



MEMORY OF ANDALUSIA... YES, BUT WHICH ONE?

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Pierre Gallez*



Orientalism (especially so-called "scholarly," i.e., institutionalized) is a European phenomenon whose complex history essentially concerns the three great nations of France, England and Germany. The other orientalisms, little or badly known, have been qualified as "peripheral"—thus, Spanish orientalism, neatly called "domestic" or "domestic orientalism." This is because it emerges against the background of the past of Al-Andalus, which exerted a real fascination on Spanish writers and Arabists, such as [Francisco Javier Simonet](#), [Francisco Codera Zaidín](#) and the theologian [Miguel Asín Palacio](#). From the tentative resurrection of Arabic studies in the eighteenth century to the present day, an ideology and a scale of values underlie the work of many Spanish Arabists.

By what mystery was spread the historiographic myth of Al-Andalus as the oasis of a sweet, gentle life and harmonious religious understanding, in a world of brutes? The prize goes to [Danielle Rozenberg](#) for "recovering the memory" of a Spain presumed to be amnesiac. A few careful hours of reading is enough to pulverize this fashionable mythology.

First, there is Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, who published *Inexistente Al Ándalus, De como los intelectuales reinventan el Islam* (Ediciones Nobel, 2008) [*Inexistent Al Andalus, How Intellectuals reinvented Islam*]. She shows that the three communities, Jewish, Christian and Muslim, had limited relations, most of the time tense, not to mention the specific laws that were applied to them.

In another vein, the three volumes of Reinhart Dozy, *Spanish Islam: A History of the Moslems in Spain* (4 vols. 1861; 2nd ed. 1881) constitute a vast panorama of the history of the Muslims of Spain; that is to say a tiresome series of murders, betrayals, massacres, revenge, reprisals, taking and retaking of kingdoms or citadels, attempts at unification, broken and betrayed alliances.

Let's be honest, there is no doubt that Islam was imposed by force wherever Muhammad's warriors went, driven by the thirst for plunder and the prospect of the spoils of war.

The blood of the Umayyads flowed in 755 in Damascus when they were massacred by the Abbasids, whom the Persians had preferred to them. The only survivor, Abd al Rhaman, took refuge in Cordoba and ended up being proclaimed emir. From then on, these Umayyads were to be the propagators of the Arab greatness before the mass of converts coming from the submitted nations. These Umayyads were not ethnically Arabs. But their "blondness" did not prevent them from defining themselves as Arabs and claiming to be the best, purest and most faithful sons of the Prophet's nation, in the

ideological struggle they waged against the Abbasids of Baghdad and the Fatimids of Cairo. The Arab theme is central to Umayyad propaganda. This land, Al-Andalus, where the descendants of the caliphs of Damascus regained their rank, undeniably foreign to the Arabs, was an issue.

The fundamental choices of Al-Andalus were "Arab" choices: the Arab culture and the religion of the one God, a religion born on Arab-soil. They kept from those early times the arrogance proper to these Bedouins of the desert. The hatred between Berbers and Arabs continued from generation to generation. When the Berber princes governed, they oppressed the Arabs and the indigenous (Christians and converted Muslims). When the Arabs took over, it was their turn to shamelessly enrich themselves and oppress. Nietzsche described this phenomenon very well, applying it to Christianity, which he hated. In reality, it is the old animal programming, the ancestral and tribal rages that govern the Bedouin world and that have been infused into their primitive religion with such force that it has become almost invincible. Through power rivalries between Visigoth factions, some of them (including the archbishop of Seville) and the Jewish community, openly resorted to the help of the Muslims. Hence the meteoric success of their conquest of the peninsula.

Thus disappeared the Visigothic and Christian kingdom of Toledo, once magnificent, which yet remained in collective memory as a beacon of the *Reconquista de Hispaniae*; and this from 722. A discontented fringe of the population turned to the newcomers, as in Byzantium. But the invaded populations were disappointed very quickly, when the true face of the conquerors showed itself—destruction of churches and places of worship, desecration of holy bodies; for the converts, prohibition to leave Islam under penalty of death. Chained to the religion of their masters, they derived little benefit from it and bore their contempt.

The first period of resistance was essentially religious, marked by spectacular provocations leading inexorably to martyrdom (on the model of the Christian martyrs in the first centuries of the Roman Empire). [Eulogius](#) was the leader of this rebellion.

In the second period, there were more uprisings, rebellions and revolts, inexorably drowned in blood. On the side of power, these three centuries were marked by cunning, treachery, and cruelty towards the indigenous, Christians and Muslims. The political facts gathered by Arab sources, stresses [Gabriel Martinez-Gros](#), "do not show the social structures which emerged from beneath the froth of events but the consolidation of the political intrigue," fundamental font of the history of this prolonged, ruinous and bloody occupation.

The Umayyads of Cordoba prospered for nearly two centuries until Emir Abd ar-Rahman III proclaimed himself caliph in 929, rejecting the spiritual authority of the Abbasid Caliphate. This so-called "golden age" was because of him; but in reality, it was merely a pause in the long oppression of the Spanish people. The reduction of tax allowed a moment of economic and cultural development. It did not last, and a civil war finally brought down the dynasty in 1031. Andalusia was then divided into a multitude of taifas (principalities). After a period of "splendor," the khalifate of Cordoba succumbed to its divisions.

In the second half of the eleventh century, the vigorous Christian offensive of the "Reconquista" reached its peak and Islam could only hold out in Spain thanks to the help of the Berbers of Morocco:

"Coming out of their deserts of Mauritania, these great Berber Sanhaja nomads, wearing the black veil with which the Tuaregs still cover their faces, after having conquered half of North Africa, went to Spain. They set back the Christian Reconquest; but also, taking advantage of their holy mission, they annexed the small Muslim kingdoms that they had come to save from the Infidels" (Georges Marçais).

These primitive Berbers of Morocco gave religious power a weight reminiscent of today's mullahs, with their tyrannical, fussy and vicious morality. In Seville, in particular, these new masters replaced the Abbadids (the Abbad dynasty) who had called them to their aid. The last ruler, the poet king El-Motamil, embarked with the princesses of his house on a boat that, going down the Guadalquivir, took them to the Maghreb, from where they would not return. Succeeding the sultans of Arab race and artistic tastes, hardly bothered by religious scruples, the rough Berber conquerors established the reign of austere virtue. Al-Ghazali, the most famous of them all, bore the fine title of "gravedigger of reason."

At the head of the cities were appointed men of their own. Above all, the *foqaha*, Malikite jurists, who enjoyed the favors of the Berbers all the more because they issued opinions in accordance with Berber policy. The Almoravids added them to the provincial governors (*qadi*) to serve as advisors. To maintain the garrisons and prepare future expeditions, they obviously had their Sanhaja relatives from the desert, but also the "blacks" whom they had once defeated and converted to Islam and who were readily more arrogant than their masters and converters.

The deference owed to the new masters cannot be extended to the brigands they brought over. The wearing of the veil, which confused them with their leaders, was an attribute of nobility whose abuse was intolerable. Such were the trustworthy Andalusians and the "colored Berbers." This division of labor

expressed the distinction maintained in this Muslim society between the two fortuitously juxtaposed elements of the population: on the one hand, the Berber Almoravids (replacing the Arab and "Syrian" caste, which was very much in the minority) and the "*muladi*" or converted Christians, and on the other hand, the indigenous mass (the Andalusians), a mass divided between Christians, called "Mozarabs," and Jews. At the bottom of this pyramid, the slaves.

Things did not go softly for the African conquerors and the people of Andalusia. The dynasties defended this Islamized Andalusia, but for their own benefit. They demanded of the people the literate, architects and artists not out of a taste for culture, but to increase the glitter of their reign. And yet hardly by the end of two generations, the sons of the big Saharan barbarians were seduced by Andalusian softness. The conquered land initiated them into the joy of living and to the charm of the common culture; the poets of Seville gave them the taste of the beautiful language; the art of Cordoba lived again in the mosques that they built in Fez, in Marrakech and in Tlemcen. Made of Berber robustness and Spanish elegance, the Hispano-Moorish civilization was established and flourished on both sides of their empire. It owed nothing to Islam, having borrowed everything from the civilization that it worked to destroy, but which tirelessly revived. It was made of the Arab taste for poetry and music, but above all for the ardent desire of the human soul to actualize the resources and treasures of beauty that it carries within, by casting them into the cultural molds at its disposal. It is neither Christian, nor Moslem, nor Jewish—it is a deep aspiration which finds its particularized expression in the psalms as well as in the lyric and love poetry, in the musicality of the language (the prosody), where the "Arab" poets excelled, an inheritance from the "times of ignorance." It was this property of the soul and of human nature that austere Islam did not cease to repress because it felt an instinctive hatred of freedom and of the creative power inherent in any culture, (carried by some of its sons and daughters).

Are the Andalusians of today Arabs as the new ideology would like to make believe? The "balance of blood and race" ([Gabriel Martinez-Gros](#)) of the Andalusian compound is largely favorable to Spain and the West. The Islamization was also an Arabization, after the Romanization and the influence of the Visigoths, Romanized barbarians. In the Maghreb, the fact of bearing a name of Arab origin is most often only a sign of allegiance to power, and not proof of any descent from Muslim conquerors. But there is no "ethnic" particularism in Andalusia from the point of view of its population. The progressive reconquest by Spaniards first from the north and then from the center resulted in the same destructive behaviors towards the conquered populations: displacement, exile of those who refused to convert or even destruction.

The Muslim "*umma*" claimed to erase tribal distinctions. In reality, in the first centuries, it was confused with the "*asabiyyah*" of the Arabs instituted by the Prophet. A powerful *asabiyyah*, i.e., clan cohesion, reinforced by belonging to Islam, the religion of the masters, facilitated or even allowed the accession of a large family to power. Until another family took it over. To maintain power, one needs a "government." Muslim power was corrupt from the outset, based on prebends, and continued only through intrigue, plots, betrayed alliances and violence.

And yet, the delirious ideology of Blas Infante (1885-1936) emerged, who was even awarded the title of "Father of the Andalusian Homeland" by the Parliament of Andalusia on April 3, 1983. [For him](#), the Arab presence in Andalusia was not a lasting invasion but eight centuries of freedom, cultural influence, well-being and scientific progress. The Andalusian people were the product of a process of assimilation, resulting from the cohabitation of populations of different origins and religions. He went so far as to advocate the creation of a federal state which would delegate to Andalusia international relations with the peoples of Africa and the East.

In these semi-fantasy modern perspectives, special mention should be made of the novelist Juan Goytisolo, a sort of Spanish Roger Garaudy, but more subtle and intellectually equally ambiguous (he was buried in Marrakech and spent most of his life outside Spain). His book, *Crónicas sarracinas* (1982) [*Saracen Chronicles*], gives an idea of the weight of the Islamic past in the ideological struggles over the formation of national identity. In this work, Goytisolo had the elegant objective of "sodomizing myth" and defending his "Saracenicity." The review of P.R. Baduel *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* gives a small idea of this edifying work.

Three chapters each are devoted to Ali Bey, to Gustave Flaubert and to Sir Richard Burton, "pilgrim and sexologist." While Flaubert shamelessly and at the expense of the government went to pursue his fantasies of an oriental lupanar, Ali Bey, (pseudonym of Domingo Badia), administrator of the Royal Tobacco Monopoly in Cordoba and self-taught Arabist, was on a secret Spanish mission in Morocco, from where he then left for the East, where he was the first European to go (disguised) inside Mecca which he described and drew. Back in Europe and in France, he lamented, "the atrophy of the heart produced by the narrowness of a society of individual property, for he who returned from the great desert spaces." Sir Richard Burton ventured to India and then went to Mecca, an act of unprecedented courage. Goytisolo compares his interest in Muslim society with that of Lawrence of Arabia: "Both feel the same fascination for Islam and the harsh and austere world of the Bedouins, placed entirely under the sign of masculinity. Both aspired to the wild freedom of the desert, to this hospitable and fraternal

world from which woman is excluded." Lawrence's homosexuality, Goytisolo says, was linked to this choice of a society of males. This is a faulty parallel that reflects either great intellectual dishonesty or great ignorance about the life of Lawrence of Arabia, who, as we know, was illegitimately born and raped by a Turk when he fell into their hands, and who apparently never recovered from either injury.

Seeing the world through the lens of one's homosexuality (even belatedly assumed) is not the most reliable light. Let's be serious: Goytisolo's "Saracenicity" is nothing more than a figure of speech. In *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario* (1988) [*The Virtues of the Solitary Bird*], he builds his fiction on the Sufi origins of the mystical poetry of Saint John of the Cross.

At this point where the imagination erases fifteen centuries of history, the only answer is an appalled silence.

The Spanish Civil War halted the process of autonomy in Andalusia, which was resumed when the autonomies were established with the 1978 Constitution: Andalusian socialism then took over the nationalist theories of this Andalusia presented as the crucible of a civilization where Judaism, Islam and Christians coexisted in harmony, under the rule of the Muslim emirs and khalifahs, a civilization that could be the prelude and model of a tolerant multicultural society.

The same one that the French Islamo-leftism dream about.

The official flag of Andalusia includes two green bands, in clear reference to the color and banner of Islam.

Featured: "Abd al-Rahman III Receiving an Ambassador," by Dionisio Baixeras Verdaguer; painted in 1885.

