

**The Umayyad Emirate in Al-Andalus /Spain and Their  
Christian Neighbors ( 756-852)**

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## **Introduction**

In order to understand the conflict, tensions, as well as peace in al-Andalus during the reign of the four generations beginning with Abd al-Rahman I in 756 until the end of Abd al-Rahman II in 852, there is a need to understand the society of that time. This is ideal because it reduces the inherent religious, cultural and historical bias that thwarts attempts to fully grasp the society of the time. There are three conceptions that we should keep in mind. First, the conceptions of religious conflict between Islam and Christianity during the reign of the four generations must bear in mind the fact that, Islam exerted significant influence in the South and still managed to muscle its authority in the north through taxes. The tensions on Al-Andalus were thus instigated by Christian revolts against Islamic authority. Second, although the Islamic conquest of Iberia and the defense of won territories that would soon follow

through both internal as well as external wars are historically perceived to have been undertaken against injustice, they were mainly inevitable since they were fought to defend a culture as well as human values of the Islamic faith. Finally , the wars that took place in al-Andalus during the reign of the four generations were ratified by the legitimization of brutal force by the then ruling political class including Christians. This was aimed at not only establishing order, but similarly thwarting revolt against opposing interest.

The paper examines the relationship between the Europeans in al-Andalus, who were mostly Christians, and the Muslim leaders during the four generations beginning with Abd al-Rahman I until the end of Abd al-Rahman II in 852. The paper focuses on three themes. First, is the Islamic influence in the southern part of Iberia and still managed to exert a significant degree of influence in the north. Second, the paper analyzes the ways the Umayyad rulers

treated the native Europeans. Finally the paper also analyzes how the northern Christian kingdoms dealt with the Muslims in the area that they conquered. The paper begins by analyzing the origins of the Umayyad Emirate of Cordoba, which started after the Abbasid revolution, focusing on their struggles and fight with Christian neighbors, especially the Kingdom of Asturias. However the tensions in al-Andalus were because of the diversity of racial, cultural and religious which characterized the regime of Abd al-Rahman I. His son Hisham I's regime enjoyed a peaceful period. Al-Hakam I and Abd al-Rahman II's regime were characterized by rampant revolt and tensions.

### The Origins of the Umayyad Emirate of Cordoba

O'Callaghan writes that towards the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century there was a dynastic revolution in Syria which paved way for the subsequent disintegration of the Islamic empire and ultimately the

formation of an autonomous Muslim state in Al-Andalus.<sup>1</sup>The Umayyad dynasty had been in power since 661 before the Abbasids deposed them in 750.<sup>2</sup> In order to boost their hold on power the Abbasids sought to wipe out the rival Umayyad family by killing all its descendants. However, Abd al-Rahman I, the grandson of Caliph Hisham was lucky and managed to escape and set camp in Spain where he restored the fortunes of his family.<sup>3</sup> Prior to settling in Spain Abdal-Rahman I first passed through Morocco, and he made contact with Berbers who helped him to establish contact with his family's clients in Spain.<sup>4</sup> Al-Qutiya writes that after Tammam ibn Alqama had crossed to North Africa, they met with Abd al-Rahman

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<sup>1</sup> O'Callaghan, Joseph, F. *A History of Medieval Spain*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1983) p.101

<sup>2</sup> Al-Qutiya, Ibn. *Early Islamic Spain: the History of Ibn al-Qutiya*. Translated by David James. New York: Routledge, 2009. p.31

<sup>3</sup> Baker, Patrick S. "Charles Martel Turns South: The Hammer's Campaigns in Southern France 733-737," *Saber and Scroll* 4(3)p.38

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.69

who asked Badr, “who are these?” He replied, “This is your client Tamman, and this is your client Abu Furaya. It is fulfilled when Abu Furaya punned in turn, “God willing we will ravage the land.<sup>5</sup>” In Spain on the other hand, there had been continued unease caused by incursions mounted by Qaysites and Kalbites against each other. Abd al-Rahman I took advantage of the tensions between the two tribes whereby he formed alliance with the Kalbites who saw him as a champion and went on to pledge their support.<sup>6</sup> This helped Abd al-Rahman I to land at Almunecar on 14 August 755 where he began to assemble his troops.

Yusuf al-Fihri, the Governor of al-Andalus, attempted to assume the crown of al-Andalus although he was virtually

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid p.69

<sup>6</sup> Abd-el-Hakem, *History of the conquest of Spain: Now edited for the First Time, Translated from the Arabic with Exegetical Notes, and a Historical Introduction*, by John Harris Jones, (London, University of Gottingen , 1858) p.23-24

independent.<sup>7</sup> Abd al-Rahman I first negotiated with the governor, but this was not successful. Ultimately, Abd al-Rahman I was forced to establish siege on Cordoba in a battle fought in 15 May 756 outside the city.<sup>8</sup> The Umayyad army forced Yusuf al-Fihri to flee, although he would later return and submit to the new king's authority. O'Callaghan writes that, Abd al-Rahman I made a triumphal entry into Cordoba where he was proclaimed emir and transformed al-Andalus into an independent kingdom and the seat of the exiled Umayyad dynasty.

Abd al-Rahman I worked tirelessly in the next 30 years and managed to secure the position he had won.<sup>9,10,11</sup> In a bid to win

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<sup>7</sup> Al-Makkari, Muhammad. *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*. Translated by Pascual de

Gayangos, 2 vols. London: W. H. Allen and Co. 1840 - 1843. p.31

Al-Qutiya, Ibn. *Early Islamic Spain: the History of Ibn al-Qutiya*. Translated by David James. New York:

Routledge, 2009. p.33

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.33

<sup>9</sup> Franco-Sanchez, Francisco, "Geographical and Historical Framework: The Iberian Peninsula

over his subjects, he invited members of his family to Spain together with his family's former clients. He also used these ties to organize an army of mercenaries. He relied on the mercenaries to defend his throne. Although Abd al-Rahman I is reported to be inclined as a conciliatory ruler during his reign, especially towards his enemies, he was continuously plagued with rebellions as well as conspiracies. After the former governor's unsuccessful rebellion in 759, Abd al-Rahman I did not offer his opponents quarter. Moreover, after initially supporting his march in Cordoba, the Moroccan Berbers turned out to be his resistance. They carried on with guerrilla attacks against his rule until 776.

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under Muslim Government” accessed on April 14, 2016 at:  
[http://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/33038/1/Franco\\_Sanchez\\_F\\_Geographical\\_and\\_Historical\\_Framework\\_The\\_Iberian\\_Peninsula.pdf](http://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/33038/1/Franco_Sanchez_F_Geographical_and_Historical_Framework_The_Iberian_Peninsula.pdf) p.40

<sup>10</sup> Cruz, Hernandez, Miguel, “Philosophical Development in Al-Andalus” In Sanaa Osseiran,

*Cultural Symbiosis in Al-Andalus*, (Beirut, UNESCO, 2004). p.110

<sup>11</sup> Grabar, Oleg, “The Great Mosque of Cordoba” Dodds, Jerrilynn, D. Ed. *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*, (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992).p.6



## Revolting Christian Neighbors (Kingdom of Asturias)

Abd al-Rahman I occupation was not received well by his Christian neighbors who viewed him as a foreigner. Primarily, Christians feared the expansion of the Arab dynasty into Western Europe,<sup>12</sup> for which, Spain served as a launching pad for this future ambition. After his family was deposed and his legacy almost wiped out, Abd al-Rahman I was keen to consolidate his hold on Cordoba before mounting fresh incursions on the Abbasids in Syria to avenge and restore his family's honor. However, preoccupation with internal strife within his kingdom did not allow Abd al-Rahman I to focus attention on the Kingdom of Asturias although it would have been ideal to do so. The first incursion was mounted by Fruela I (757-768), the son of Alfonso, in which battle Fruela I won a minor victory against the Muslims at Pontivium in Galicia. However,

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<sup>12</sup>Shaban, M.A. *Islamic History: A New Interpretation*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1971). p.71

Fruela I's successors, Aurelius (768-774), Silo (774-783), as well as Mauregatus (783-788) who were either related to him by marriage or blood, were at peace with al-Andalus.

### **The North-eastern Frontier**

Number of the most notable Christian and Muslim opposition that Abd al-Rahman I is reported to have faced was mounted from the northeastern frontier. These were under the administration of governors of advanced posts including Barcelona, Zaragoza, and Gerona. These leaders according to O'Callaghan retained a high degree of autonomy from Cordoba. Moreover, they were justified in their attitude in light of the fact that Abd al-Rahman I was primarily a rebel against the Abbasid caliph.<sup>13</sup> In the hope of stirring up rebellion, agents of the Abbasid caliph approached the governor of

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<sup>13</sup> O'Callaghan, Joseph, F. *A History of Medieval Spain*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1983) p.102

Zaragoza, Sulayman ibn Yaqzan. However, Abd al-Rahman I reacted by mounting siege on Zaragoza whereby Sulayman ibn Yaqzan is reported to have realized that collaboration with an easily accessible power was more ideal as opposed to the distant caliph in Syria. Sulayman ibn Yaqzan, thus sought the help of Charlemagne, King of the Franks (768-814).

### **Charlemagne – King of the Franks (768-814)**

Although strife with Abd al-Rahman I offered little incentive to Charlemagne (768-814) as he was already involved in the affairs of both Italy and Germany, he was nevertheless tempted by the promise of quick success in an expansion south of the Pyrenees. In pursuit of a much needed alliance, Sulayman is reported to have journeyed to Padermon in Saxony where he pledged allegiance to Charlemagne and promised to surrender Zaragoza in the hope that

he would continue as governor and thus enjoy independence from the Emir of Cordoba under the protection of the Carolingian.<sup>14</sup> Charlemagne march on Cordoba was through the pass of Roncesvalles in the spring of 778 whereby O'Callaghan reports that, as the king marched through Pamplona, the natives offered their homage, and so did those of Aragon and Huesca. When Charlemagne arrived at Zaragoza, he, however, found the city gates shut. In internal disagreement Sulayman's lieutenant had refused to admit Saxons into an Arab court. This infuriated Charlemagne who chose to establish a siege on Sulayman's fort. However, during the course of the incursion, Charlemagne learnt that back at home he was under Saxon revolt. This forced him to lift the siege because thwarting the Saxon revolt was a more important priority to the Frank king.

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<sup>14</sup> O'Callaghan, Joseph, F. *A History of Medieval Spain*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1983) p.102

## Historical mischaracterization of Charlemagne's defeat at Roncesvalles

O'Callaghan writes that while Charlemagne was traversing the pass of Roncesvalles in 778, his rearguard came under siege and was subsequently wiped out by the Basques. O'Callaghan writes that the royal biographer Einhard wrote that, among those who fell at the pass of Roncesvalles were the seneschal Eggihard, the count of palace Anselm, and the count of the march of Brittany, Roland.<sup>15</sup> The mischaracterization of the events was in light of the fact that the poem wrongfully attributes the attacks to Muslims and similarly portrays Charlemagne as the champion of Christendom against a rising Islamic power.<sup>16</sup> However, as O'Callaghan adds, it is possible that some Muslims took part in the attack. Nevertheless, their

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<sup>15</sup>O'Callaghan, p.102

<sup>16</sup>Crosland, Jessie, *The Song of Roland*, (Ontario, Cambridge, 1999). P.55  
Crosland in this translation writes that, "the emperor is a valiant warrior; he would rather die than flee the field of battle. There is not a king beneath the sky whom he accounts more than a child. Charles does not fear any living man."

participation was mainly intended to liberate Sulayman, who upon his return to Zaragoza was murdered by a treacherous lieutenant because they thought he was a traitor of the faith for consulting with Saxons against a fellow Muslim – Abd al –Rahman I. The treacherous lieutenant was later forced to surrender Zaragoza to Abd al-Rahman I. Important to know is the fact that Einhard’s assertion that Frank king Charlemagne dominated the chain of the Pyrenees mountains and stretched the entire length up to the Ebro River is false. Also Watt adds that, “the central event in the poem the defeat of a rearguard at Roncesvalles, was a very minor affair from the military standpoint – but the more important aspect of the campaign, - the failure to take Saragossa – may have influenced Charlemagne to leave Spain alone for the most part.”<sup>17</sup>”

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<sup>17</sup> Watt, Montgomery W. and Cachila, Pierre, *A History of Islamic Spain*, (Edinburg, Edinburgh University Press, 2001) p.34

## Diversity in the Kingdom

Watt writes that the major issue that Abd al-Rahman had to grapple with in his attempt to establish a secure and formidable emirate rule was diversity of elements.<sup>18</sup> Such diversity was evident in mostly racial differences in the population which ultimately led to cultural and religious tensions.<sup>19</sup> The first of these elements were the Arabs, who, although they were not many, were at the helm of power in al-Andalus. However, although these shared a cultural identity, they nevertheless exhibited further divisions. Comprising of the group of divisions among the Arabs were the old opposition consisting of the Qaysites and Yemenites or Kalbites. These seemed to have merged into yet other identities - that of the first-wave Arabs referred to as the old establishment or *baladiyyun*, and the later

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<sup>18</sup>Watt and Cachila p.34

<sup>19</sup> Marin-Guzman, Roberto, "Unity and Variety in Medieval Muslim Society: Ethnic Diversity and Social Classes in Muslim Spain 711-1090" In Sanaa Osseiran, *Cultural Symbiosis in Al-Andalus*, (Beirut, UNESCO, 2004) p.92

arrivals, mainly Syrians or shamiyyun.<sup>20</sup> Owing to the fact that the Syrians had been given fiefs, this further resulted in further economic tensions. Such was the case because the first arrival of Arabs did not enjoy the same economic priority as the late arrivals. However, both the first-wave and the late-arrival Arabs were Muslims.

Moreover, there were also other divisions in the Muslim community in addition to the first wave and late arrival Arabs in Cordoba that complicated Abd al-Rahman I's authority in Cordoba.<sup>21</sup> These other groups of Muslims primarily were comprised of Berbers and local converts. Between the two groups, the Berbers however were the most populous owing to the fact that they had supplied most of the forces that Abd al-Rahman had relied

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid 34

<sup>21</sup> Issa, Muhammad Abdul Hamid, "Muslim Education in Al-Andalus" In Sanaa Osseiran, *Cultural Symbiosis in Al-Andalus*, (Beirut, UNESCO, 2004) p.256



upon in mounting his invasion of Spain. Furthermore, the most distinct of these Berbers were the sedentary, who exhibited a unique cultural identity different from the nomad Berbers. Such was the case that the sedentary Berbers, unlike their Nomad counterparts, opted to turn to agricultural activity and subsistence farming after the end of the war of conquest. However, although the sedentary Berbers were the most populous, they were nevertheless treated as inferiors by other Arabs, which resulted in constant smoldering among them.

The local converts also with time grew in numbers, surpassing even the Berber population in Cordoba. The term that was used to refer to the converts was *musalim* although it was restricted for use when referring only to those that changed their religion to Islam. The common name that was used by the Arabs to refer to Spanish Muslims was *Muwalladin*, which at best translates to English as 'born Muslims.' Spanish writers however term them as

renegades. This term was not in use until the Reconquista. Significant to note is the fact that the primary motive for acceptance of Islam in Spain by the local population was mainly because it was associated with not only higher but similarly attractive civilization doubled with the fact that there was also distrust of the Christian Bishops as a result of their close ties with the unpopular Visigoths, dynasty.

### **The Christian Faction**

The remaining large element in the Islamic state that Abd al-Rahman had to contend with was the Christian population who were referred to as Mozarabs (musta'ribun), which translates to Arabizers although this was not used until the Reconquista. Although this faction remain Christian in their practice, they were nevertheless, attracted by several aspects of both Islamic and Arab civilization.

Moreover, they exhibited less hostility to Arab rule and went as far as learning Arabic, although their dialect was Romanticized and they embraced numerous Arabic customs. In addition to the Christians, Jews also constituted another notable religious faction in Cordoba.<sup>22</sup>

In light of the above diversity and often discordant elements, it is inevitable that Abd al-Rahman particularly found it difficult to consolidate his rule on Cordoba. Subsequently, these explain the numerous revolts that consumed the emirate during Abd al-Rahman I's reign.

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<sup>22</sup> Roth, Norman, "The Jews and the Muslim Conquest of Spain" *Jewish Social Studies* 38(2)145-158(Spring,1976) p.146

## Hisham I (788-796)

Hisham I (788-796), the son of Abd al-Rahman, succeeded his father when he died. Unlike his father, HishamI enjoyed a relatively tranquil reign over Al-Andalus<sup>23</sup> and is reported to have been renowned for his charity as well as piety.<sup>24</sup> This personality of Hisham drew from the fact that he was a learned prince who had not been exposed to the brutality of war. Moreover, Hisham is reported to have sought the counsel of fellow scholars that he brought to the Emir's court to help him with the governance of the emirate.<sup>25</sup> Most of these jurists were from the Malkite School. According to

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<sup>23</sup> Gutierrez, Juan, "The Peace Significance of al-Andalus" In Sanaa Osseiran, *Cultural Symbiosis in Al-Andalus*, (Beirut, UNESCO, 2004). p.20

<sup>24</sup> Al-Makkari, Muhammad. *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*. Translated by Pascualde Gayangos, 2 vols. London: W. H. Allen and Co. 1840 - 1843. P.33

<sup>25</sup> O'Callaghan, Joseph, F. *A History of Medieval Spain*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1983). p.103

O'Callaghan<sup>26</sup> the jurists adopted a strict interpretation of the Quran and the law whereby they tended to be hostile to rationalist speculation as well as innovation. The general peace prevailing in Al-Andalus made it possible for the emir to send expeditions to Asturias to gain from the spoils of war.

### **al-Hakam I (796 -822)**

#### Toledans Revolt

Hisham I's son al-Hakam I was one of the longest reigning Umayyads in al-Andalus. However, unlike his father, his reign was a time of trouble as well as discord. This was mainly instigated by conspiracies as well as rebellions which led him to display what O'Callaghan describes as "a terrible ferocity and gained a terrible

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid p.103

reputation for tyranny”.<sup>27</sup> During his accession, al-Hakam I’s uncles attempted to seize the throne from the young emir which led him to ask Charlemagne for help at Achehe. Moreover, a number of frontier towns also exhibited a degree of hostility towards the new emir. Such hostility mainly from Zaragoza and Merida and later on (792) Toledo which was mainly inhabited by Jews and Mozarabs was caused by the heavy financial burdens. This revolt was, however, crushed in order to serve as a lesson to any future attempts to revolt against the emir. Al-Hakam I executed approximately 700 -5000 principal citizens in the concerned cities. Their bodies, as O’Callaghan writes, were thrown into dumpsites in their respective cities, to serve as a lesson and a reminder to the citizens.<sup>28</sup> O’Callaghan also writes that although there is a likelihood that the

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<sup>27</sup> O’Callaghan, Joseph, F. *A History of Medieval Spain*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1983). p.103

<sup>28</sup> Ibid p.103

numbers reported are definitely exaggerated, nevertheless, the brutality served as the emir's lesson to the people of Toledo.

### **Malikite Revolt**

Apart from Toledans the most serious challenge to al-Hakam's reign came from Cordoba itself. Such was the case after the Malikite jurists that had enjoyed extensive power during Hisham I's reign found their influence considerably diminished under the new emir. According to O'Callaghan, the jurists began to murmur and accuse al-Hakam I of drunkenness, irreligious conduct and evil conduct. They went as far as to conspire against the emir and create a plan to depose him. However, al-Hakam I learnt about the plot in time and in order to prevent future plots he ordered the execution of 72 Malikite jurists. However, although this instilled a sense of terror in the Cordoban citizenry, it did not prevent them from future

revolts as their hostility continued unabated.<sup>29</sup> In reacting to the increased risk of losing power, al-Hakam I went ahead and recruited Franks, Africans, and Galicians. These were placed under the command of Rabi, a Christian Count. Count Rabi was also put in charge of tax collection. The money was needed to finance the heavy fees of al-Hakam I's strong bodyguard force. The citizens of Cordoba, particularly the Muwalladun, were heavily burdened by the exorbitant taxes and the constant bullying. However, in reaction to the revolt, al-Hakam put down the uprising with great barbarity, crucifying three hundred notables and expelling the inhabitants of the southern side of the city. Then, he went ahead and razed the entire section to the ground. The majority of these exiles fled to Morocco, however, a number of them proceeded further east to Egypt where they established themselves as a dominant group. This

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<sup>29</sup>Bordoy, Guillermo, Rossello, "The Ceramics of al-Andalos" (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992). p.98



did not last for long as they would soon be expelled from Egypt in 827. They then sailed to Crete and established a new kingdom which O'Callaghan reports would last until the Byzantine reconquest in 961.<sup>30</sup>

The development of Christian States during al-Hakam I's Reign.

O'Callaghan writes that as the emir was preoccupied with domestic life in Cordoba, his counterpart in Asturias, Alfonso II, took conscious steps to reestablish both the civilization as well as ecclesiastical order of the Visigoth monarchs. As CroniconAlbeldense (58) writes, Alfonso established all things and the entire order of the Goths, both in the church and the palace as it had been on Toledo. Important to know is the fact that the Visigoth and Asturian kingdoms were not connected in any way. Moreover, Alfonso II also borrowed the characteristic titles of early

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<sup>30</sup> O'Callaghan, Joseph, F. *A History of Medieval Spain*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1983). p.104

Visigoth rulers and similarly sought the counsel of palatine officials whose offices were a reflection of the Visigoth courts. Alfonso also appointed the royal city of Oviedo as the new seat of a bishopric, erecting churches and blessing. Historically, Alfonso II is credited with establishing the historiographical tradition that connects the Asturian and Visigoth empires.

#### Apostle St. James the Great's Tomb

One of the most extraordinary events of this time which had significant implications both on al-Hakam's reign and on the future was the discovery of a tomb believed to belong to Apostle St. James the Great. The specific details of the discovery according to O'Callaghan are recorded in a late 11<sup>th</sup> century archived document, although acknowledgement of the existence of the tomb is evidenced from at least the end of the 9th century. The recorded story details

that a hermit heard angels singing and was witness to bright lights illuminating the place where Apostle St. James the Great was laid to rest. Later on the hermit confided in Bishop Theodomir of Iria Flavia in Galicia about the experience, who led the conformation before notifying the king. Alfonso II in turn funded the construction of a church at the site which was named Campus stellarum, translating into English the "field of stars".

Important to know is the fact that, the discovery of Apostle St. James the Great's tomb highly lifted the spirits of the Christian community both in Spain and northern Europe but also elevated the tensions between Christians and Muslims. The 11<sup>th</sup> century Muslim historian Ibn Hayyan characterizes this tension as mere pretension:

Santiago is ...one of the sanctuaries most frequented, not only by the Christians of Andalus, but by the inhabitants of the neighboring continent, who regard its church with veneration equal to that which Muslims entertain for the Kabba at Mecca

... pretending that the tomb ...is that of Yakob (James), one of the twelve apostles ... They said that he was bishop of Jerusalem and that he wandered about the earth preaching ... until he came to that remote corner of Andalus; that he then returned to Syria where he died ...They pretend likewise that after the death of Yakob his disciples carried his body and buried it in that church.<sup>31</sup>

Alfonso II reign, as a result of the dissension in al-Andalus, did not bear heavy attacks from the Umayyad Muslims on the south. Moreover, Alfonso made occasional attacks and managed to temporarily occupy Lisbon in 798. However, the city was later reclaimed by Muslims. In the course of Alfonso II's constant battles with the Muslim south, Frankish sources, as O'Callaghan writes,

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<sup>31</sup>Al-Makkari, Muhammad.*The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*. Translated by Pascual de Gayangos, 2 vols. London: W. H. Allen and Co. 1840 - 1843. P.193

relate that he commissioned messengers to deliver trophies of war in addition to Muslim captives to Charlemagne as well as his son Louis the Pious.

Although Charlemagne extended very little assistance to Alfonso II, al-Hakam I had to contend with the looming Carolingian presence, influence and authority south of the Pyrenees. Such as the case that after the occupation of Gerona in 785 the Franks consumed themselves with the task of extending their influence and rule into the mountainous area covering an extended length of the Segre River, Cardona, Caserras and Vich. The Muslims had made their last incursion in the region during the last days of Hisham I's reign in 793. After engulfing Gerona and proceeding to ravage the Narbonn suburbs, they toppled William of Toulouse in the shore of River Orbieu near Carcassone. Nevertheless, despite gaining large booty, the frontier, as O'Callaghan writes, remained unchanged.

During the reign of al-Hakam I the Muslim governors of Zaragoza, Cordoba, and Huesca who had allied with Hisham I, al-Hakam's father, switched camp and sought Charlemagne's patronage. In response, Charlemagne sent a message to Harun al-Rashid (the fifth Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad) in 797, a year after al-Hakam had ascended the throne. In his message the Frank sought the alliance of the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad, to topple his Umayyad neighbors. However, Louis the Pious, the Aquitaine King, rushed ahead perhaps encouraged by overtures in Spain to lay siege on Barcelona, which he subsequently captured in 801. However, although he attempted to extend the territory south at the mouth of the Ebro near Tortosa, his efforts did not bear fruit. Later on when Louis the Pious acceded to the imperial throne in 814, doubled with the dissension within his own kin, this put hold on the Frankish drive into Iberia which later encouraged the independence of the conquered territories.

In the years that followed the Franks would organize their conquests along the Pyrenees. The Spanish March (limes hispanicus) ultimately comprised the counties of Ribagorza, Sobrarbe, Urgel, Cerdagne, Ampurias, Vich, Cerdagne, Pallars, and Barcelona. The settlers that would later repopulate the territory primarily immigrated from Septimania. Their occupation adhered to the principles, laws and regulations of squatters' rights or *Aprisio*. The majority of these settlers descended from Hispano-Romans and the Visigoths that had earlier fled the region following the earlier Hispanic conquests. O'Callaghan writes, the imperial capitularies of 812 and 815-816 governed colonization as well as administration of justice. With the establishment of Frankish rule north of Iberia, the political structure of this region followed the feudal system. As such Catalonia was uniquely different from other territories in Iberia. Moreover, Frankish influence was felt in the liturgy, law, architecture and art of the northern counties. This continued to be

felt even after the disintegration of both the Islamic and Carolingian empires, later on persisting with the social and cultural ties to the north of the Pyrenees.

On the other hand, in the west of Catalonia, Jaca and the future state of Aragon began to take shape under the leadership of Aznar Galindo. In the lands extending farther to the west towards the mountains surrounding Pamplona, the ferociously independent Basques retained their autonomy despite attempts by Asturians, Franks, and Muslims to colonize and subdue them. However, little is known about the tiny Pyrenean states after the tenth century.

## **Abd al-Rahman II**

Abd al-Rahman II took power after the death of his father al-Hakam I in 822 and ruled until 852. His father had thwarted rebellion and discord in al-Andalus by means of what O'Callaghan writes of as "calculated ferocity". Abd al-Rahman II was both



learned and pious. He assumed leadership of the emirate using the same approaches like his grandfather Hisham I. Under Abd al Rahman II's reign, the emir became renowned as a patron of poets, scholars, and musicians transforming the emir's court into a cultural center of western Islam.<sup>32,33</sup> Abd al-Rahman II also proved to be an able ruler. He organized both the local and the central administration with a few minor changes that would last until the end of the caliphate. During the time of his reign, O'Callaghan writes, that al-Andalus enjoyed a period of relative calm, an aspect that was greatly beneficial to the emir as he was able to send moretroupes further north to Barcelona, Asturias, in addition to the Spanish March.

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<sup>32</sup>Holod, Renata, "Luxury Arts of the Caliphal Period" (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992).p.43

<sup>33</sup>Khemir, Sabiha, "The Arts of the Book" (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992).p.117

## **The Threat of the Norsemen**

It was during Abd al-Rahman II's reign that al-Andalus came under heavy attack from the Norsemen, who instigated attacks against the British Isles and Carolingian empire at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>34</sup> The first Norse fleet made attempts on al-Andalus after sacking Bordeaux and landing at Gijon in the northern mountains of Asturias towards the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. However, in the first raid, the Asturian king, Ramiro (842-850) managed to ward off these attacks, repelling them back to the sea. They nevertheless returned but opted to march west to La Coruna where they plundered the neighborhood before sailing to Lisbon on the south. After Lisbon, the Norsemen moved to Cadiz. Although, they had Guadalquivir in sight after plundering Seville, Abd al-Rahman II sent his soldiers to ward them off. The emir's army captured several

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<sup>34</sup>Triano, Antonio Vallejo, "Madinat al-Zahra: The Triumph of the Islamic State" (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992). p.29

prisoners of war. As events in the subsequent seasons would prove, neither the Iberian Peninsula nor Western Europe had seen the last of the Norsemen. The emir thus found it of great importance to come up with a strategy to deal with the Norse attacks once and for all. He thus came up with the idea of developing shipyards and commanded the training of a fleet charged with guarding the shores of Seville and the stretch of the Guadalquivir River.<sup>35</sup>

#### Balearics and the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus

O'Callaghan reports that this fleet was deployed in 848-849 in the war that re-established Umayyad rule over the Balearic Islands.<sup>36</sup> The Balearics made a deal with the Franks to fight with them against Abd al-Rahman II, but the Franks failed to assist them. So they submitted to the emir before subsequently agreeing to pay

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<sup>35</sup> See Appendix 1 for the map of al-Andalus

<sup>36</sup> O'Callaghan, Joseph, F. *A History of Medieval Spain*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1983). p.109

the normal tribute in return for protection.<sup>37,38,39</sup> However, the emir's ambition did not surpass the west of the Mediterranean. Theophilus, the Byzantine emperor, requested an alliance with Abd al-Rahman II in 839 after coming under threat from the Abbasids in Baghdad. However, Abd al-Rahman refused an alliance with the Byzantine emperor, noting that he instead would trust in the protection and help of Allah who would restore the reign of Umayyads and forever oversee over them as the rightful rulers of Islam.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Aznar, Bermudez, "A Historical Model of Judicial Coexistence" In Sanaa Osseiran, *Cultural Symbiosis in Al-Andalus*, (Beirut, UNESCO, 2004). p.212

<sup>38</sup>Viguera, Maria Jesus, "Political and Administrative Exchanges" In Sanaa Osseiran, *Cultural Symbiosis in Al-Andalus*, (Beirut, UNESCO, 2004). p.223

<sup>39</sup>Chahlane, Ahmed, "Exchanges in Daily Life" In Sanaa Osseiran, *Cultural Symbiosis in Al-Andalus*, (Beirut, UNESCO, 2004). p.271

<sup>40</sup>Lapidus, Ira, M. *A History of Islamic Societies*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2014) p.76

## The Mozarab Villains

As Abd al-Rahman II was nearing the end of his reign, the Mozarabs of Cordoba started to show patriotism and religious defiance. They opposed Islam and its rulers in Cordoba, slandering the name of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>41</sup> The response of the officials in Cordoba under the authority of Abd al-Rahman was both swift and sure. Blasphemy of Allah and his prophet was not only intolerable, but unpardonable and the only acceptable punishment was death. Nevertheless, the Christians continued to disparage the name of Allah and his prophet and seemed to be courting death in the hope that they would acquire the crown of martyrdom.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Gamito, Teresa Judice, "The Western Part of Al-Andalus: Ancient Kingdoms of Portugal and the Algarve" In Sanaa Osseiran, *Cultural Symbiosis in Al-Andalus*, (Beirut, UNESCO, 2004) p.60

<sup>42</sup> Eugenius II of Toledo, Poetic Epitaphs (ca.650) Translated from Latin by Jeremy duQ. Adams In Constable, Olivia Remie and Zurro, Damian, *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian*,

As Fernandez-Morerawrites there were numerous reports of incursions against Catholic faithful in Cordoba mounted by Abd al-Rahman II.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, other Catholics were also forced out of Cordoba following expulsion by the emir. Baxter also writes of such Christian martyrs in Cordoba, noting that among the most notable of these villains was Isaac. Isaac previous high standing in Cordoba's society partly drew from his high birth and his training in Arabic. He was a high standing government official (a katibadh-dhimam)or secretary of government, which remained the highest position a non-Muslim had held. However, after serving in government, Isaac retired to life in the monastery at Tabanos which was to the north of

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*Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). p.27

<sup>43</sup> Fernandez-Morera, Dario, "The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise"  
*Intercollegiate Review*, Fall  
(2006)23-31. p.24

the province in an area adjacent to the mountains.<sup>44</sup> When one day Isaac was visiting the emir's palace, he requested the qadi or judge about instruction concerning the fine points of the Islamic faith. When the official started to elaborate on divine rules of the faith, Isaac burst out with what Baxter describes as "vituperative attack against Islam." He also asserted that the Prophet had misled Arabs and for that he would languish in hell.<sup>45</sup> The qadi presumed that Isaac was drunk or simply mad to disparage Islam in the presence of judge the way he had done. However, Isaac assured the qadi that he was completely fine and he speaks against the Islamic faith by denouncing the prophet Mohammed and ready to die for that. Isaac's crime was reported to Abdar-Rahman II, and he sentenced him to die for unforgivable crime. Baxter writes that, after Isaac was

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<sup>44</sup> Baxter, Kenneth Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p.18

<sup>45</sup> Ibid p. 18

decapitated, the monk's body was then suspended upside down for viewing. This was intended to instill a sense of fear in non-Muslims, and thus ensure that they continued to respect Islam.<sup>46,47</sup>

Baxter, in analyzing Isaac's case notes that the most significant aspect of the events leading to his execution was not because he blasphemed the name of the prophet. Isaac's actions were deliberately provocative, which led to his execution. It was such willful disobedience that raised concerns among the Muslim elite and as such prompted drastic and severe measures in order to ensure that future outbursts were forestalled.

The threat implied in Abdar-Rahman II's edict, in which the emir directed the execution of all future blasphemers, however, did

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<sup>46</sup>Alasti, Sanaz, "Comparative Study of Stoning Punishment in the Religions of Islam and Judaism" *Justice Policy Journal*, 4(1)2007 1-38 p.15

<sup>47</sup>Marsham, Andrew "Public Execution in the Umayyad Period: Early Islamic Punitive Practice and Its Late Antique Context" *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 11(2011)101-136 p.118



not serve the intended purpose. <sup>48</sup>Two days after Isaac's execution a young Christian soldier named Sanctius was also executed for the same crime. Sanctius was from the southern part of France. After he was captured when he was a boy, he was subsequently forced to serve in the Cordoban army. Baxter notes that the boy probably served in the King's guard as part of the palace swordsmen. However, it is not clear whether Isaac's martyrdom was a motivation in the young soldier's case.

There are also more explicit links between Isaac's case and those of the six Christians that were condemned 48 hours after the monks' deaths. Among them is Petrus who was a priest posted at Ecija. Another one was Elche, who was a priest in south east Spain. The two priests had visited Cordoba under a study program. They were serving as convent supervisors in a small village outside of the

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<sup>48</sup>Epalza, Mikel de, "Military Conflicts, Tension and Peace in al-Andalus" In Sanaa Osseiran, *Cultural Symbiosis in Al-Andalus*, (Beirut, UNESCO, 2004). p.74

city called Cuteclara. Another two executed by the ruling Muslim elite in Cordoba were Sabinianus and Wistremundus, who like Petrus also came to Cordoba from Ecija. Sabinianus on the other hand came from a small village called Fronianus. In addition to the four, others included Hieremia, Isaac's kinsman and one of the founding members of the Tabanos Monastery, and a native of Cordoba by the name of Habentius who lived at St. Christopher.<sup>49</sup>

This paper shows the struggles and challenges that the Umayyad emirs faced in al-Andalus. The first challenge was with the Berbers who were ruling al-Andalus. The second challenge was the diversity of ethnicities and religions. There were Arabs, Berber and Europeans. This paper focuses on the ways that the Umayyad emirs dealt with the diversity of religions and how they treated the Christians in their realm. The paper also analyzes the conflict between the emirs and the Christian kingdoms in the north. The

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<sup>49</sup> Baxter, Kenneth Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p.19

emirs wanted to occupy the north and gain more land, but the rebellions weakened the emirate, which gave the Christian kingdoms the opportunity to reinforce their armies and attack the emirate. The emirs spent their time and power consolidating their regimes by fighting the rebellions and uprisings in their realm, which distracted them from fighting and occupying the north.