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**An Alternative Insight into the First Centuries of Islam  
on the Iberian Peninsula – Problems of Historiographic Sources  
Concerning the Early Islamic History of Al-Andalus**

**Abstract**

The stream of historical revisionism within the Orientalist scholarship has offered in recent years a number of intriguing theories attempting to undermine some of the conventional concepts of the Arab-Muslim early history and religious tradition. Regardless of their actual scholarly value, they do shed light on various methodological problems concerning the critical research on early the Islamic historiography, raise sensitive and stimulating questions, and encourage to think possibly of revising certain axioms of knowledge about that epoch. This paper endeavours to present briefly an alternative image of the arrival of Islam on the Iberian Peninsula, as emerging from research by the revisionist school of West-European scholars called *Inārah*. Their controversial theory involving, among others, historical and dogmatic aspects of the development of Islam in Andalusia, disputes the generally accepted version of historical events beginning with the 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E. which is largely based on the traditional sources of Arabic historiography.

**Keywords:** Historical revisionism, Arab-Muslim conquest of Spain, early Islam, Islamic historiography

This article outlines briefly an alternative image of early Islamic history on the Iberian Peninsula, as emerging from research by the revisionist school of West-European Semitists called *Inārah* (active mostly in Germany and France for nearly 10 years). The controversial theory involving, among others, historical and theological aspects of the development of Islam in Andalusia, disputes the generally accepted version of historical

events beginning with the 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E. which is largely based on the traditional sources of Arabic historiography.

The precursors of the *Inârah* Institute gained publicity in year 2000 after the publication of the known pioneer philological work of Christoph Luxenberg entitled. *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran – Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache* (the book was released in English in 2004 as *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran – A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* by Verlag Hans Schiler). It soon became the reference point for most of scientific research undertaken by scholars of the Oriental studies affiliated with the *Inârah* movement. Luxenberg, its member, calls for the revision of our current knowledge on the oldest Islamic history by means of subjecting its primary sources to the requirements of scientific criticism. The main methodological assumptions of Christoph Luxenberg rely on the analysis of the Qur'anic text against the cultural and historical background of its probable origins – the Middle East of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century, saturated with the Syro-Aramaic tradition. The *Inârah* school embraced scholars (mostly German, French and American) specializing in different fields, such as Semitics (including Arabic and Syriac studies), Iranian and Turkish studies, archeology, history of the pre-Islamic ages and early centuries of Islam, Christian and Muslim theology, history of art (relics of Arab material culture, including numismatics), Islamic studies, literature and other branches of human science.

The scientific activities of the *Inârah* movement are strongly revisionist and are criticized by most of the Orientalist milieus as lacking scientific objectivity and charged with prejudice against the Muslim tradition. On the other hand, the critical scientific theses put forward by members of the *Inârah* group gained support of some prominent intellectuals of the Western Oriental scholarship, including the Egyptian liberal Muslim theologian-in-exile Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and the world-renowned German paleographer of the Arabic language Gerd-Rüdiger Puin. The publicity surrounding *Inârah* has contributed to the popularity of their scientific theories which are widely discussed within the Western Orientalist milieus, undoubtedly pushing forward the development of this field of human sciences. Every year, dozens of published scientific papers refer directly or indirectly to the effects of *Inârah*'s work.

The main assumption made by the revisionist school is that our contemporary knowledge on the origins of Islam has almost solely been acquired from the sources of the Islamic tradition, written accounts of which date back to the 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> century AD or later, i.e. 150–200 years after the events in question. Historical credibility of these sources has never been sufficiently confirmed by scientific research, least of all archaeology.

According to *Inârah*'s theory, the formation of Islam as a separate religion was a long-term process covering about two centuries<sup>1</sup>. The forerunner of the Muslim community became in the 7<sup>th</sup> century a specific community of Syro-Arab Christians who

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<sup>1</sup> The hypothesis of a wide expanse of time accompanying various processes leading to the (development or) evolution of the dogmatic message of Islam (i.e. the Qur'anic script, exegesis, but also jurisprudence etc.) is an often returning motif within the critical scholarship on Islam. See also, inter alia: John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies. Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford University Press 1977, p. 47, 90, 92, 140 etc.

were gradually detaching themselves dogmatically from the Byzantine church since the time of the First Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. (which recognized the doctrine of the Holy Trinity). In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, their faith was already marked by a distinct form of anti-trinitarianism, in some way akin to the beliefs of the Arians. Hence, the Syrian literature of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries (including theological treatises and historical chronicles) considers this denominational group to be an Arab-Christian heresy. Its followers began to assume power over the region of Great Syria after the Emperor Heraclius (610–641 C.E.) had renounced his administrative authority over the eastern provinces of Byzantium in the twenties of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, the Syriac Arabs regarded themselves politically as the rightful heirs of the Byzantine dominions in the Middle East. Religiously, they believed in the new anointment of the Arabs – sons of Ismail as the inheritors of Abraham’s spiritual legacy and the heirs of the divine law given to Moses<sup>2</sup>. By the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Arab Umayyad Empire under the leadership of ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwān usurped the spiritual and material patrimony over the former provinces of the Byzantine Empire in the Arab East, as well as the lands in North Africa and Spain<sup>3</sup>.

In the revisionist theory, this theological movement was gradually drifting away from the teachings of Constantinople and Rome and transforming itself slowly into Islam as an independent non-Christian religion, a process which only materialized at the turn of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century.

Also, the very terminology of the Islamic religion is – according to the *Inārah* school – historically late and derives from the Syriac Christian tradition. The word “*islām*” was initially to mean theologically the compliance of faith dogmas with the message of *Al-Kitāb* – the Holy Book. The term “*muslim*” depicted believers of this specifically conceived form of pre-Nicaean theology, and the Arabic passive participle “*muḥammad*” (Arabic: praised, glorified) was to be the theological Arab epithet referring to the person of the Messiah Son of God and describing one of His virtues, and was not to refer to the name of the Muslim prophet Muhammad<sup>4</sup>.

In this sense, *Muḥammad* is not a historical figure, but one of theological concepts of the said group of Arab-Syriac Christians<sup>5</sup>. This concept becomes for the new Arab

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Wansbrough supports J. Schacht’s point that the canonization of the Qur’an could not have preceded the process of working out of the Islamic jurisprudence first. John Wansbrough, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Within this theory, the Qur’an, and precisely its oldest surahs, was originally thought as the eschatological epopee of the spiritual struggle of these people.

<sup>3</sup> According to revisionist views, during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik the Arab state subsumed Tripolitania and the former Roman province of Africa. This fact is historically confirmed by numismatic finds from these areas – coins marked with the religious symbol ‘Abd al-Malik’s sovereignty (called *yegar sahaduta* – the Old Testamental “stone of witness”), corresponding to similar coins of the same ruler minted in the Arab East. The newly subjugated territories were governed by ‘Abd al-Malik’s brother – ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Ibn Marwān. Then the sons of ‘Abd al-Malik continued further conquest of Africa in the western direction, and Spain.

<sup>4</sup> Volker Popp, *Biblische Strukturen in der islamischen Geschichtsdarstellung*, in: Markus Groß, Karl-Heinz Ohlig (ed.), *Schlaglichter. Die beiden ersten islamischen Jahrhunderte*, Verlag Hans Schiler Berlin, pp. 35–92.

<sup>5</sup> Volker Popp, *Von Ugarit nach Sāmarrā*, in: Karl-Heinz Ohlig (ed.), *Der frühe Islam. Eine historisch-kritische Rekonstruktion anhand zeitgenössischer Quellen*, Berlin 2007, pp. 13–222.

church (breaking free religiously from the hegemony of the Patriarch of Constantinople and administratively from the rule of the Byzantine Emperor) the main motto and guiding maxim of “new Arab Christianity”. It was only after the Abbasid dynasty had been established that a historic dimension was added to the concept of “*muḥammad*”, within the frame of a reverse projection into Islam’s history, done by Abbasids to make their dominion legitimate<sup>6</sup>. It was also that time when the Arabic biography of Muḥammad was created.

According to the revisionist school, this religious philosophy, and not Islam as defined today, arrived in 711 at the gates of the Visigothic Spain (and earlier to Egypt and the entire North Africa.) This belief was characterized by doctrinal resemblance to various Christian-like religious factions of the Iberian Peninsula at that time, from the still strong Arianism to gnosticism. The new anti-trinitarian theology, which was brought by the newcomers from the East, could therefore find fertile Arian ground on the Iberian Peninsula which in turn might have greatly facilitated its conquest.

Researchers from the *Inârah* group believe that the Berber-Arab army encountered remnants of the Arian community still before their military arrival in Spain, that is in North Africa. An anti-Catholic and anti-Franconian coalition was formed there and found its natural ally on the other side of the Strait of Gibraltar in parts of the population inhabiting southern Spain. This may mean that the legendary victory of the Arabs over the Visigothic king Roderick in 711 might have been the result of the said alliance between the Visigothic Arian aristocracy on one side and – on the other one – the Arian Berbers together with a few Syrian Arabs professing the belief in one God whose anti-trinitarian faith put them close to Spanish Arians<sup>7</sup>. This hypothesis implies that the conquest of Spain might not have been an ordinary military campaign with the “Muslim finger of God” in the background, but it rather had an opportunistic ground – the Berber-Arab army could have been “invited” to Spain to help in the removal of the Visigothic king loyal to Rome<sup>8</sup>.

In revisionists’ opinions, such a theory correlates with historical descriptions of the religious situation in Spain of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Preserved synodical documents and writings of church officials do not refer in any way (at least till the middle of the

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<sup>6</sup> In this context see also the theory of: Yehuda D. Nevo, Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State*, Amherst New York 2003, pp. 297–336.

<sup>7</sup> Looking at the further course of historical events from this perspective, the victory of Charles Martel over the Arabs at Poitiers in 732 cannot be regarded as “driving back Muslims from the walls of Christian Europe”. The military invasion of the Spanish anti-Catholic coalition was a retaliation for continuous pro-Catholic interferences of the Franks into Spanish affairs.

<sup>8</sup> The more that cases of coup d’état of a religious nature with Arian participation were not anything new in Spain by that time. The mere fact of the conversion of the Visigothic king of Spain Reccared I (586–601) to Catholicism in 587 was of an opportunistic political nature: his intention was to avoid the fate of the Ostrogothic Arians and a blow from the part of the Catholic Franks of the Narbonese Gaul. A year later, in 588 some significant noble Arian clans led by Witteric revolted against the king demanding the rehabilitation of the Arian faith. Witteric instigated another revolt in 603 gaining reign over the Visigothic state till 609. In turn, he was murdered by a group of Catholic aristocrats.

9<sup>th</sup> century) to the supposed appearance of a new non-Christian religion in Spain. The original source-texts (including theological writings devoted to dogmatics, correspondence, polemics, etc.) neither mention the terms “Islam” nor “Muslims”. Still in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, numerous Spanish clergymen were pointing in their letters to some gradually increasing threats to the orthodoxy of the Catholic faith – mainly posed by the Arians and other locally-rooted religious currents. For this reason, by the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century Toledo saw seven synods of bishops<sup>9</sup> held in short time intervals during which many of the spreading heresies, including gnostic currents associated with the earlier priscillianism and movements related to nestorianism, were condemned. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century the conflicts within Christianity took on more momentum, still no one seemed yet to know about the advent of a new teaching – the Islam<sup>10</sup>. The Church hierarchy was mainly occupied with its continuous struggle against internal Christian heresies. The metropolite of Toledo – Elipandus (717–808) took an attempt to unite factions of the church by announcing the doctrine of adoptionism, which, however, led in effect to sealing the already existing divisions<sup>11</sup>. At the same time, increasing numbers of the Christian Spanish population were adhering to an Arab faith brought from the East by the Umayyads. It was characterized by strong anti-trinitarianism, however the literature still did not call it Islam, but a Christian sect. A member of the *Inârah* institute prof. Johannes Thomas writes that in the 9<sup>th</sup> century the Christians of Córdoba were already in a substantial part followers of those various religious anti-trinitarian factions which still back in the 7<sup>th</sup> century were the reason for convening a series of synods. The Andalusian theologian and poet Álvaro of Córdoba (c. 800–861) complains in a letter to his friend written around the year 840 that the heresy of which he had been writing earlier, was *tearing apart the church, and leading the whole community to destruction*<sup>12</sup>. Its followers were, inter alia, denying the unity of the Holy Trinity and rejecting the belief in the divinity of Christ. The religious beliefs of the Cordoban Christians in reference to Jesus and the Holy Trinity coincide with the faith dogmas condemned by the First Council of Nicaea, which were in turn preserved by the

<sup>9</sup> During these synods bishops defended the teachings of the First Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.), the First Council of Constantinople (381), both councils of Ephesus (431 and 439), and especially the Council of Chalcedon (451). The Toledan synods were convened in the years 675 (11<sup>th</sup> synod), 681 (12<sup>th</sup>), 683 (13<sup>th</sup>), 684 (14<sup>th</sup>), 688 (15<sup>th</sup>), 693 (16<sup>th</sup>) and in 694 (17<sup>th</sup>). José Vives (ed.), *Concilios visigóticos y hispano-romanos*, Barcelona–Madrid 1963, p. 171.

<sup>10</sup> According to this theory, also the analysis of numismatic findings does not indicate that Spain was a Muslim country (in today’s understanding of this word) by the 8<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. More on this: Popp Volker, *Die frühe Islamgeschichte nach inschriftlichen und numismatischen Zeugnissen*, in: Karl-Heinz Ohlig, Gerd-R. Puin (ed.), *Die dunklen Anfänge. Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, 3. Aufl. 2007, Berlin pp. 16–123.

<sup>11</sup> The adoptionism of Elipandus, akin to the views of Paul of Samosata and Photinus of Sirmium, was condemned by the pope and Charlemagne as a form of nestorianism. Northern Spain took energetically the side of the pope, whereas southern Spain, including Hispania Baetica (approximately today’s province of Andalusia) limited itself just to refuting adoptionism as a thesis.

<sup>12</sup> José Madoz (ed.), *Epistolario de Alvaro de Córdoba*, Madrid 1947, p. 173, as quoted by: Johannes Thomas, *Frühe spanische Zeugnisse zum Islam*, in: Markus Groß, Karl-Heinz Ohlig (ed.), *Schlaglichter...*, op. cit., pp. 172–173.

tradition of the Syro-Arab church in the East. The fact that they were still referring at that time to the Gospel of Matthew (and not the Qur'an) also presupposes that they might have still been more heirs to the pre-Nicaean Christian dogmatics rather than Muslims<sup>13</sup>.

Given the foregoing considerations, the revisionist school opposes the division of the events that took place before 711 and after this date into the Christian era and Muslim era, which is common in Spanish historiography. Many of today's scientific works illustrate the Berber-Arab conquest of Andalusia as a sharp turn in the course of history and an ideological reference point for the entire subsequent history of the Arab Umayyad caliphate in Spain. The history preceding the arrival of the Arabs is being "lumped" together under the catchword of "the Christian kingdom of the Visigoths", and all events after 711 are being stereotypically classified under the heading "Arab-Muslim governance", just as if they were two homogeneous opposing historical epochs. Contesting this view, Johannes Thomas also argues that Islam today is not the same religion as professed in the 8<sup>th</sup> century by Arabs, Ibadi Berbers conquering the Iberian peninsula or inhabitants of Andalusia by that time<sup>14</sup>. According to the German Romanist, the myth of a "fine division of two historical epochs" is sustained by the uncritical gaining of knowledge of that time from hardly reliable Arab historical chronicles, written down not earlier than a few hundred years after the portrayed events<sup>15</sup>. According to researchers

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<sup>13</sup> Till the time of condemning the so-called Cassian heresy in 839, it seems that for the Cordoban church the problem of the person of Muhammad was not existent (later he was present in clergy writings and depicted as the "harbinger of the Antichrist"). A synod convened at that time dealt with the case of the Cassian sect and with the passivity of the catholic faith of those Christians who did not stand against the Syro-Arab christology. The bishops shared their concerns with the Umayyad caliph 'Abd ar-Rahmān II, who convened the synod.

<sup>14</sup> The more that the conquest of Spain was mainly executed by the Berber army. The chronicle of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam from the 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century describes the North African Berber tribes interchangeably with two closer unspecified terms: *ṣufrī* (Sufiris) and *ibādī* (Ibadis). As for some tribes (e.g. Barani, Butr) it is being mentioned that they remained Christian. In most cases however, the chronicle does not mention the religious affiliation of the Berber tribes. Thus it may be concluded that the troops invading Spain in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century did not consist of Sunni Muslims, but of Sufiris and Ibadis (Similarly moreover, when the chronicle of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam talks about the commander Mūsā Ibn Nuṣayr, it mentions only a few Arab personalities assisting him, however most of the persons surrounding him were Berber leaders and their freedmen (*mawālī*). Thus, there couldn't have been any major religious conflicts between them and the conquered Spanish Christians). In turn, according to Muslim tradition, Ibadi missionaries arrived in Africa from Basra not earlier than in 757 and supposedly managed to Islamize immediately the Berber tribes. However, this seems highly unlikely only because of the reason that Berbers spoke Berber dialects and Latin, and not Arabic. Anyway, it is possible that Ibadis were more concerned with acquiring Christian Berbers for an alliance against the Umayyads than perhaps islamizing them. Johannes Thomas, op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>15</sup> As Johannes Thomas points out, the thesis of *tabula rasa* creates scientific paradoxes in such fields as archeology, history of arts and architecture. For example, archaeologists working in Spain sometimes classify buildings and ornamentation similar architecturally to Umayyad palaces in the Arab East as a direct influence of Islamic culture, although till recently these monuments were regarded unquestionably as examples of Visigothic architecture. Moreover, the Spanish historian Luis Caballero Zoreda argues that Spanish architectural objects deriving by all their features from the late Roman, Byzantine or Visigothic periods are being tendentiously reclassified into the Muslim period. Thus, for example, a floormosaic dating till now on the basis of archaeological evidence to the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century, must be regarded as a monument of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, although it is explicit with taking the oldest archaeological layer for the youngest one. And further, after classifying the church as a building from

from *Inârah*, the transformation of Christian and gnostic Spain into Muslim Andalusia was a much smoother and long-lasting process than and it is being presented today by modern researchers. The Spanish historian Ignacio Olagüe (1903–1974) indicates that it is only since the 9<sup>th</sup> century that sectarian unrest began growing, the pressure against orthodox Christians was building up, Islam was formed as a religion separate from Christianity and started to be considered by the followers of Christ as the embodiment of the apocalyptic beast from the Book of Daniel<sup>16</sup>. It is impossible to understand the historical events in Spain of the early 8<sup>th</sup> century by adopting the view of the “fine clean division of two epochs”, without paying attention to the cultural and religious background of the Mediterranean region and of the Orient in the late antiquity.

The revisionist school questions the generally accepted historical outline of the beginnings of Islam on the Iberian Peninsula showing that we owe it largely to the Muslim tradition written down on demand of the late Abbasid dynasty. It is a version of history oriented theologically and politically to sanctioning the religious and political power of the Abbasid rulers. It may be concluded from the research done by the German theologian Volker Popp that it is exactly in this political agenda of the first Abbasid caliphs where the real motives standing behind this homogenous traditional Muslim concept of describing the early history of Islam should be looked for. At the request of the Abbasids, a specific version of history friendly to the Abbasids rulers was created and projected back into the past, with the overall objective of purposeful legitimizing their political and religious authority. It is a certain kind of mythologization of history, in order to derive one's own lineage from the Prophet of Islam from Arabia<sup>17</sup>. At the same time, the Christian traditions of the Syriac Arabs did not correspond to the image of the history promoted by the Abbasid dynasty. Hence their marginalization or complete omission in traditional works of Muslim historiographers.

In the opinion of the renown English medievalist Roger Collins, it must be remembered that Arab sources portraying the conquest of Spain are not contemporary with the described events, but much later, sometimes even several hundred years. Thus, it is hard assigning them historical value, but only the literary one. These sources are also unreliable historiographically because they do not meet the requirements of scientific criticism: they often provide contradictory information, do not respect the chronology of events, include numerous literary topoi as well as later interpolations and contaminations, in a much greater degree than contemporary Latin chronicles. All this makes it necessary to treat early Arabic sources with a large dose of skepticism and credit them with confidence only if the information contained therein is confirmed by other sources of the given period<sup>18</sup>.

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the 9<sup>th</sup> century, its commemorative plaques bearing the earlier dates are being automatically rated as forgeries. Ibidem, p. 104–106.

<sup>16</sup> Ignacio Olagüe, *La revolución islámica en Occidente*, Guadarrama 1974, p. 198.

<sup>17</sup> In this context see also: Mondher Sfar, *Raison d'espérer*, in: K.H. Ohlig, G.R. Puin (ed.) *Die dunklen Anfänge...*, op. cit., p. 350.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain, 710–797*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 1989, pp. 2 and 26.

The oldest Arabic document of Andalusia dating back to the year 94 A.H. (713 C.E.) is the text of the treaty concluded by the son of the Arab commander Mūsà Ibn Nuṣayr – ‘Abd al-‘Azīz – with the Gothic magnate Theodemir. However this document which is referred to by almost every contemporary source of the Spanish history after 711, makes part of a manuscript dating from the turn of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century, therefore it cannot be regarded as a historical source<sup>19</sup>. What is more, it contains numerous interpolations of subsequent later copyists which makes it impossible to verify the historical authenticity of the treaty.

In turn, the chronicle considered to be the oldest Arab annal reporting on the ongoings of the North African and Spanish conquest is the Egyptian chronicle attributed to Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (803–871) entitled *Futūḥ Ifrīqiya wa-al-Andalus*. However, problematic from the standpoint of historical criticism is the fact that the chronicle contains some information about events from the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century (such as the conquest of Narbonne by the Franks in 941/2)<sup>20</sup>. The author himself had never been to Spain, and wrote his work in Egypt drawing knowledge from travelers whose accounts find no confirmation in history. The Western Oriental scholarship has treated Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam’s chronicle as an unreliable source since the known Dutch Arabist Piet Reinhart Dozy revealed its inaccuracies, the author’s tendency to confabulating and fabricating facts. Dozy likened the information provided by the chronicle to “tales from One Thousand and One Nights”<sup>21</sup>.

Late is also the chronicle attributed to the first Andalusian historiographer known by his name – ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Ḥabīb (790–854) which is preserved only in fragmentary quotations by later authors. However, since the last events portrayed in it involve the years 888–912, and it also contains allusions to the reconquest of Toledo (1085), hence it is being suggested that the work might have been originally written down by the successors of ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Ḥabīb. Similar doubts arise over the chronicle of the Cordoban historiographer Ar-Rāzī (889–955). The text has been preserved through its later translations (including into Portuguese ca. by the year 1400, and into Castilian in the 15<sup>th</sup> century) and later compilations.

Hence, the oldest preserved Arabic-language Andalusian contribution to the history of Spain after 711 is generally considered the collection of traditional stories entitled *Aḥbār Mağmū’a*<sup>22</sup> dating to – by various estimates – between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> The manuscript saw wider light of the day for the first time in the publication of Miguel Casiri by the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>20</sup> Johannes Thomas, *Araboislamische Geschichtsschreibung und ihre Auswirkung auf Geschichtsbilder von al-Andalus* (8 Jh.) – *Quellen- und Tradentenprobleme, fiktionale Geschichte bei Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam und das Märchen von den arabischen Stammesfehden*, in: Markus Groß, Karl-Heinz Ohlig (ed.), *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion I*, Verlag Hans Schiler Berlin–Tübingen 2010, p. 155.

<sup>21</sup> See: Piet Reinhart Dozy, *Recherches sur l’histoire et la littérature des arabes d’Espagne pendant le Moyen Âge*, Brill Leyde 1881, 3 ed. vol. 1, pp. 36–38.

<sup>22</sup> *Ajbar Machmu. Crónica anonima del siglo XI, dada a luz por primera vez. Traducida y anotada por Emilio Lafuente y Alcántara*, Madrid 1867.

<sup>23</sup> *Aḥbār Mağmū’a* as a source written from the perspective of the late Muslim tradition does not reflect historiographically the actual socio-religious considerations of Spain at the brink of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, particularly



Its oldest manuscript (from the 14<sup>th</sup> century) is stored in the National Library in Paris. All other Arab sources to early medieval history of Andalusia (including the work of Ibn al-Qūṭīyya *Ta'rīḥ iftitāḥ al-Andalus* preserved in manuscripts from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the anonymous chronicle *Fath al-Andalus* from the 12<sup>th</sup> century) are even more subsequent.

Because of numerous contradictions between various Arab chronicles and the large time-span separating them from the events described, some historians conclude that the reconstruction of the history of Arab Andalusia demands assigning the priority to more reliable Latin chronicles<sup>24</sup>. Another argument against the Arab accounts is the fact that they were written from the perspective of the victors. As pointed out by Roger Collins, “to a large degree the problem is one of contradictions and confusion in the [Arab] sources, resulting not least from the character of much of the Arab historiography of the western conquests. Thus the Arab historians writings in Egypt, North Africa, and Spain from the later ninth century onward often worked backward from contemporary conditions and practices and tried to find an explanation for their existence in terms of what had happened in the past. In practice this could often mean inventing a past what was able to make sense of the present. (...) Added to this must be the natural if regrettable tendency to give particular region, tribe, people, or settlement a longer and more distinguished Islamic past than it might actually have enjoyed. (...) [the] actual conquest by the Arabs would be a far longer and slower process than the sources imply, and in which Islam would be established much less rapidly and with less homogeneity than the piety of thirteenth-century and later Muslim historians writing in North Africa in North Africa would find able to credit”<sup>25</sup>.

There exist two Latin chronicles from Spain of the period in question: the chronicle of the year 741 (*Continuatio Byzantia Arabica a. DCCXLI*)<sup>26</sup> and of the year 754 (the so-called *Continuatio hispanica a. DCCLIV*)<sup>27</sup>. Especially the latter one is considered the oldest source of Muslim historiography of Spain and the benchmark of credibility for the facts reported by Arab chronicles and subsequent Latin historiographic descriptions

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by passing over in silence on the influence of the Judeo-Christian culture. For example, when the text refers to Ṭāriq Ibn Ziyād's army consisting mainly of Berbers and free mercenaries, it uses the vague term “*Muslims*” even though Berbers were still not Islamized nor Arabized by then. However, a dozen pages later when describing the Berber rebellion against Arabs, the chronicle uses the term “*Muslims*” only in reference to Arabs. The author or compiler of *Aḥbār Mağmū'a* must have probably known that Berbers had revolted against the official Islam of the caliph. He wrote the chronicle from the perspective of the Arab rulers who did not acknowledge usurpers of power nor any different views on their religion.

<sup>24</sup> More on this, among others, by: Claude Dietrich, *Untersuchungen zum Untergang des Westgotenreichs (711–725)*, “Historisches Jahrbuch”, Band 108, 1988, pp. 329–358.

<sup>25</sup> Roger Collins, *Hiszpania w czasach Wizygotów. 409–711*, PWN, Warszawa 2007, p. 98.

<sup>26</sup> *Continuatio Byzantia Arabica a. DCCXLI*, in: Theodorus Mommsen, MGH, Auct. Antiq. Tomus XI. *Chronicorum minorum* sec. IV, V, VI, VII, vol. II, Berlin 1894.

<sup>27</sup> Eduardo Lopez Pereira (red.), *Crónica mozárabe de 754. Edición crítica y traducción por E.L.P.*, Zaragoza 1980. It is believed that the work was actually written around 790, and its author was a Cordoban or Toledan cleric.

or their compilations. The contents of these two chronicles correlates with the historical continuum of the Byzantine influence in Spain. Both works correspond in terms of the text, sources and chronology to the Byzantine chronicle of world events by Theophanes the Confessor (c. 760–c. 817) and with *Chronologia brevis* by the Patriarch of Constantinople Nikephoros I (750–828). All these reports show a great deal of knowledge about events in the Byzantine Empire, the expansion of the Arabs and the situation in Spain, which simultaneously demonstrates that there must have been an intense flow of information between Spain and the Orient. It is worth noting that both chronicles of 741 and 754 write about the conquests of the Saracene Arab prophet Muhammad, but do not mention by name the appearance of a new religion, the *Qur'an*, 'Alī nor the term of *hiğra* (but e.g. *year of the Arabs*). In turn, the Mozarabic chronicle of 754 describes, among other things, the Kharijites as a sect of Christian heretics<sup>28</sup>. Unfortunately, a serious shortcoming of these Latin chronicles remains the fact that they are also preserved only in later copies. And so, the chronicle of 754 is known from wide fragments of its copy dating to the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

Unfortunately, the current outline of the 8<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish historiography is primarily based on the late Arab chronicles, supplemented by information derived from the Latin chronicle of 754 (or its later compilations), but only within the scope not contradicting with the Arab report. Moreover, as pointed out by Johannes Thomas, the measure of reliability of Arab historiographic texts is often the degree of their compliance with one another. As a result, when encountering contradictory facts historians usually tend to believe one or another Arab chronicle without reaching out to independent sources. Besides, those historians who have their eyes fixed on the traditional Muslim historiography are particularly fond of these works which contain a greater variety of detailed descriptions. Thus, while citing the said Latin chronicle of 754 and Arab sources, many modern historians quote willingly e.g. the author of Spain's history Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada (1170–1247) whose work *Historia Arabum* comes only from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, all information contained in the Arab sources is being taken for historical facts except for some obvious legends, unfortunately regardless of the time span separating the sources from the events described<sup>29</sup>. And so the renowned modern Spanish historian Pedro Chalmeta portrays in his *Invasión y islamización. La sumisión de Hispania y la formación de al-Andalus*<sup>30</sup> the successful landing of Tāriq Ibn Ziyād on the Spanish coast

<sup>28</sup> The Kharijites appear in the Latin text as "Arures". Johannes Thomas, *Frühe...*, op. cit., p. 151. More on the revisionist hypothesis of Kharijites' Christian origin, also see: Volker Popp, *Biblische Strukturen...*, op. cit., pp. 35–92.

<sup>29</sup> For example, it is often stated as a historical fact (taken from Arab annals) that during the conquest of Spain in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, the entire Christian population, if not killed, fled from the cities to the mountains. Such a retreat into the Asturian Pyrenees or to Galicia of all the residents of Cordoba, Granada, Seville and Merida seems historically very improbable.

<sup>30</sup> Published by Mapfre in Madrid in 1994.

citing without reservation a detailed story by Al-Haza'inī although it is known only from a compilation of his work by Al-Maqqarī, so – from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>31</sup>.

In the opinion of the revisionists from *Inârah*, when taking into account the requirements of historical criticism, the character of Ṭāriq Ibn Ziyād must be rejected as not being confirmed by any independent historical evidence, such as inscriptions, coins, etc. The geographical name of the Gibraltar peninsula cannot be taken as a proof for the existence of the Berber commander. It much more brings to mind the common tendency of Arab literature to explain proper names of localities by proper names of important personalities. Numerous examples for this were put forward by the German scholar of Islamic studies Albrecht Noth (1937–1999) arguing that localities were receiving names after fictional characters who supposedly visited them<sup>32</sup>. What is more, Ṭāriq is in Arabic language an anthroponomical name meaning *someone following a path*. Another example of explaining names of localities by personal names is the story of the expedition of Ṭarīf to the Spanish coast in 710, from which shall be derived the name of the Spanish port of Tarifa. With high probability however, this town has already had this name before that period<sup>33</sup>. It is possible that also many other proper names of Spanish localities, that are commonly explained as deriving from Arabic, may actually come from Latin, Greek or Punic names<sup>34</sup>.

According to Fred Donner and Albrecht Noth, doubts about the early Arab annals arise not only because of the proper names of people or localities<sup>35</sup>. Disputable is primarily the very informational value of these works. The authors' manner is either to ignore the chronology of events in whole, or to attach little importance to it. Datings according to the hijra calendar, as well as many other textual elements, are later interpolations. Finally, the reports themselves are filled with a multitude of literary topoi. An example of such a topos is the central planning for the conquest of non-Muslim countries by the caliphate's administration<sup>36</sup>, as well as the conquest of Cordoba with the help of a shepherd who was to show the invading army a gap in the city walls. A similar

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<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Chalmeta describes as historical facts, inter alia, the following: the nowhere confirmed historiographically first expedition of Ṭarīf Ibn Malik to Tarifa, running by Ṭarīf an independent trade activity, naming the city by his name, the lack of resistance of the Visigoths and only one decisive battle at the river Rio Barbate or Rio Guadalate, as well as stories of shepherds showing invaders the way to Cordoba by a breach in the city walls. Even the finding of the richly decorated king Solomon's table doesn't seem for the historian Pedro Chalmeta completely unreliable. The only information he regards as unreliable is the story of the closed chamber in the royal castle and the prophetic prediction about the upcoming invasion of the Arabs. Ibidem, pp. 118–157.

<sup>32</sup> Albrecht Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichtslieferung*. Bonn 1973, p. 169.

<sup>33</sup> More on this topic, see also: Joaquín Vallvé, *Nuevas ideas sobre la conquista árabe de España. Toponimia y onomástica*, "Al-Qantara". Revista de estudios árabes, vol. 10, Madrid 1989, pp. 51–150.

<sup>34</sup> For example, in the theory of Johannes Thomas, the name of Gibraltar may be derived from juxtaposing the Aramaic (Punic?) *.gibr.* (great, high) with the its Latin synonym *.altus..* Such types of joins are not unusual (for example, the Persian *kamarband* (belt) is the juxtaposition of two synonyms meaning *belt*: the Aramaic *kamar* and the Middle Persian *band*). Johannes Thomas, *Araboislamische...*, op. cit., p. 160.

<sup>35</sup> Fred Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquest*, Princeton 1981; Albrecht Noth, *Futuh History and Futuh Historiography: the Muslim Conquest of Damascus*, "Al-Qantara", 10 (1989), pp. 453–462.

<sup>36</sup> Albrecht Noth, *Quellenkritische...*, op. cit., pp. 163–164.

topos may be encountered in the literary descriptions of seizing the cities of Damascus, Caesarea (Palestine), Alexandria, the stronghold of Babilon-Fustat in Egypt or Tustar in the Persian Khuzestan.

As demonstrated by prof. Thomas from the University of Paderborn, there exist no Arabic inscriptions from Spain dating to the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and only six of them come from the 9<sup>th</sup> century – the inscription on the foundation act of a mosque in Seville by ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān II (792–852), two inscriptions on the foundation of the fortress in Merida by the same ruler, the inscription on the restoration of a mosque in Cordoba also by ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān II, the inscription on the tombstone of a Cordoban female magnate released by Al-Ḥakam, and the inscription on the anonymous grave in Torre del Campo in the province of Jaen<sup>37</sup>. At the same time, religious formulas appear thereby only in the inscriptions at the fort in Merida and the Mezquita in Cordoba, of which only one dating to the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century contains the expression *Muḥammad-un Rasūl-u Allāh*, which is not anything unusual for this period of Islamic history. As Solange Ory writes, “in the *ṣahāda* formulas the reference to the Prophet is not systematic. This reference is also absent in the text engraved on the right side of the entrance gate to the Umayyad mosque in Busra. As well as it is not present in most of funeral texts”<sup>38</sup>. Thus, if Andalusian inscriptions lack the *Muḥammad* motto, so they correspond to the traditions of the east-Umayyad inscriptions from the period of ‘Abd al-Malik’s reign. It follows from that also that the confession of faith in the prophet was not yet by then an integral part of the Arab faith.

Regardless of the correctness (or incorrectness) of the theses put forward by the members of the *Inārah* Institute, and in spite of their clearly revisionist overtones, they definitely possess one fundamental value. Namely, they revive the critical discussion on various aspects of the historiography of early Arab Spain, including its essential methodological assumptions to which the science has not yet presented fully satisfactory explanations.

As Roger Collins writes, we should after all remember that till now, “the western expansion of Islam has been relatively little studied and understood, and that current interpretations depend heavily upon late and ideologically slanted sources that present an image of the processes of the conquest of North Africa that may have been justified by conditions and perspectives of the thirteenth century and later, but which have little to do with the realities of the second half of the seventh century and early eight<sup>39</sup>.”

<sup>37</sup> More on this see: Evariste Lévi-Provençal, *Inscriptions arabes d’Espagne avec 44 planches en phototypié*, Leiden 1931, as quoted by Johannes Thomas, *Frühe...*, op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>38</sup> Solange Ory, *Aspects religieux des textes épigraphiques du début de l’Islam*, “Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée”, 58, 1990/4, p. 32; as quoted by: Johannes Thomas, *Frühe...*, op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>39</sup> Roger Collins, *Visigothic Spain, 409–711*, Wiley-Blackwell 2006, p. 117.