illes Balears, Palma de Mallorca 2008.
- [5] The most recent (partial) translation is IBN 'IDÂRÎ. *La caída del Califato de Córdoba y los Reyes de Taifas (Al-Bayân al-mugrib)*. Translation by F. MAÍLLO. Universidad de Salamanca, Salamanca 1993.
- [6] References to the editions and translations of the Arabic sources that provide information on Sharq al-Andalus can readily be found in P. GUICHARD. *Les musulmans de Valence et la Reconquête (XIe-XIIIe siècles)*. Institut Français de Damas, Damascus 1990-1991, vol. I, pp. 32-41; M. BARCELÓ (coord.). *Musulmans i Catalunya*. Empúries, Barcelona 1999, pp. 143-146. We should also mention the translations of excerpts of texts published by J. M. MILLÀS. *Textos dels historiadors àrabs referents a la Catalunya Carolíngia*. Institut d'Estudis Catalans, Barcelona 1987; D. BRAMON. *De quan érem o no musulmans. Textos del 713 al 1010*. Eumo and Institut d'Estudis Catalans, Barcelona 2000.
- [7] X. BALLESTÍN. “Prosopografía dels *fūqahâ'* i '*ulamâ'* de la zona oriental del *al-tagr al-a'lâ'*: Balagà, Lârida, Turtûša”. *Estudios Onomástico-biográficos de al-Andalus*, no. VI (1994), pp. 55-119.

- [8] In the region of Valencia, Carme Barceló has catalogued 55 monumental Arabic inscriptions, all from the 10th to 13th centuries, 45 of which are funerary, as are the vast majority of the 37 catalogued in the Balearic Islands in 1975 and all six of the new stone tablets found recently in the Valencian area of El Comtat: C. BARCELÓ. *La escritura árabe en el País Valenciano. Inscripciones monumentales*. Universitat de València, Valencia 1998, 2 vol.; G. ROSSELLÓ. "Corpus balear de epigrafia árabe". *Mayûrqa*, no. 13 (1975), pp. 5-68; V. MARTÍNEZ ENAMORADO. "Inscripciones árabes del Comtat". *Els musulmans al Comtat*. Centre d'Estudis Contestans, Cocentaina 2007.
- [9] The original work has 12 volumes published in Rabat in 1981. The selection of abstracts found in this source can be used as a guide or catalogue: V. LAGARDÈRE. *Histoire et société en occident musulman au Moyen Âge. Analyse du Mir'yâr d'al-Wanšarisi*. Casa de Velázquez, CSIC, Madrid 1995. We can only find three jurists from Valencia (10th to 12th centuries), one from Dénia (11th century), one from Xàtiva (11th century) and one from Orihuela (12th century), each with a single *fatwâ*, in addition to a handful of references to local affairs in the eastern region of Al-Andalus.
- [10] GUICHARD. *Les musulmans...*, vol. I, pp. 42-51 and 223-240; vol. II, pp. 259-274.
- [11] This kind of study has particularly been developed on Mallorca: A. POVEDA. "Introducción al estudio de la toponimia árabe-musulmana de Mayûrqa según la documentación de los archivos de Ciutat de Mallorca". *Awràq*, no. 3 (1980), pp. 75-101; M. BARCELÓ. *Sobre Mayûrqa*. Museu de Mallorca, Palma de Mallorca 1984; G. ROSSELLÓ, *Mallorca musulmana*. Universitat de les Illes Balears, Palma de Mallorca 2007.
- [12] Beyond reports and brief lists, the best publications of excavations include those by I. LÓPEZ *et al.* *Troballes arqueològiques al Palau de les Corts*. Corts Valencianes, Valencia 1994; J. A. GISBERT, V. BURGUERA and J. BOLUFER. *La ceràmica de Daniya (Dénia). Alfares y ajuares domésticos de los siglos XII-XIII*. Ministry of Culture, Madrid 1992; R. AZUAR (coord.). *El ribât califal. Excavaciones e investigaciones*. Casa de Velázquez, Madrid 2004, "Fouilles de la Râbita de Guardamar" collection, no. 1.
- [13] A. BAZZANA, P. CRESSIER and P. GUICHARD. *Les châteaux ruraux d'al-Andalus. Histoire et archéologie des husûn du sud-est de l'Espagne*. Casa de Velázquez, Madrid 1988; A. BAZZANA. *Maisons d'al-Andalus. Habitat médiéval et structures du peuplement dans l'Espagne Orientale*. Casa de Velázquez, Madrid 1992, 2 vol.; A. BAZZANA and P. GUICHARD. "Pour une archéologie extensive". In: *Histoire et archéologie de l'habitat médiéval. Cinq ans de recherches dans le domaine méditerranéen et la France du centre-est*. Université de Lyon 2 and EHESS, Lyon, 1986, pp. 175-184; J. TORRÓ, "Fortificaciones en Yîbâl Balansiya. Una propuesta de secuencia". In: A. MALPICA (ed.). *Castillos y territorio en al-Andalus*. Athos-Pérgamos, Granada 1998, pp. 385-418.
- [14] M. BARCELÓ, H. KIRCHNER and C. NAVARRO. *El agua que no duerme. Fundamentos de la arqueología hidráulica andalusí*. El legado andalusí, Granada 1996; M. BARCELÓ *et al.* *The Design of Irrigation Systems in al-Andalus*. Servei de Publicacions of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona 1998.
- [15] C. DOMÉNECH. *Dinares, dirhemes y feluses. Circulación monetaria islámica en el País Valenciano*. Universidad de Alicante, Alicante 2003; C. DOMÉNECH. "Un tesoro de la taifa de Alpuente". In: *Actas XI Congreso Nacional de Numismática*. Real Casa de la Moneda, Madrid 2003, pp. 243-255; F. RETAMERO. *Moneda i monedes àrabs a l'illa d'Eivissa*. Govern Balear, Ibiza 1995; B. MOLL. "Contribució a l'estudi de la circulació monetària a la Menorca musulmana". *Acta Numismàtica*, no. 26 (1996), pp. 81-138; F. RETAMERO and B. MOLL. "Moneda y madina. El caso de Madina Manûrqa". In: M. A. GINÉS (ed.). *La arqueología medieval en la arqueología*. Alhulia, Granada pp. 205-239; A. M. BALAGUER. "Troballes i circulació monetària. Corpus de les troballes de moneda àrab a Catalunya (segles VIII-XIII)". *Acta Numismàtica*, no. 20 (1990), pp. 83-109.
- [16] See the excellent synthesis by X. BALLESTÍN. *Una nissaga de poder viatgera i inquieta: els Omeies de Damasc a Còrdova*. Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona 2004.
- [17] P. GUICHARD. "Le peuplement de la région de Valence aux deux premiers siècles de la domination musulmane". *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*, no. 5 (1969). New information in the text by Ibn Hayyân cited in note 4.
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- [21] Contrary to BALLESTÍN. "L'anomenada frontera...", *op. cit.*, E. MANZANO. *La frontera de al-Andalus en època de los Omeyas*. CSIC, Madrid 1991, pp. 340-343 claims that Tortosa seems to have maintained close ties with the Umayyad power.
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- [23] MARTÍ and PASCUAL. "El desarrollo urbano...", *op. cit.*; P. GUICHARD. "Qasr et ville à Valence et à Murcie à l'époque musulmane". In: P. CRESSIER (ed.). *Le château et la ville. Espaces et réseaux*. Casa de Velázquez, Madrid 2008, pp. 261-268; GUICHARD. *Les musulmans...*, vol. II, p. 318.
- [24] J. LIROLA. *El poder naval de al-Andalus en la época del califato omeya*. Universidad de Granada, Granada 1993, pp. 242-243; X. BALLESTÍN. "De la instauració de la *hilâfa* dels Banû Marwân —317 H/929 dC— als *Mulûk at-tawâ'if*". In: M. BARCELÓ (coord.). *Musulmans...*, pp. 79-91; M. M. RIERA. *Evolució urbana i topografia de Madīna Mayûrqa*. Ajuntament de Palma de Mallorca, Palma de Mallorca 1993, pp. 27-38.
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