ALSO BY MARÍA ROSA MENOCAL

The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History:
A Forgotten Heritage

Writing in Dante's Cult of Truth
from Borges to Boccaccio

Shards of Love:
Exile and the Origins of the Lyric

The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature:
Al-Andalus (COEDITOR)

The Ornament of the World

HOW MUSLIMS, JEWS, AND CHRISTIANS
CREATED A CULTURE OF TOLERANCE
IN MEDIEVAL SPAIN

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A Brief History of a First-Rate Place

THE MOMENTOUS EVENTS OF EIGHTH-CENTURY EUROPE WERE first set in train by the death of Muhammad, the Prophet who bore the Revelation of submission to God that is Islam. The story of Muhammad's transformation, from ordinary citizen of Mecca to charismatic military leader and radical founder of a religious and civil order, played itself out in a corner of our ancestral world about which we know precious little. The Arabs of the steppes and deserts of the Arabian peninsula were more or less settled in the oases that provided what scant water there was to be had. Some few were traders, serving as connections between one settlement and another. The most powerful were the nomads, the Bedouin. The desert culture of these peoples—who also had historic connections with the adjacent cultures of the Fertile Crescent—was itself strongly marked by two features that gave distinctive shape to the religion

that Muhammad's revelations brought into existence. On the one hand, the pagan and idol-worshiping religions of the desert were the target for this new and utterly uncompromising monotheism, which begins with the starkest possible declaration on the matter: "There is no god but God."* On the other hand, not only conserved but fully appropriated from the culture whose ritual center was Mecca was the loving cultivation—some would say adoration—of language, and of poetry as the best that men did with the gift of language. Muhammad's revelation, preserved in the Quran, embraced the poetry-besotted universe of his ancestors and contemporaries, and thus ensured the survival of the pre-Islamic poetic universe, with its many blatant contradictions of what would become normative Islamic belief.

The vexed question at the heart of the story we are following, the one that will take us to Europe's remarkable transformations in the medieval period, lies not in Muhammad's life but in his death. (The Islamic calendar hinges neither on Muhammad's birth nor on his death, but on the turning point in the story, in 622, when Muhammad and his followers moved from Mecca to Medina, a journey known as the *hijra*, or hegira.) Muhammad had died in Mecca in 632 without an obvious successor. He had left behind, first and foremost, a powerful revelation, a combination of tradition and revolution. Islam was nothing less than the return to the pristine monotheism of Abraham—abandoned or misunderstood by Jews and Christians alike, the revelations asserted, and unknown altogether to the benighted pagans of the desert. All this came forth not in Muhammad's own words but through his transmission of the direct language of God, his "Recitation"—the word *Quran* means "recitation"—of what God was revealing and dictating to him.

Alongside that relatively straightforward revelation, however, and inextricably intertwined with the essentially spiritual reorientation he urged, Muhammad had also created a community with distinctive social-civil-moral values, one that was already a military and political empire in the making. But there were no clear guidelines for how that empire should be organized or ruled, and Muhammad's death left an inevitable vacuum. No question in Islam is more fundamental and shaping than this one, a source of political instability and violent dispute from the beginning, as it remains to this day. Who could, after all, succeed a prophet who was also a dominant statesman? In that highly contested succession lie the origins of many of the major shapes and terms of Islam that are mostly unknown or puzzling to non-Muslims: Shiites and Sunnis, caliphs and emirs, Umayyads and Abbasids, all of these crucial internal divisions. One of the earliest chapters of this struggle within Islam for legitimate authority was the one that transpired in 750, the bloody massacre of the Umayyad royal family that led to the foundation of a rival Islamic polity in southern Europe, and the origins of that story lie in the moment directly following the Prophet's death, over a century before.

The simplified version of the succession to the Prophet is that the initial four caliphs—from the Arabic *khalifa*, or "successor"—were chosen from among Muhammad's contemporaries, from the community of his companions and close relatives. The last of this foursome (called the Rightly Guided by many Muslims) was Ali, a cousin of Muhammad who was married to the Prophet's daughter Fatima. But Ali ruled for a mere five years before his caliphate came to a bloody end with his assassination in 661. This was barely thirty years after the Prophet's death, yet this fateful event began a new act in the drama of the ever-expanding Islamic empire. The Umayyads,

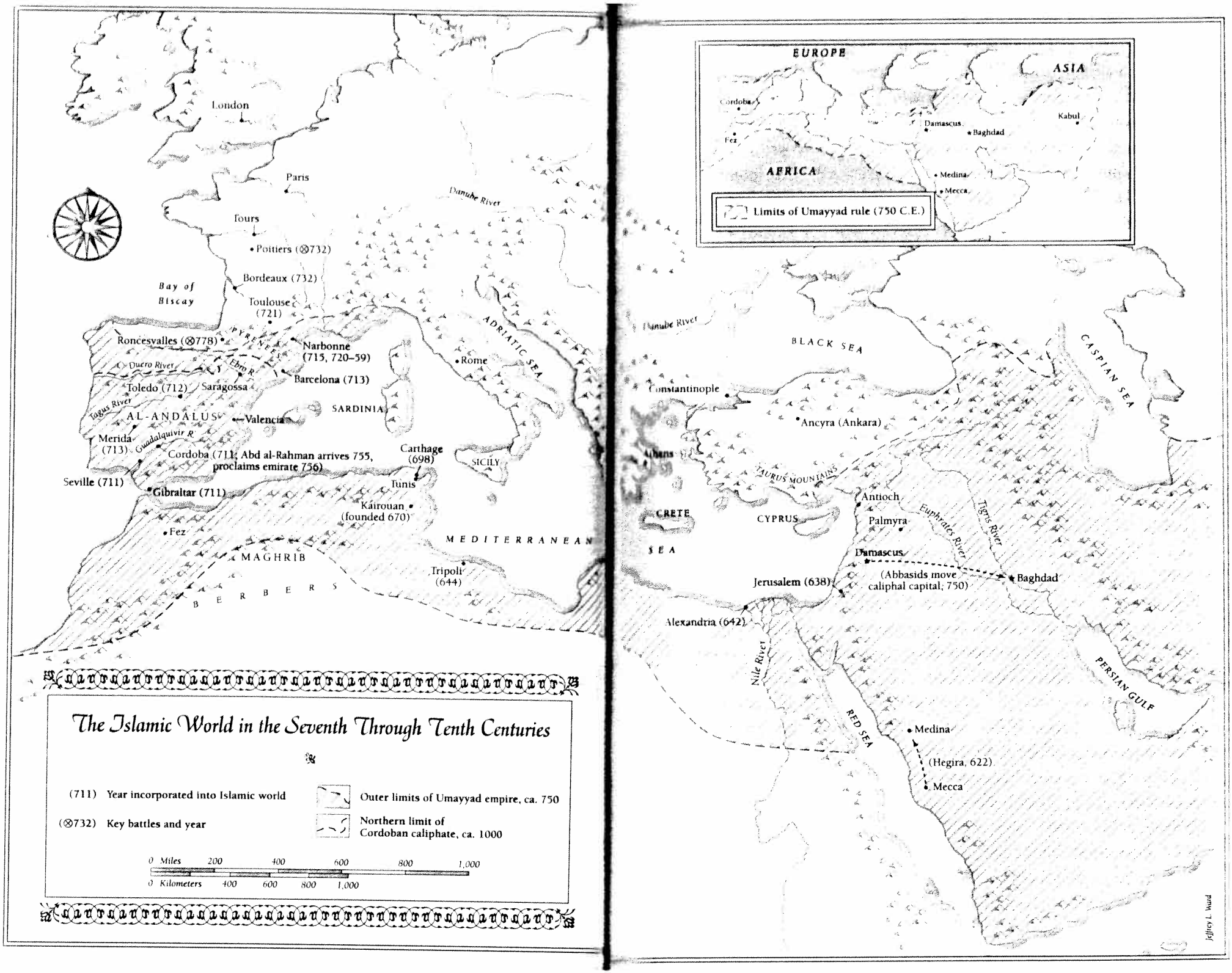
*One of the inappropriate and alienating ways we speak about Islam in English is to use the Arabic word *Allah*, God, as if it were a proper name, creating the false impression—ironic and horrifying for a Muslim—that this is some different god. I will invariably use the word "God" for the God of the three monotheistic religions, whose different languages use, of course, different words for the same Being.

the new dynasty that came to power, were both Arabs and Muslims, and they symbolized the original fusion of a culture—and especially a language—with a revelation, a fusion that was the very soul of a new religion and civilization. But they moved their capital from the provincial and dangerously factional Medina to the more open and friendly spaces of Damascus, and in coming out of the isolation of the Arabian desert and making Syria over into the new homeland, and in the conversions of people far removed from Mecca and Medina, the Umayyads' Islam forged a new culture that added generously to the Arab foundation. Transplanting the heart of the empire out of the Arabian peninsula and into Syria, which had its own mixed cultural legacy, was the first significant step in creating the ill-understood, crucial distinction between things Arab and things Islamic, a distinction that is particularly relevant to our story.

The Umayyads presided over this expansive period from their central and accessible caliphal seat in Damascus, a cosmopolitan and venerable city, in its previous lives Aramaean, Greek, Roman, and, most recently, Christian. There and elsewhere they began building new defining monuments in places where the remains of other cultures were still visible. The Great Mosque of Damascus was not built out of blank clay but with the bits and pieces of a Roman temple and a Christian church. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem was built on the ruins of the Temple Mount and around the natural rock where Abraham's sacrifice of his son was mercifully rejected by Abraham's God. The building was thus erected by the Umayyads as a monumental version of the Quranic understanding that this is the One God, and that the Muslims are also, and now preeminently, among the Children of Abraham.

The borders of the Islamic empire continued to spread, and by 711, armies of recently converted Berbers, led by Umayyads from Syria, moved into Europe. Within and around the Mediterranean basin, from the Taurus Mountains in the northeast (the border with Anatolia) to the Pyrenees in the northwest (the border with Gaul), the new empire filled almost exactly the bed left by the old Roman empire: a map of the Mediterranean territories of the nascent Islamic empire—the Umayyad caliphate—in the seventh and eighth centuries corresponds remarkably to the Mediterranean center of a map of the Roman world in the second century. In our casual acceptance of the notion that there is some critical or intrinsic division between Africa and Europe, we are likely to neglect just how central this southern shore of the Roman world was. But if we reexamine the stretch of North African coastline as it was plotted out geopolitically in the second- or third-century Roman world, and then in the eighth, we can see the relative inconsequence of small stretches of water such as the Strait of Gibraltar and the baylike line of blue between Carthage and Sicily, as well as the obvious underlying unities and orders.

The Islamic transformation began to remake the entire ancient Near East, including Persia and reaching as far, already at the time of the Umayyads, as northwestern India. The virtue of this Arab-Islamic civilization (in this as in other things not so unlike the Roman) lay precisely in its being able to assimilate and even revive the rich gifts of earlier and indigenous cultures, some crumbling, others crumbled, even as it was itself being crafted. The range of cultural yearning and osmosis of the Islamic empire in this expansive moment was as great as its territorial ambitions: from the Roman spolia that would appear as the distinctive capitals on the columns of countless mosques to the Persian stories that would be known as *The Thousand and One* (or *Arabian*) *Nights*, from the corpus of translated Greek philosophical texts to the spices and silks of the farthest East. Out of their acquisitive confrontation with a universe of languages, cultures, and people, the Umayyads, who had come pristine out of the Arabian desert, defined their version of Islam as one that loved its dialogues with other traditions. This was a


EUROPE
ASIA
AFRICA
Cordoba
Fez
Damascus
Baghdad
Kabul
Medina
Mecca
Limits of Umayyad rule (750 C.E.)
London
Paris
Tours
Poitiers (⊗732)
Bordeaux (732)
Toulouse (721)
Bay of Biscay
Danube River
PYRENEES
Roncesvalles (⊗778)
Narbonne (715, 720–59)
Duero River
Ebro R.
Barcelona (713)
Toledo (712)
Saragossa
Tagus River
AL-ANDALUS
Valencia
SARDINIA
Merida (713)
Guadalquivir R.
Cordoba (711; Abd al-Rahman arrives 755, proclaims emirate 756)
Carthage (698)
SICILY
Seville (711)
Gibraltar (711)
Tunis
Kairouan (founded 670)
Fez
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
MAGHRIB
Tripoli (644)
BERBERS
ADRIATIC SEA
Rome
Danube River
BLACK SEA
CASPIAN SEA
Constantinople
Ancyra (Ankara)
Ghans
TAURUS MOUNTAINS
Antioch
CRETE
CYPRUS
Palmyra
Euphrates River
Tigris River
Damascus
(Abbasids move caliphal capital; 750)
Baghdad
Jerusalem (638)
Alexandria (642)
Nile River
RED SEA
PERSIAN GULF
Medina
(Hegira, 622)
Mecca
The Islamic World in the Seventh Through Tenth Centuries
(711) Year incorporated into Islamic world
(⊗732) Key battles and year
Outer limits of Umayyad empire, ca. 750
Northern limit of Cordoban caliphate, ca. 1000
0 Miles 200 400 600 800 1,000
0 Kilometers 400 600 800 1,000
Jeffrey L. Ward

remarkable achievement, so remarkable in fact that some later Muslim historians accused the Umayyads of being lesser Muslims for it.

The Umayyads themselves did not survive to see the pattern of growth and acculturation they had established come to fruition, at least not in their adopted Syrian home. This change of leadership in the Islamic world is the beginning of our narrative of medieval European culture. The Abbasids, who overthrew the Umayyads in Damascus in 750, had different claims to caliphal legitimacy; indeed, they claimed something resembling direct descent from the Prophet, by way of the Prophet's uncle Abbas, whose name became their own. But, as with other ruling groups before and since, establishing their own authority seemed to require eliminating rival, and especially previous, claimants, which is why they massacred the Umayyads at their family estate in Rusafa and abandoned Damascus. The capital of the Abbasid Islamic empire was moved away from the Mediterranean basin to Iraq, which had been the center of the Abbasids' support and armies. Baghdad, the circular "City of Peace," resembling nothing so much as a fortress, was made the new capital, and the familiar setting of many of *The Arabian Nights*. The sole survivor of the massacre at Rusafa, Abd al-Rahman, went west and became the first of the Umayyads in a place we too often relegate to being a "corner" of Europe but which became Europe's veritable center for centuries thereafter.

The Iberian Peninsula, much like the rest of post-Roman Europe in the eighth century, was a culturally and materially dreary place. Rome had governed there for nearly six hundred years, beginning about 200 B.C.E., when it followed in a long line of Mediterranean settlers and cultures—Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Greeks. During the years of both republic and empire, Hispania flourished from the material and cultural benefits of the

Romans and sent native sons to the centers of power and into the annals of Latin letters. But that became a distant memory—or, rather, something like no memory at all—forgotten during the long period that in European history is most paradigmatically the age of "barbarians." The cataclysmic upheavals, the pan-European migrations of the Germanic tribes, in the third and fourth centuries C.E., led to the decline and, if not the fall of the Roman empire, at least the loss of both the civil order and the long-term continuity from classical Greece that constituted the heart of our cultural heritage. Rome had replaced Greece in part by self-consciously absorbing Greek culture and history and by building its own civilization on the foundations of its ennobling predecessor, with whom it had a naturally rivalrous relationship.

The collapse of Rome's northern and eastern frontiers and the assumption of power by various Germanic tribes ruptured Europe's connection with its own cultural past, an event that would shape the West's consciousness of itself. Among the tribes that dismantled and then resettled what had once been the Roman empire, the Visigoths played a notorious role. This tribe, infamous for the sack of Rome in 410, eventually ended as the overlords of the former province of Hispania, although not without centuries of destructive battling over the territory with the Vandals and then among themselves. As elsewhere among the ruins of the Roman empire, and among the mobile Germanic tribes, Christianity was rather imperfectly adopted, from the perspective of the Catholic ("Universal") Church. Not until 589 did the Visigoths join the Roman Church, disavowing their own deviant version of Christianity. Although there were important Church seats in Visigothic Hispania, Toledo notable among them, paganism was far from unknown throughout the countryside, where the once Romanized rural population had little to do with either Visigoths or Christianity, and where the Jewish communities that had arrived with the Romans lived in nearly enslaved squalor.

The bright lights during the long twilight that had begun in the fifth century were few and far between, and a lonely figure like Isidore of Seville stood out conspicuously: a notable churchman, he understood the extent to which some sort of Christian order had to fill the terrible vacuum left by the collapse of Roman civil institutions. His most revealing and influential political work, *In Praise of Spain*, was an attempt to bring the ruling Visigoths into the fold of the cultural continuum that they had ruptured by conceiving their history as a continuation of the Romans' own. Much more famous is Isidore's still quite readable masterpiece, the *Etymologies*, an unrivaled intellectual effort during those centuries to preserve and transmit the tattered remains of the knowledge of the ancient world to the still uncertain future. Despite Isidore's brave attempts to make the Visigoths out to be a regime worthy of the Roman succession, they were not remotely up to it. As a result there was very little center to hold when, shortly after the turn of the eighth century, the next wave of conqueror-immigrants came knocking forcefully on the door.

Like the Romans long before and the Germanic tribes more recently, the Muslims were seduced by the fat and nearly round peninsula that hangs at the western end of the Mediterranean. Hispania was ripe for the picking, since the Visigothic kingdom that the newly minted Muslims from North Africa coveted, and then rather easily overran and settled, was all the things one might expect from hundreds of years of civil discontinuity: politically unstable, religiously and ethnically fragmented, culturally debilitated. Even the Christian mythology surrounding the events of 711, stories elaborated many centuries later to tell how the old Christian Spain had been lost to the Muslims, hinged on the utter political disarray, moral corruption, and decadence of the last of the Visigothic kings. By the time Abd al-Rahman arrived, less than fifty years after the first Muslim armies had ventured across the Strait of Gibraltar, nearly all the formerly

Visigothic territories as far north as Narbonne, in Aquitaine, had been taken over by Muslims. When the Umayyad prince surveyed this place where he was bound to live out his life in political exile, he must have known that there would be no returning to his native land. This land where he had ended up would be only what he managed to make of it. Yet he could feel sanguine that it had nowhere to go but up, and that he might well make its barren and ruined landscape thrive and bear new fruit.

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Over the course of the subsequent three hundred years until roughly the turn of the first millennium as it was calculated in the Christian calendar, the sort of political order and cultural flourishing that had once graced Roman Hispania returned to the peninsula. The Muslims never took and held the entire peninsula, however, and Christian outposts clung to the mountainous regions of the northwest Atlantic coast and the Pyrenees. Yet although the scattered Christian settlements there led to occasional skirmishing along its frontiers, the political history of the Cordoban state is amazingly even. Its very stability might well make it boring to anyone other than an enthusiast: one emir ruling for decades after the next, one addition to the Great Mosque of Cordoba after the next, one damned thing after another, as someone once wittily defined history itself. But within the stability of the long reigns and orderly successions of Abd al-Rahman's sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons, other kinds of revolutions occurred. There was a vast economic revival: the population increased, not just in the invigorated and ever more cosmopolitan cities, but even in the once decimated countryside, where the introduction of new crops and new techniques, including irrigation, made agriculture a prosperous concern; and the pan-Mediterranean trade and travel routes that had helped maintain Roman prosperity, and which were vital for cultural contacts and continuities, were reconfigured and expanded.

Al-Andalus fattened and bloomed with a distinctive identity. The original armies, and the settlers they became or brought with them, had been relatively few compared with the peninsula's population at the time. The newcomers, with their new languages, new customs, and new religion, constituted perhaps one percent of the overall population in the first generation of conquest and settlement. Like Abd al-Rahman, they were already an ethnic mix, part Arab and mostly Berber. Within a few generations, a vigorous rate of conversion to Islam from among the great variety of older ethnic groups, and from the Christian and pagan populations, made the Andalusian Muslim community not only vastly larger, but one of thoroughly intermarried and intermixed ethnic and cultural origins. Whereas the Visigoths, distinguished primarily by their ethnicity, had remained a minority of outsiders during their several hundred years of dominance of Hispania, the Muslims were members of several different ethnic groups. As with the Christians before them, the Muslims' distinctive power and authority resided in a faith to which conversion was not only possible but desirable and encouraged, pragmatically coerced by the range of civil advantages to any Muslim, whether he had converted the day before or descended from the most prestigious Bedouin tribe, the Quraysh of the Prophet himself. And convert the population did, in droves.

The convergence of mixed ethnicity and a religion of converts meant that the ancestors of a Muslim from Cordoba in the year 900 (let alone another two hundred or four hundred years later) were as likely to be Hispano-Roman as Berber, or some measure of each, perhaps with smaller dollops of either Syrian-Arab or Visigothic, these latter two having always been the smaller but politically dominant groups. It was of course the height of prestige to be able to claim, as many would over the years, that one was descended from the original small group of desert Arabs who had first trekked out of the Arabian peninsula or from the Syrians who had led the earliest westward

expeditions. Arabness was the most aristocratic feature of ancestry one could want, and Syrian-Arabness was the venerable paternal line of Andalusian culture, both literally and figuratively. But even the emirs, and then their children, the caliphs who were direct and linear descendants of Abd al-Rahman—himself half Berber and half Syrian—were nearly all children of once-Christian mothers from the north, and the pale skin and blue eyes of these Umayyads were regularly remarked on by eastern visitors.

By the same token, all that was Arab was not necessarily Islamic. The other foundation of Andalusian culture, the Arabic language, spilled over the banks of its original religious riverbed and roamed beyond the exclusively religious needs of the Muslim community. This was, after all, the esteemed and powerful language of an empire, and was marked by its vital links to the rest of civilization. As far as the eye could see, and beyond, Arabic was the lingua franca of all save the barbarians—if not the native tongue, at least the pidgin of traders and travelers. Throughout most of the invigorated peninsula, Arabic was adopted as the ultimate in classiness and distinction by the communities of the other two faiths. The new Islamic polity not only allowed Jews and Christians to survive but, following Quranic mandate, by and large protected them, and both the Jewish and Christian communities in al-Andalus became thoroughly Arabized within relatively few years of Abd al-Rahman's arrival in Cordoba. One of the most famous documents from this period is the lament of Alvarus of Cordoba in the mid-ninth century detailing the ways in which the young men of the Christian community couldn't so much as write a simple letter in Latin but wrote (or aspired to write) odes in classical Arabic to rival those of the Muslims.

Of course, one can see this adoption of Arabic by the *dhimmi*—the Arabic word for the protected "Peoples of the Book," Jews and Christians, who share Abrahamic monotheism

and scripture—throughout the rest of the Islamic world. In principle, all Islamic polities were (and are) required by Quranic injunction not to harm the dhimmi, to tolerate the Christians and Jews living in their midst. But beyond that fundamental prescribed posture, al-Andalus was, from these beginnings, the site of memorable and distinctive interfaith relations. Here the Jewish community rose from the ashes of an abysmal existence under the Visigoths to the point that the emir who proclaimed himself caliph in the tenth century had a Jew as his foreign minister. Fruitful intermarriage among the various cultures and the quality of cultural relations with the dhimmi were vital aspects of Andalusian identity as it was cultivated over these first centuries. It was, in fact, part and parcel of the Umayyad particularity vis-à-vis the rest of the Islamic world. In 929, what had been understood or believed by many since 756 was said aloud: from every mosque in al-Andalus there was read the declaration that Abd al-Rahman III was the true Defender of the Faith, the legitimate caliph of the whole Islamic world, and the religious leader of all Muslims.

This full-fledged declaration of sovereignty on the part of the Andalusians—involving a great deal more than political independence, since it entailed the public declaration of legitimate stewardship of all Muslims, not just those of al-Andalus—revealed the fatal weaknesses of the Abbasid empire in this first half of the tenth century. No civilization anywhere had been more splendid during the previous two centuries than the Abbasids'. One of the most tenable clichés surrounding the history of Islamic civilization is that this was the very zenith of its accomplishment and influence, these few hundred years following the moment when the Abbasids deposed the Umayyads and settled into their new home in Baghdad. The effects of this adventurous and energetic culture—which, among other things, undertook the project of translating the Greek philosophical corpus into Arabic nearly in its entirety—did reach from Baghdad

to Cordoba, as well as to other places within its wide orbit. Despite their move inland, away from the old Roman sea to an ancient spot on the Tigris near where it meets the Euphrates, the Abbasids were the beneficent force of revival in the Mediterranean during these centuries, and quite directly responsible for the return of both material prosperity and intellectual vitality throughout that inland sea.

Chaos in the Abbasid capital had led directly to the declaration of independence and superiority by the Andalusians, who until then had been reasonably content to live with the half-fiction that they were a mere province, no matter how luminous, of the caliphate centered in Baghdad. In 909, the center lost its hold and the almost unthinkable happened: a breakaway group of Shiites, who saw themselves as descendants of the murdered Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, succeeded in taking control of the empire's western provinces. In Tunis—not so far from al-Andalus—these pretenders, led by an imam who claimed direct descent from Fatima, the Prophet's daughter and Ali's wife, proclaimed their breakaway Islamic state to be the legitimate caliphate. From the Andalusian perspective, it had been one thing for the quite reasonably independent Umayyads to pay lip service to the authority of the far-off Abbasids. There had been considerable profit all around from that comfortable arrangement, and free and easy travel back and forth between the rival cities of Cordoba and Baghdad had helped feed the Andalusians' insatiable appetites for every latest fashion from the eastern metropolis. But by the turn of the tenth century, Cordoba, which from the outset had a distinct sense of its own legitimacy, scarcely imagined itself a provincial capital at all.

Unlike Iraq, however, where the Abbasids lived, Tunis was practically around the corner, and the Fatimids, as they were called, thus represented a dangerous rival for the Andalusians. It was quite another thing, then, when the Fatimids proclaimed not just independence but rival authority, a rival

claim to represent what an Islamic state was and should be. The Umayyad counterclaim, that the authentic leadership and very center of the Islamic world resided in Cordoba, was thus made very loudly and very publicly that day in 929 by the young Abd al-Rahman III, a fitting heir to his ancestor and namesake. Cordoba, and not just from the obviously prejudiced view of the Cordobans, was probably justified at that moment in believing it was the center of the known universe. But that public declaration, as satisfying as it may have been, helped trigger particularly hostile and rivalrous reactions, from both the Christian north and the Islamic south. Resentful rivalries would come to haunt the golden city on the Guadalquivir. But let us not go quite yet to the undoing of the great caliphal capital of Europe, not until we have lingered a bit in the short century of its deserved celebrity.

Cordoba, by the beginning of the tenth century, was an astonishing place, and descriptions by both contemporaries and later historians suffer from the burden of cataloguing the wonders, much like the counting off of Don Juan's conquests by the dozens and hundreds: first the astounding wealth of the caliph himself and of his capital, then the nine hundred baths and tens of thousands of shops, then the hundreds or perhaps thousands of mosques, then the running water from aqueducts, and the paved and well-lit streets . . . The cultivated nun Hroswitha of Gandersheim was involved enough in the diplomatic and social circles of the court of Otto I that she wrote a glowing account of the Muslim city based on her conversations with one of the emissaries to Otto's court sent by the caliph Abd al-Rahman in 955. "The brilliant ornament of the world shone in the west, a noble city newly known for the military prowess that its Hispanic colonizers had brought, Cordoba was its name and it was wealthy and famous and known for its pleasures and re-

splendent in all things, and especially for its seven streams of wisdom [the trivium and quadrivium] and as much for its constant victories."

But Cordoba was luminous not just by virtue of a necessarily invidious comparison with those lands to the north, barely progressed, materially or culturally, beyond where they had been in the eighth century. Renowned Arab chroniclers and historiographers were also responsible for Cordoba's image throughout the rest of the Islamic world—where running water and libraries were part of the familiar landscape—and they left a powerful vision and memory of that city as "the highest of the high, the farthest of the far, the place of the standard." Not just Cordoba shone, of course, but the whole of al-Andalus over which its caliph presided. In the end, it would be al-Andalus's vast intellectual wealth, inseparable from its prosperity in the material realm, that made it the "ornament of the world."

The rich web of attitudes about culture, and the intellectual opulence that it symbolized, is perhaps only suggested by the caliphal library of (by one count) some four hundred thousand volumes, and this at a time when the largest library in Christian Europe probably held no more than four hundred manuscripts. Cordoba's caliphal library was itself one of seventy libraries in a city that apparently so adored books that a report of the time indicated that there were seventy copyists in the book market who worked exclusively on copying Qurans. In one of the dozens of pages he devotes to Cordoba, the historian Edward Gibbon describes the book worship of the Islamic polity he so admired (and found incomparably superior to what he saw as the anti-book culture of medieval Christianity) using a somewhat different measure: the catalogues alone of the Cordoba library ran to forty-four volumes, and these contained the librarians' information on some six hundred thousand volumes. Islam was indeed a clerisy: its privileged elites were the religious lawyers who studied the sacred texts and the scribes and bureaucrats who

staffed the royal chanceries. But beyond that considerable segment of the population, these libraries were the monuments of a culture that treasured the Word, built by rulers who had the resources to enshrine it. Many of the volumes they housed, it is safe to assume, were on subjects of little concern to visitors who were not Muslims or Arabophiles: works on religion and on language played a dominant role in the Islamic library. But there was a great deal more, and there were books that would have astonished any Christian visitor, with his necessarily vague knowledge of the classical world. The Andalusians, thanks to their regular intercourse with Baghdad, which had made translation of the Greeks a prized project, also housed the libraries of crucial traditions long lost to those in the rest of the Latin West, and unknown to them still, in the tenth century. Hroswitha's informant about the marvels of Cordoba (including, centrally in her description, the knowledge of the trivium and quadrivium) was, tellingly, not a Muslim but a Christian, and none other than Racemundo, the bishop of Elvira, the metropolitan see of all of Andalus. Hroswitha's description of Cordoba also speaks to the sensation no doubt created by the Latin- and Arabic-speaking Christian who came from a place where they not only knew the long-forgotten Greeks but where the bishop was an esteemed member of the caliph's diplomatic corps.

Cordoba's libraries were a significant benchmark of overall social (not just scholarly) well-being, since they represented a near-perfect crossroads of the material and the intellectual. The sort of libraries built in Cordoba—unseen and unimagined for hundreds of years amid the intellectual spolia of the Roman empire—ultimately depended on a vigorous trading economy throughout the Mediterranean. This in turn encouraged energetic technological innovation, so that at some fundamental level what allowed those libraries to exist, and on such a previously unimaginable scale, was a paper factory in Jativa, a town near the prosperous coastal city of Valencia. Paper was dramatically

cheaper and thus more plentiful than old-fashioned parchment, which was still being used in less developed places. Just as essential to the social and cultural project embodied in those libraries was a series of attitudes about learning of every sort, about the duty to transmit knowledge from one generation to another, and about the interplay between the very different modes of learning that were known to exist—modes that might contradict each other, as faith and reason did, and do now. These sat happily in those libraries, side by side, unafraid of the contradictions, first-rate.

In the eyes of the Christians who lived in the territories of Galicia and Asturias in the northwest, and in the uplands north of the Ebro River valley in the northeast, it was unambiguously the Iberian Peninsula that had most successfully recovered, well before the turn of the millennium, from the economic and cultural depressions that had followed the full collapse of Rome. The glorious city of Cordoba, and the polity of al-Andalus of which it was the capital, had filled the black hole of cultural, material, and intellectual well-being in the West. Within the first century after the year 1000, all sorts of byways would open up, and notice would start to reach the outer corners of the lands on its far northern outskirts about what life could be and what a culture could achieve. Intellectual as well as material traffic between the hungry markets of the north and the prosperous merchants of the south would begin in earnest and eventually expand everyone's horizons. But in the meantime, there sat fat, complacent, and conceited al-Andalus, sure of itself and its own superiority vis-à-vis not just the northern Christians but all other Muslims. After the Abbasid hiatus of nearly two hundred years, the Cordobans, the Andalusians, were unembarrassed to reclaim the Umayyads' rightful place on the center of the world's stage.

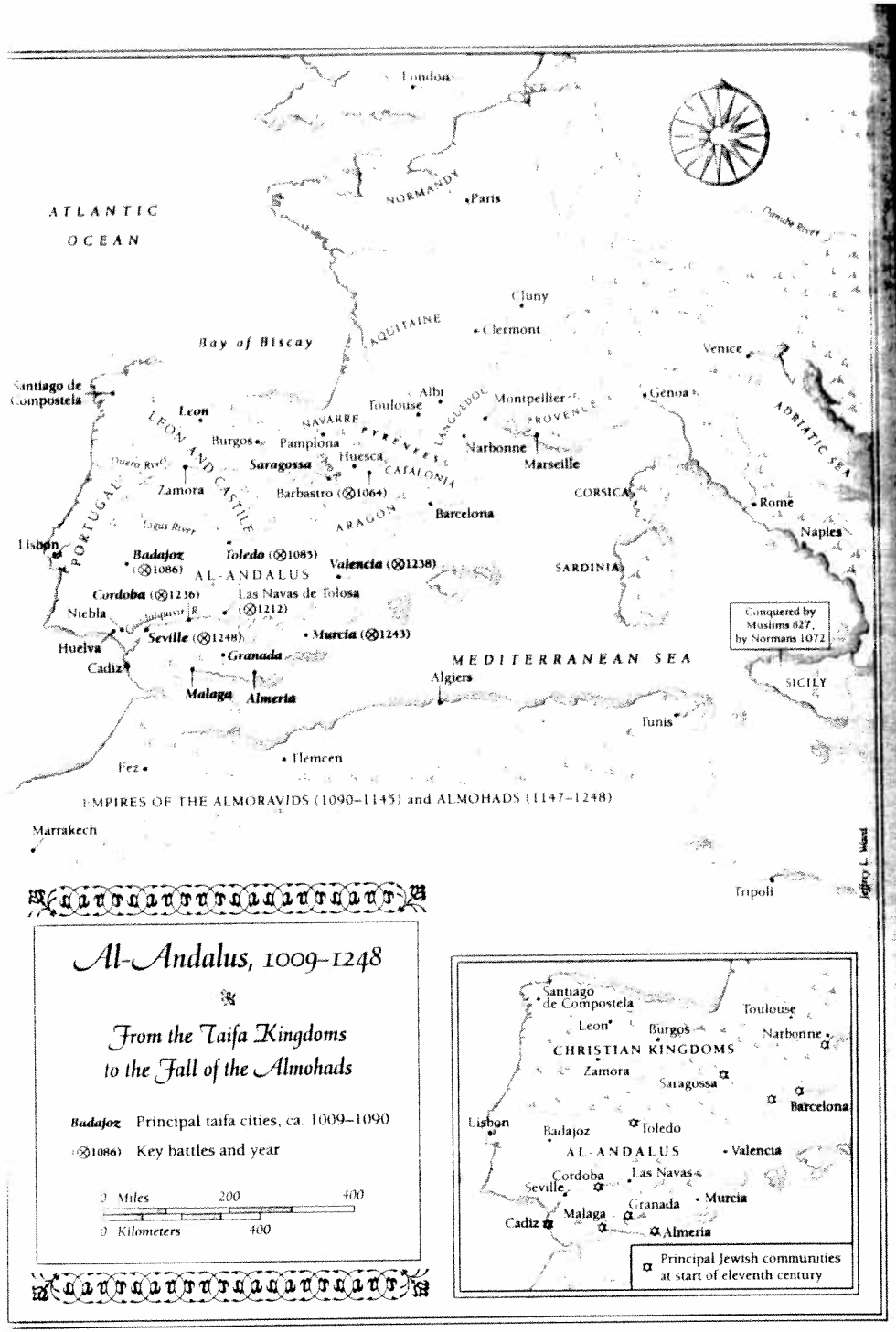
In some ways the caliphate of Cordoba was a victim of its own prosperity and its own successes, and what came with them. Despite every cliché, this story is far from that of a simple conflict between infidels and believers. Provocative and damaging raids against Christian strongholds in the north had been undertaken during the late 900s by a notorious vizier named al-Mansur, who had become more powerful than the young and feeble caliph whose protector he was supposed to be. But at the turn of the millennium these raids and tauntings of the northern kingdoms were not the cause for the collapse of central caliphal power.

Bitter civil wars among the rival Muslim factions of al-Andalus began in earnest in 1009, and for the subsequent two decades they tore apart the "ornament of the world." Appalled contemporary observers rather poignantly called those self-destructive years the *fitna*, "the time of strife." A culture that not long before had been at the peak of its powers was being brought low not so much by barbarians at the gate as by all manner of barbarians *within*—within its own borders and within the House of Islam. On the one hand, internal arrogance and the excesses that came from extraordinary wealth began to color the caliphate in the late tenth century. At the same time, the cocksureness of Abd al-Rahman III in declaring the Andalusian caliphate had incited other pretenders to authority, and at precisely the moment when other powerful Islamic polities, hostile to the idiosyncratic Umayyads on both ideological and political grounds, were on the rise in North Africa.

The violent destruction of Madinat al-Zahra, the Versailles of Cordoba, in 1009, just after the beginning of the civil wars, is as good a marker as any of the end of the political well-being of an Islamic polity in medieval Europe. That lavish palatine city on Cordoba's outskirts was one of the most fabled architectural and urbanistic achievements of the Islamic world. Although to this day the lost city is only partially excavated, what is now visible,

combined with the written accounts of what there once was, reveals breathtaking levels of architectural sophistication. Madinat al-Zahra had been built in the early tenth century by Abd al-Rahman III, and this architectural complex was part of the declaration of worthy rivalry to the Abbasids. But when this monumental Umayyad site was sacked, less than a century later, it was not by the Christians with whom the caliphate had been sparring on its frontiers. Rather, the destruction was perpetrated by other Muslims, marauding and rampaging Berbers ferociously venting all manner of resentments. These soldiers were part of the mercenary armies brought into al-Andalus by the last desperate rulers of the caliphate to help keep the peace. That devastation of 1009, not at all unlike the Goths' sack of Rome of 410 in its symbolic freight, was the sign of a civil society that had lost control of itself and whose erstwhile order had been left to foreign armies. The ruins of the palaces and gardens of Madinat al-Zahra became the touchstones in Andalusian memory for human grandeur—and its ultimate fragility.

In part, too, the destruction of Madinat al-Zahra reveals the dramatic divisions among the various communities of Muslims that were part of the struggle to carve out both political and religious legitimacy, and that had been visible a hundred years before, when the Andalusians had declared themselves the true caliphs. Particularly ferocious were the divisions between Berber Muslims from North Africa, traditionally far more conservative, even fundamentalist, and the Andalusians. Many Andalusians were, of course, descendants of Berbers who had first settled the peninsula in the eighth century, when there were already destructive ideological and political rivalries between the Arab-Syrian leadership and the Berber hoi polloi. But in the end, their Andalusian identity had been decisively shaped during those subsequent 250 years as a quasi-mythical Umayyad polity in exile; and the citizens of al-Andalus, even those descended from the original Berber settlers, were in many ways at cross-purposes



Al-Andalus, 1009–1248

From the Taifa Kingdoms to the Fall of the Almohads

Badajoz Principal taifa cities, ca. 1009–1090

(⊗1086) Key battles and year

0 Miles 200 400

0 Kilometers 400

with the Berbers across the Strait of Gibraltar. As a viable political entity, al-Andalus ended under conditions not unlike those under which it began, as one more chapter in the bloody struggle within Islam for legitimate authority, the intense and often rancorous competition for the succession to Muhammad.

The full and official dissolution of the Cordoban caliphate came in 1031, slightly more than a century after its optimistic and triumphant proclamation. And although Madinat al-Zahra would never recover, a phoenix of sorts did rise from the ashes of the caliphate in the taifa, or party, kingdoms. In Arabic *taifa* means "party" or "faction," and in this case it means a splinter party, a breakaway from the mainstream. In the aftermath of the fragmentation of the caliphate of Cordoba, individual cities and their hinterlands became independent or quasi-independent states and began years of struggle among themselves to acquire the prestige and authority that had once belonged to the now ruined Andalusian caliphal capital. In the early years there were some sixty states of differing sizes and differing political provenances. Some of these were dominated by Umayyad loyalists, others by the old tribal groups who saw themselves as the true Arab aristocracy, others still by Berbers, or even disgruntled military adventurers. As time went by, incessant warfare among these rival cities winnowed the survivors down to a powerful few.

A vital part of this cultural landscape in full bloom at this time was the Jewish community. As was the case with many other well-off Cordobans, whole sectors of the prosperous and well-educated Jewish populace left the ruined and dangerous former capital. Emigrating to newly formed taifas, many Jews resumed the influential roles they had enjoyed in Cordoba. The taifa of Granada, to take but one conspicuous example, recruited a gifted young man whose family had fled Cordoba and settled in nearby Malaga. Samuel ibn Nagrila succeeded, as his employers had hoped, in bringing his Umayyad-Cordoban refinements

to this backwater, and he quickly became vizier, or prime minister. At the same time, he became the first *nagid*, or head, of the Jewish community—and, as one of the most accomplished of the new Hebrew poets of the Golden Age, is remembered by his Jewish honorific, Samuel the Nagid.

Precisely at this point also, the northern Christian territories began to consolidate as unified and increasingly powerful kingdoms. Expanding slowly southward throughout the eleventh century, the Christian-controlled cities were in the same general melee of competition for territories and widespread leadership and cultural prowess as the Muslim cities. The Cid, an ambitious military adventurer (who would enjoy a long career in Spanish myth and legend), lived and led his various armies into all manner of battles at this time, when religious rivalry was more an ideological conceit than any kind of determining reality. Rodrigo Diaz, known by his Arabic epithet—El Cid comes directly from *al-sayyid*, meaning "the lord" in Arabic—had military successes chronicled admiringly by Muslim as well as Christian writers, just as he fought in the service of Muslim and Christian monarchs alike. Likewise, Muslim cities at times paid tribute to more powerful Christian neighbors, just as Christian kings at times found their most loyal allies among Muslim princes or emirs.

The rivalry for ascendancy among the various taifa cities of the peninsula, militarily and socially destructive as it was, is often likened to the jockeying for power, coupled with cultural exuberance, that was so distinctive among the Italian city-states during the Renaissance. Many of the most characteristic and influential Andalusian cultural forms came into their own in one or another of the many independent city-states that dotted the landscape, and many of them came as part and parcel of the rampant mixtures of people produced by the splintering of the caliphate. During the eleventh century, the fallout from the crash of a centralized and powerful state meant the constant

reshifting of political borders and considerable resettlement of many who had once been subjects of the Cordoban caliph. Muslims now found themselves living in Christian cities—these were the Mudejars, as their Christian sovereigns called them—along with Arabized Jews and yet another hybrid group, the Mozarabs. The Mozarabs were those Arabized Christians who, during the three hundred years they had lived in an Islamic polity, had become a community dramatically distinct from their coreligionists in the rest of the Latin West. There was movement in the other direction as well, of course, and Romance-speaking Christians from the north were also suddenly traveling in and out of—even settling in—areas that were perhaps just beyond their own borders geographically. These new and previously unseen places may as well have been different planets culturally. But only for a short while: the pell-mell fraternizations soon enough produced familiarity with the sounds, smells, and colors of every kind of neighbor.

The commingling of languages, religions, and styles of every sort—food, clothes, songs, buildings—took place not only within the Iberian Peninsula, although certainly most vigorously there, but with increasing intensity far beyond the Pyrenees. The much more promiscuous and transformative interaction between Andalusian culture and the rest of Europe still lay ahead, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, although its beginnings became obvious during the last half of the eleventh century and were enhanced by the mobile culture of the vigorously competitive city-states, Muslim and Christian alike. But another crucial turning point reshaped the cultural and political landscapes of Europe in the first century after the millennium: the expansion and invasions of the Normans.

The outcome of the encounter between the Norman Christians and the Muslims of Sicily—Sicily, too, had been an Islamic polity since the eighth-century expansion that had created al-Andalus—is in its own way a parable for the complex

shift of power and the cultural absorption of the times. In 1072, after thirty-four years of effort, Palermo, the capital of Islamic Sicily, fell to the invaders and became the center of the Norman kingdom of Sicily. Yet over the course of the subsequent century and a half, the Arabized Normans ended by becoming near-captives of the culture they had conquered. This case speaks volumes about the complicated and often paradoxical relationship between politics, ideology, and military history on the one hand and culture on the other. Though the Church had maintained a hostile attitude toward Islam from the beginning—the entire Eastern patrimony was swept under Muslim sovereignty in the seventh and eighth centuries—it was never in a position to call for a taking-up of arms against that ideological enemy. But in 1095 at Clermont, in France, Pope Urban II summoned Western Christendom to a Crusade to win the Holy Land back from the infidel Muslims; and from our perspective the times often seem stamped principally by this act of aggressive religious intolerance. Yet, these were also the times during which some of the vast holdings of Cordoba's spectacular libraries came to be read, translated, and in effect canonized as part of the Western tradition, as often as not by men who were part of the hierarchy of the same Church promoting the Crusades.

Within the Iberian Peninsula, the tumultuous period of the independent Muslim cities of al-Andalus came to an end with an event characteristic of the times. Alfonso VI of Castile, a politically astute and highly ambitious Christian monarch and long-time protector of the critically important Islamic taifa of Toledo, consolidated his power and took overt and official control of that ancient city in 1085. Victor over Christian and Muslim adversaries alike in his bid for leadership over broad territories, Alfonso made Toledo his new capital. He also made it the heir apparent to some of the lost glories of Cordoba and al-Andalus. Alfonso and his line of influential successors became the patrons and proselytizers of much of Arabic culture, and of the vast

range of intellectual goods that were subsequently made accessible to the Latin West. Toledo was made over as the European capital of translations and thus of intellectual, especially scientific and philosophical, excitement.

But to the south, Toledo's takeover by a powerful Christian monarch who was a real contender, not just another strongman of some minor city, provoked a historically fateful military reaction. Alfonso's defeated and dismayed rival for control over Toledo, the equally ambitious and accomplished Mutamid, based in Seville, asked for military help from the Almoravids, the fundamentalist Muslim regime that had recently taken control of Marrakech and established the polity we know as Morocco. The Almoravids were Berber tribesmen who had been building a considerable empire in North Africa. These fanatics considered the Andalusian Muslims intolerably weak, with their diplomatic relations with Christian states, not to mention their promotion of Jews in virtually every corner of their government and society. But the somewhat deluded Mutamid of Seville cared little about their politics, and imagined he could bring them in to help him out militarily and then send them packing. The Almoravids thus arrived ostensibly as allies of the weak taifas and quickly succeeded, in 1086, in defeating Alfonso VI. These would-be protectors, however, stayed on as the new tyrants of al-Andalus.

By 1090, the Almoravids had fully annexed the taifa remnants of the venerable al-Andalus into their own dour and intolerant kingdom. For the next 150 years, Andalusian Muslims would be governed by foreigners, first these same Almoravids, and later the Almohads, or "Unitarians," an even more fanatic group of North African Berber Muslims likewise strangers to al-Andalus and its ways. Thus did the Andalusians become often rambunctious colonial subjects in an always troublesome and incomprehensible province. They had irretrievably lost their political freedom, but the story of Andalusian culture was far from over: although bloodied, the Andalusians were unbowed, and

their culture remained their glory—viewed with suspicion, yet often coveted by all their neighbors, both north and south.

The twelfth century in Europe opened with a series of ironic juxtapositions and then ran with them. While Latin Europe began to reap the material and intellectual rewards of contact with Andalusian progressiveness, what had once been al-Andalus was itself an increasingly repressive place. The Crusades, a term understood to mean the religiously motivated warfare between Christians and Muslims, have come to symbolize the political history of that moment. But at the same time, destructive intrareligious disputes within both the Christian and the Muslim communities were shaping broad social and cultural developments at least as much. Perhaps the most transforming of these was the great rebellion of the new vernacular languages against Latin, which marks the beginning of the road leading, through many twists and turns, to Dante and Cervantes and Shakespeare and all the others who would use the individual vernaculars of Europe instead of the older, unchanging, and universal language of the Church and of the long-vanished Roman empire.

This period is also the beginning of the end of hundreds of years of open Islamic and Jewish participation in medieval European culture. The years of colonial status, from the Almoravids' 1090 annexation on, were unhappy ones for the Spanish Muslims. The Almoravid attempts to impose a considerably different view of Islamic society on the Andalusians provoked relentless civil unrest: in 1109, not even twenty years after these newcomers had been invited in as allies, anti-Almoravid riots broke out in Cordoba following the public book-burning of a work by al-Ghazali, a legendary theologian whose humane approach to Islam, despite its orthodoxy, was too liberal for the fanatical Almoravids. Such violent disagreements about the nature of Islam were far from unique. Equally striking was the

resistance against various Almoravid government attempts to control and even persecute the Sufis, mystics deemed far too heterodox by the Almoravids but much admired by the Andalusians.

The generally turbulent religious climate in al-Andalus drastically changed the composition of Muslim cities. A significant flight of the dhimmi, the Jews and Christians who had been a vital part of the vivid and productive cultural mix, now began. Regrettable as all this was, still worse was to follow: an even more repressive Muslim Berber regime overthrew the Almoravids in North Africa, and kept al-Andalus as its own colony. The Almohads' brand of antisecular and religiously intolerant Islam was at irreconcilable odds with many Andalusian traditions, and they ultimately failed in their attempts to "reform" their colonized Muslim brethren. Nor were they able to achieve anything like the sort of ideologically based political unity they demanded among Muslims, a failure with grave political consequences.

This severe and often violent internal discord within the tattered remains of al-Andalus coincided with the power and influence of Pope Innocent III, who ran roughshod over much of Europe during his years as pontiff, 1198 to 1216. Al-Andalus was only one of Innocent's many targets of crusade, both within and beyond Europe, and within and without Christianity. Christian civil wars had been going full force throughout the twelfth century and into the beginning of the thirteenth; the Crusade against the so-called Albigensians, a starkly puritanical heresy, also decimated the social and political structures of the once flourishing courts of Provence, the same courts, with intimate ties to those of northern Spain and al-Andalus, where the troubadours had wrought the first canonical secular literature of the modern Western tradition. Sung in defiance of the previously omnipotent Latin written tradition and often performed on a range of new instruments that challenged the traditional sounds

of religious music, their songs of impossible love flourished throughout the twelfth century as the cultural chic of the times. So it is yet another paradox that this first full flower of modernity—arriving, as it did, at the very height of the medieval period—should come to an end by the mid-thirteenth century with the destruction, during the Crusade against the Albigensians, of the Provençal courts that had supported and encouraged these revivals of secular culture.

Once again, in a parallel to the events within al-Andalus that led to the destruction of the once vibrant Islamic society, the enemies here were as often within as without. With his grandiose visions of universal dominance over political enemies (Christian heretics and Muslim infidels alike), Innocent was a pope of unrivaled political reach who provoked wide-ranging changes in Europe's cultural and ideological landscape. Innocent's iron fist was also directed at what seemed to him a motley crew indeed, the Christians of the various and sundry kingdoms south of the Pyrenees. Here was a collection of disunited and all too heterodox Christians so lackadaisical in their faith that they permitted Jews to live indistinguishable from them in their midst, eventually even ignoring the 1215 decree of the Fourth Lateran Council, over which Innocent presided, that stipulated that Jews wear distinctive clothes or other external markers of difference. These were Christians who, most of the time, would just as soon fight each other as wage crusade against their Muslim enemies next door.

But one exceptional moment made all the difference. In 1212 the disunited Spanish Christians took full advantage of the offers of northern European military help against the Almohads, and this led to the second crucial turning point in the history of al-Andalus, much as the first, in 1086, had been the outside military help sought by the then disunited Muslim city-states. A pivotal military moment but also a rarity, the battle at Las Navas de Tolosa was about ideology as a fairly abstract thing, and one of

the few real incidents of "Reconquest," fought with crosses and papal banners on one side and nothing but Muslims on the other. The resounding Christian victory was the clear beginning of the end; virtually nothing but further Muslim losses and retreats followed this disastrous Almohad defeat. Like dominoes, the grand old cities fell to the Christians one by one: Cordoba in 1236, Valencia in 1238, and finally Seville, the lovely orange-tree-filled city the Almohads had made their capital. Seville was taken in 1248 by Ferdinand III of Castile, the first of many generations of Castilian monarchs who would prefer Seville above all other cities. When Ferdinand died a few years later, his son Alfonso—who would be called "the Learned" and be the great patron of translations and thus of the transfer of the Arabo-Islamic fortune into the treasury of Christendom—built for his father a tomb to sit in the Great Mosque of Seville, which had been reconsecrated as the splendid cathedral of the new Castilian capital. Alfonso had the tomb inscribed, in the spirit of the age, in the three venerable languages of the realm—Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin—as well as in the upstart Castilian that only poets and other revolutionaries were writing in just yet.

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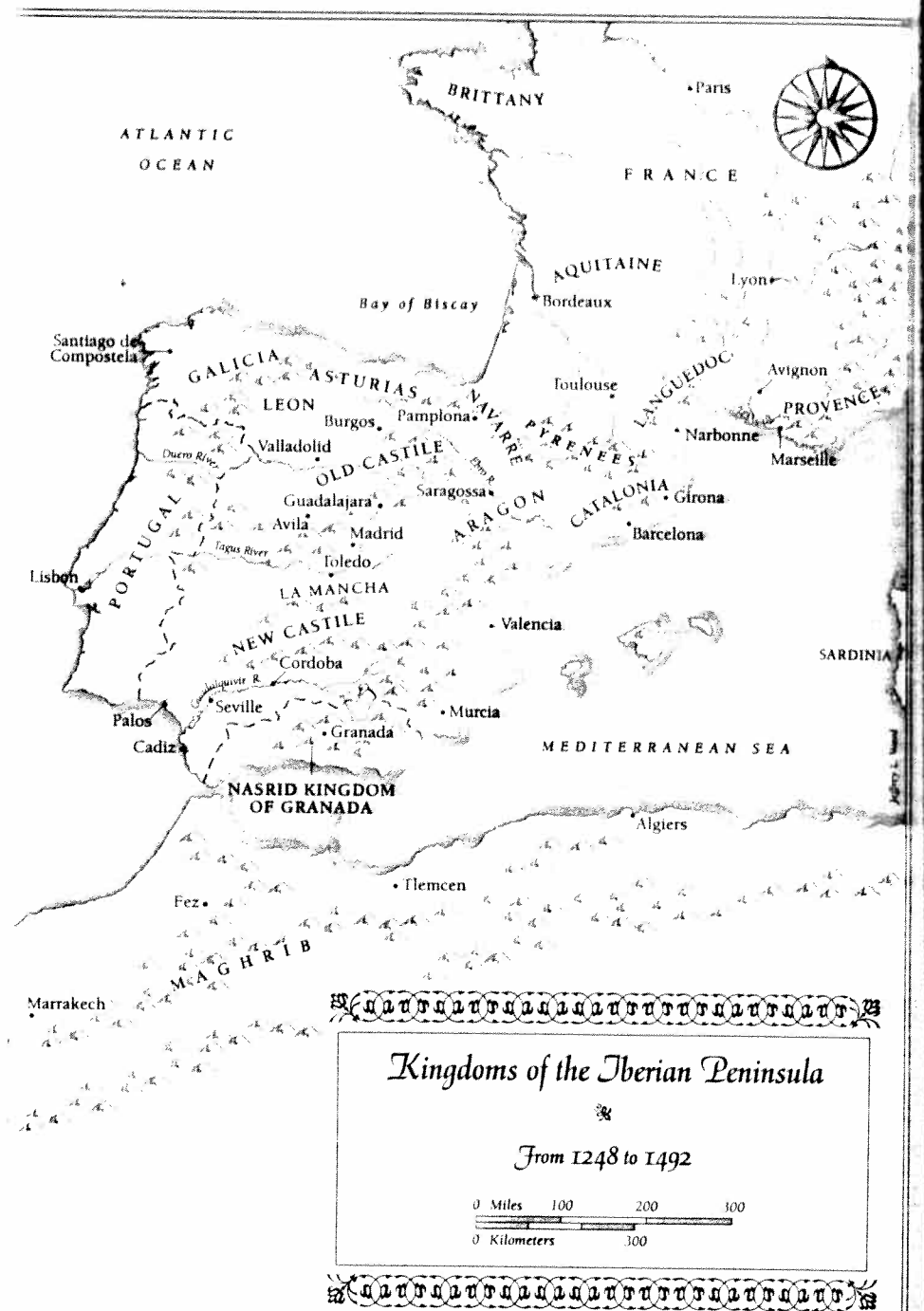
But the world within which Ferdinand's tomb made sense, that first-rate world in which all those languages sat comfortably next to each other carved on the tomb of a Christian saint, was eventually destroyed, along with the mosque that originally housed it, and inside which not only Ferdinand but his successors prayed until well into the fifteenth century. The fitful dismantling of that universe, the hows and whys of the disappearance of this first-rate European culture is really a different history from the one that concerns this book, and it is a long and often treacherous road that winds from Ferdinand III's Seville in 1248 to Ferdinand V's Granada in 1492. Ferdinand III had, in effect, created Granada as the last Islamic polity on the Iberian



Peninsula: it had been the reward given to one Ibn Ahmar, of the Nasr family, in return for much-needed military assistance in the battle for Cordoba that the Castilian had waged against the Almohads in 1236. The Nasrids, the descendants of Ibn Ahmar, survived the *Iliad*-like 250-year siege that followed, not as Andalusians proper but rather as keepers of the memory of al-Andalus and, increasingly, as the builders of its final sepulchral monument, called the Alhambra. On a spot already inlaid with layers of memories, the Alhambra ultimately became the setting for the highly charged scenes that set the stage for the true end of the Middle Ages in 1492: Muhammad XII, the last of the Nasrids, known as Boabdil, handed the keys of his family's royal house to the descendant of Ferdinand III and Alfonso the Learned, Queen Isabella of Castile, and her husband, Ferdinand of Aragon. Some recountings of that story say that the Catholic Kings were dressed in Moorish clothes for the occasion, and perhaps they were also dressed that way just a few months later, when they signed the decree expelling the Jews.