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Chapter 1

THE MARKET AT THE EDGE OF THE WEST

For most of the medieval period, the Iberian peninsula experienced the paradox of an existence between two worlds. Situated at the western edge of the Muslim Mediterranean and the southern edge of Christian Europe, it was part of both – yet not fully part of either. Distance continually accentuated the peninsula's liminality, while at the same time the region remained an accepted element within both Muslim and Christian views of the world. From the eighth to the fifteenth centuries, the peninsula belonged to two spheres, Christian in the north and Muslim in the south, with a border which shifted southward over the centuries. As a frontier, Spain (by which I intend the entire peninsula) provided a gateway between Christian and Muslim worlds, giving passage to diplomats, scholars, refugees, soldiers, and merchants.

This book will concentrate on the passage of merchants and their goods to and from Muslim Spain (*al-Andalus* in Arabic) from the tenth through the twelfth century. International trade and traders helped to preserve ties between al-Andalus and other regions of the Mediterranean world, both Muslim and Christian. During these three centuries, the peninsula formed a distinct political, cultural, and economic entity incorporated within the larger Muslim world (*dār al-Islām*). Although geographically distant from Cairo and Baghdad, Mecca and Jerusalem, Andalusi cities remained in close contact with the Muslim east, and al-Andalus was very much part of the Islamic Mediterranean mental, religious, and commercial sphere. Even in times of political discord between Muslim regimes in east and west, communications remained open as travelers, letters, and commodities passed back and forth with ease and regularity. Merchant ships and their cargoes traveled across the Mediterranean between east and west with sufficient frequency to render a commercial voyage from

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Egypt to al-Andalus something of "a humdrum experience".[1]

In most respects, Andalusi international trade during these three centuries matched wider patterns in the medieval Mediterranean economy. The structure of Andalusi commerce was similar to contemporary trade elsewhere, and there was nothing particularly unusual in Iberian commercial techniques, merchant relations, shipping, governmental attitude toward trade, or market forces. As Braudel has observed, over the long term there were "identical or near-identical worlds . . . on the borders of such countries as far apart and in general terms as different as Greece, Spain, Italy, North Africa . . . [worlds which could] live at the same rhythm . . . [with] men and goods . . . able to move from one to another without any need for acclimatization".[2]

For all these similarities, however, al-Andalus differed from other Muslim regions. The Iberian peninsula was on the border between Muslim and Christian spheres, and it was the only region of the Mediterranean world to remain a frontier for eight centuries. Al-Andalus played a unique role in western Mediterranean commerce, serving as an economic transit zone and an emporium through which commercial connections stretched across the border between the Muslim world and the Latin west. From an Islamic Mediterranean viewpoint, al-Andalus was the market at the edge of the west: a consumer of eastern imports, an exporter of Andalusi goods, and a way-station for commodities coming southward from Europe into the *dār al-Islām*. From a Christian European perspective, al-Andalus was a point of contact with the Islamic trading domain and one of the channels through which desirable luxuries – eastern spices, precious metals, textiles, paper, and other items – might be obtained. Before the expansion of European commercial horizons and mercantile activity in the central middle ages, nearby Andalusi markets could supply many of the good things in Latin Christian life.

This unique commercial function disintegrated in the first half of the thirteenth century, when the progress of Spanish Christian victories, together with parallel trends toward Christian military and commercial expansion elsewhere in the Mediterranean

[1] S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society. The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza.* [Berkeley, 1967–88] I, p. 42.

[2] F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II.* [New York, 1966] I, p. 231.

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world, permanently realigned power in the peninsula. Economic changes went hand in hand with territorial conquest, as the peninsula reoriented its trade northward to Christian Europe and away from the Muslim world.

A brief survey of Andalusi history is necessary in order to demonstrate the repercussions of political and economic events on the structure of Andalusi international trade. Al-Andalus became part of the Islamic world in 711, when a Muslim army crossed the Straits of Gibraltar, conquered the Visigoths, and established most of the peninsula as a western province under the rule of the Umayyad caliph in Damascus. When the Umayyads were ousted by the Abbasids in the middle of the next century, the center of eastern Muslim political, cultural, and economic power shifted to Iraq and al-Andalus became marginalized. Perched at the edge of the Islamic west, al-Andalus took on an autonomous existence under the rule of its first amir, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I (756–88), one of the few surviving members of the Umayyad family.

Despite the new independence of his realm, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān did not claim the title of caliph (though the ʿAbbasids were not acknowledged in Andalusi Friday prayers) and the peninsula remained culturally aligned with the larger *dār al-Islām*. For two centuries, intellectual and religious developments in al-Andalus closely followed trends set in the east. Baghdadi poets and scholars were read and admired in the peninsula, though eastern readers paid little attention to western writings. Likewise, the inhabitants of ninth-century Cordoba, the Umayyad capital, were renowned for their slavish adherence to the fashions and manners of Baghdad, while Andalusi merchants, scholars, and pilgrims journeyed eastward seeking profit, learning, and religious fulfillment.

During the eighth and ninth centuries, al-Andalus also communicated with Christian territories, both within the peninsula and beyond. Andalusi borders (*thughūr*) with Christian Spain remained fairly stable in this period, but Muslim armies held the upper hand. Although the Christian idea of reconquest (or *reconquista*, a crusade to win back territories lost to the Muslims in 711) may have taken root as early as the eighth century, it would not come to fruition for two centuries. Outside the peninsula, Umayyad interests extended as far as Byzantium, as shown by diplomatic contact between Cordoba and Constantinople

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in the ninth century, but there is more evidence for relations between Cordoba and Aachen at this period. After Carolingian expansion into the Spanish March and their rout by Basques at Roncevalles (commemorated indelibly, if inaccurately, in the *Song of Roland*), embassies were exchanged between the Umayyad and Carolingian courts. Later diplomacy is also recorded between Umayyad and Ottonian rulers.[3]

Commerce came along with other contacts, and Andalusi markets began to serve as channels through which Muslim commodities, from the peninsula and further east, found their way to consumers in northern Spain and elsewhere in the Latin west. In commercial terms, al-Andalus could take a more dominant role in its relations with Christian regions than with the *dār al-Islām*. A skilled Andalusi workforce, with well-developed industries and sophisticated agriculture, had much to offer to the rural and less technologically developed northern kingdoms.

Political developments in the tenth century brought an end to the somewhat subservient status of al-Andalus in relation to the eastern Islamic world. When the Umayyad ruler ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III declared himself caliph in 929, Muslim Spain became a major player on the stage of Mediterranean politics and commerce. The declaration of an Andalusi caliphate was sparked by the contemporary decline (though not disappearance) of Abbasid power in Iraq and the rise of the Fatimids, a Shiʿite dynasty that had taken the unprecedented step of establishing the first rival caliphate in Tunisia in 909 (and in Egypt after 969). In assuming the title of caliph, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān positioned al-Andalus as an influential entity within the Muslim Mediterranean, and he backed his claim with military and diplomatic force. During the 920s and 930s, Umayyad armies captured several ports along the North African coast, which served as buffers against the Fatimids, provided termini for Andalusi trade, and gave access to the gold-producing regions of West Africa. When Andalusi mints began to produce gold dinars for the first time in 929, these coins served to proclaim Umayyad economic and political power both at home and abroad.

With the declaration of an Umayyad caliphate in al-Andalus, the appearance of a Fatimid caliphate in Tunisia and Egypt, and

[3] E. Lévi-Provençal, "Un échange d'ambassades entre Cordoue et Byzance au IXe siècle," *Byzantion* 12(1937), pp. 1–24; A.A. el-Hajji, *Andalusian Diplomatic Relations with Western Europe during the Umayyad Period*. [Beirut, 1970].

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the decline of the ʿAbbasids in Iraq, the Mediterranean world took on a renewed vigor in the tenth century. Economic opportunities and merchant enterprise won out over political and religious antagonisms as a commercial network emerged to link markets in al-Andalus, Sicily-Tunisia, and Egypt. The demise of Baghdad as a critical trading hub allowed Mediterranean port cities (particularly Almeria, Tunis, al-Mahdiyya, and Alexandria) to become focal markets for trade along a busy east–west Mediterranean axis. The appearance of this energetic new commercial system signaled a renaissance in Mediterranean trade, which had been depressed though by no means made extinct during the previous two centuries. Demand in the Mediterranean channeled eastern goods coming by sea from the Indian Ocean away from the Persian Gulf and into routes up the Red Sea to Egypt. From Egypt, goods were disseminated along the east–west trunk route to markets in Ifriqiya and al-Andalus, and from there along spur routes to Christian lands and other satellite markets. Andalusi markets were a crucial western component in this system, since not only did they consume and distribute eastern imports, but they also exported Iberian goods back to the eastern Mediterranean. Andalusi agriculture and industries were well developed and diversified by the tenth century, allowing a reasonable balance of trade between east and west.

The period from the tenth to the late twelfth century, during which this Muslim Mediterranean commercial system remained functional, marked a phase of relative stability for Andalusi international trade. The integration of Muslim Spanish commerce within the Mediterranean trading axis gave it strength, and thus Andalusi markets were able to maintain their far-flung trading contacts and retain their function even in the face of three major obstacles. The first was distance (both perceived and actual), the second was the turmoils of internal Andalusi politics, and the third was the shifting balance of Christian and Muslim power in the peninsula and wider Mediterranean world. The first two could be overcome, but the addition of the third would eventually destroy Andalusi trade and the Muslim Mediterranean network.

Before continuing the survey of political history, a discussion of perceptions of distance draws attention to the position of al-

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Andalus within the Muslim thought world during the Umayyad period and after. Merchants and other travelers knew that physical distance could be traversed and that a trip from Almeria to Alexandria might be accomplished in a couple of months. Conceptual distances were harder to conquer, however, and al-Andalus remained at the western edge of the Islamic mental map. Geographical writings emphasized this Andalusi paradox of being both part, and yet not fully part, of the *dār al-Islām*. Arab geographers in the ninth and tenth centuries provided descriptions and maps that portrayed the Iberian peninsula hovering at the western edge of the earth. In the early tenth century, the eastern geographer Ibn al-Faqīh described the inhabited world as all that "is known between al-Andalus and China".[4] By the middle of the twelfth century the techniques of map-making had improved, but although the geographer Idrīsī (writing ca. 1150) was careful to depict al-Andalus accurately, with rivers and cities clearly sited, the peninsula still marked the farthest western point of the known world with an empty ocean beyond. Within a hundred years of the creation of Idrīsī's map, this perceived liminality became real. By the middle of the thirteenth century, most of the peninsula had slipped out of the Muslim sphere and the functional Islamic frontier shifted southward across the sea to North Africa.

Not only distance, but also the unique position of al-Andalus as a long-term frontier inhibited the peninsula's full incorporation within an Islamic world view. Geographical descriptions emphasized the role of al-Andalus as a border territory. According to the tenth-century geographers Iṣṭakhrī and Ibn Ḥawqal, al-Andalus had two borders, one along its frontier with Christian Spain ("the land of the unbeliever") and the other along its coastline.[5] Because the Arabic term *thughūr* could apply to either a land frontier or a sea coast, al-Andalus was entirely surrounded by borders and even its access to the rest of the Islamic world necessitated a sea journey across the Straits of Gibraltar. Port cities in the south, including Seville, Malaga, and Almeria, were channels of connection to other Muslim regions. Northern cities, such as Barcelona and Tarragona, were "the gates of al-

[4] Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān*. [ed. M.J. de Goeje, *BGA*, 2nd edn, v, Leiden, 1967], p. 50.
[5] Iṣṭakhrī, *Kitāb al-masālik wa al-mamālik*. [ed. M.J. de Goeje, *BGA*, 2nd edn, I, Leiden, 1967], p. 41; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb ṣūrat al-arḍ*. [ed. J.H. Kramers, Leiden, 1938], p. 109.

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Andalus".[6] Tudela (north of Zaragoza along the Ebro) was "the furthest frontier of the Muslims" and a point at which merchants and other travelers might cross into the "lands of the infidel".[7] Some authors took a dismal view of the Andalusi situation, with Ibn Bassām (d. 1147) lamenting that the people of al-Andalus live "close to the Christians, in a land which is at the extremity of those conquered by Islam and quite removed from the influence of Arab traditions, surrounded by the vast sea . . ."[8]

In literary imagery likewise, al-Andalus stood on the perimeter of the Muslim world. One anonymous author, in a fanciful mood, related an anecdote in which King Solomon questioned a cloud regarding its course, and learned that it traversed the sky from "one gate of Paradise, called al-Andalus, in the far west," to Abbadan in the east.[9] In a similar vein, the eastern author Yāqūt (d. 1229) recalled the verses: "I asked the people about Anas, and they replied: [He is] in al-Andalus, and al-Andalus is far away."[10] Perhaps the eleventh-century Andalusi scholar Ibn Ḥazm best summed up the Andalusi paradox of distance and unity when he wrote that

> if [my beloved] were in the most distant eastern region of the civilized world, while I remained in the furthest western region, with the whole length of the inhabited world [between us], yet there would still be only the distance of a single day's journey between him and me, for the sun rises at daybreak in the extreme east, and sets at the end of every day in the extreme west.[11]

Al-Andalus was certainly far away, but the passage of people and ideas ensured that the peninsula was never out of touch with the Islamic east. After the twelfth-century Jewish poet Judah Ha-Levi wrote "my heart is in the east and I am at the edge of the west . . . it would be easy for me to leave behind all the good

[6] Isḥāq b. al-Ḥusain, "Il compendio geografico arabo di Isḥāq ibn al-Ḥusayn," [ed. and trans. A. Codazzi and C.A. Nallino] *Rendiconti della R. academia nazionale dei Lincei* [Rome] 6th series, 5(1929), p. 411.

[7] Ibn Ghālib, "Naṣṣ andalusī jadīd qaṭ'īa min kitāb farḥa al-anfūs li-Ibn Ghālib," [ed. L. 'Abd al-Bādī] *Majalla ma'had al-makhṭūṭāt al-'arabiya* 1(1955), p. 287.

[8] H.E. Kassis, "Muslim revival in Spain in the 5th/11th Century," *Der Islam* 67 (1990), p. 83.

[9] L. Molina (ed.), *Una descripción anónima de al-Andalus*. [Madrid, 1983], p. 17.

[10] Yāqūt, *Mu'jām al-buldān*. (*Jacut's Geographisches Worterbuch*.) [ed. F. Wüstenfeld, Leipzig, 1873] 1, p. 375.

[11] Ibn Ḥazm, *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma*. [ed. T.A. Makki, Cairo, 1975], p. 135.

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things of Spain; it would be glorious to see the dust of the ruined shrine . . ." he fulfilled his desire and traveled to the Holy Land in 1140.[12] When he arrived, he was eagerly greeted by eastern friends and admirers, whose enthusiasm marked a significant change from an earlier period. During the tenth century, al-Andalus began to emerge as a more equal participant in the Arabic intellectual world. Andalusi scholarship flourished in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, producing such figures as Judah Ha-Levi, Moses b. Maimon, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Ḥazm, and Ibn Ṭufayl. Increasingly, Andalusi learning and literature were studied and appreciated in the Near East, and western scholars began to journey east to teach as well as to learn.

Changes in the relationship between al-Andalus and the wider world, both Muslim and Christian, were also evident in the political sphere. The eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed major upheavals in internal Andalusi politics, although not sufficient to destroy the Mediterranean trading axis. After nearly two and a half centuries of relatively stable centralized Umayyad rule in al-Andalus, the dynasty crumbled in the early eleventh century (usually dated to 1031) in the face of disputes over succession and civil war. In its place, smaller independent states emerged called Taifas or *Mulūk al-ṭawā'if* ("Party Kingdoms"). Life in these smaller states emphasized the ethnic differences that had always existed in Andalusi society. For example, an Arab dynasty, the ʿAbbadids, ruled in Seville; two Berber dynasties, the Ḥammūdids and the Zīrids, controlled Malaga and Granada respectively; while the so-called *ṣaqāliba* (or Slavs) held power in the coastal cities of Almeria, Valencia, and Tortosa.[13]

The disintegration of the Umayyad state into these smaller kingdoms weakened Andalusi cohesion along the land frontier, and provided an opportunity for northern Christian rulers (in Galicia, Castile, Leon, Navarre, Aragon, and Catalonia) to gain advantage. Since individual Muslim rulers were no longer able to defend their borders against either Christian armies or each other, many sought alliance with northern states. In return for security of their borders, Taifa states paid monthly or annual

[12] *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*. [ed. and trans. T. Carmi, London, 1981], p. 347.
[13] On the Taifa states, see D. Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party Kings: Politics and Society in Islamic Spain, 1002–1086*. [Princeton, 1985].

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tribute (*paria*) to Christian rulers.[14] This was in stark contrast to the situation in the tenth century, when Christian Spanish kingdoms had paid tribute to the Umayyads. *Parias* were first paid to Ramon Berenguer I of Catalonia during the 1040s, and soon became a widespread phenomenon. Some Taifa states paid multiple *parias*, notably the kingdom of Zaragoza, which owed tribute to Catalonia, Urgel, Navarre, Castile, and Aragon, with each of whom it shared a border, while more isolated Taifas owed only a single payment.

The payment of tribute to northern rulers was a drain on the coffers of Taifa rulers, but it does not seem to have damaged Andalusi international trade. Evidence from the Cairo Geniza and elsewhere indicates that commerce remained vigorous in the middle of the eleventh century, with many merchants trafficking along the trunk routes between Almeria and Alexandria. Indeed, it may have been the very success of Andalusi international trade in this period, and particularly the profits derived from Andalusi exports of silk, which allowed Taifa rulers to keep up with their *paria* payments.

Tribute did not ensure peace, however, and Christian armies began to push south, shattering Muslim confidence by capturing Toledo in 1085. The loss of Toledo made clear the need for military assistance, and an invitation was extended to the Almoravids, a Berber dynasty based in Marrakesh. Almoravid armies arrived in the peninsula in 1086, soon halted the Christian advance at the Battle of Zallaqa, and shortly thereafter established Almoravid control over both the peninsula and North Africa. Unified Almoravid rule marked the end of Taifa diversity, and established al-Andalus as part of a huge single kingdom. The new centralization strengthened Andalusi military organization so that most *paria* payments stopped and Christian incursions were slowed, although Muslim armies never managed to retake Toledo. Internal dissent gradually led to the disintegration of Almoravid power in the early twelfth century and the brief reappearance of Taifas before another Berber dynasty, the Almohads, incorporated al-Andalus into their North African empire in 1147.

[14] The term *paria* derives from either the Arabic *bara'* (to be free, acquitted, cleared [of a debt]) or *bara'* (which in some forms means to donate, give, or concede). Chapter 2 contains a more detailed discussion of *paria* tribute.

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The vast extent of Almoravid and Almohad territories, which stretched from al-Andalus eastward across much of North Africa (and included regions traversed by the routes of gold traffic coming from West Africa), gave these two dynasties unprecedented economic weight in the Mediterranean world. The influence of the Almoravid regime, in particular, is attested by the diffusion and imitation of their gold dinars (*murabiṭūns*) throughout Christian Spain and southern Europe. Under the caliph 'Abd al-Mu'min (1130–63), the Almohads held ports stretching from Valencia to Tripoli. The dynasty also controlled the critical maritime passage through the Straits of Gibraltar from their Andalusi capital at Seville. With the cooperation of the Ayyubid dynasty in Egypt, Almohad hegemony helped to maintain the Muslim Mediterranean trunk route between Egypt and al-Andalus, although the network was beginning to fray by the second half of the twelfth century. The reasons for this disintegration lay not only within the Islamic world, where mercantile interests in Egypt were starting to turn eastward toward the Indian Ocean, but also outside the *dār al-Islām*, with contemporary developments in Europe and the Christian Mediterranean.

Changes in commerce were only one element in a slow but profound shift taking place in Europe and the Mediterranean world from the tenth to the fourteenth century. Parallel trends in political, military, demographic, and economic strength combined to redefine the balance between Christianity and Islam, north and south, east and west. The burgeoning of European population, industries, and trade all contributed to shift the foci of power in the Mediterranean world. In particular, the growth of southern European city states in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, including Genoa, Pisa, Venice, Florence, Marseille, and Barcelona, created substantial new players on the western Mediterranean stage. These cities emerged as naval and commercial powers that Muslim rulers, both in al-Andalus and elsewhere, could not ignore.

In parallel with Christian military conquests in the Iberian peninsula, there were Christian advances elsewhere in the Mediterranean. Sicily came under Norman rule in the 1060s and 1070s, shortly before the First Crusade was launched to Palestine. In support of their commercial concerns, Italian cities lent their

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