

A LEGEND IN THE MAKING
The Evolution of the Conquest Accounts of Al-Andalus

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Introduction

One night in the year 711, a force of several thousand Muslims, mostly Berbers, crossed the Straits of Gibraltar from North Africa. Disguised as a party of traders so as not to arouse the suspicion of the locals, they landed on the Iberian Peninsula near Gibraltar. Led by Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād, they spread out into the peninsula, conquering villages and defeating the Visigothic armies. Their endeavor was the next step of the Muslims' expansion from the Middle East, into North Africa and beyond. This next step, the conquest of Spain, and the succeeding society the invaders established in the peninsula became legendary, feeding the imaginations of Muslims and Europeans alike. Even today, Muslim Spain is often an object of nostalgia and a symbol of tolerance in ages past.

While no contemporary Muslim accounts of the conquest have been discovered, later sources from the ninth century and beyond provide modern scholars with plentiful information on the subject. The difficulty in interpreting this information is in separating fact from fiction. Because there are so few accounts dating from near the time of the conquest, historians tend to collect much of their information from the later, more detailed, accounts. The problem with this, as one can easily observe, is in knowing the source of the information the later accounts contain. When we read new details in Ibn 'Idhārī's fourteenth century manuscript, we are understandably skeptical. Was this information also contained in earlier accounts that have since been lost? Or was the information simply a product of the author's imagination and penchant for story-telling?

While it is unlikely that, in the absence of a contemporary account, we will ever be able to truly know what happened, this paper seeks to fill a hole in the research on the conquest of Spain by examining the evolution of Muslim accounts of the conquest. Through this survey of texts ranging from the ninth century to the fourteenth, I highlight trends in the conquest accounts.

As a result of this study, I find that the legends surrounding the conquest of al-Andalus were already firmly established in North Africa and Spain by the 9th century. After this time, the major legends were standardized from one text to another, but other anecdotes, such as those detailing the conquest of individual cities, became much more elaborate towards the eleventh century.

In order to reach this conclusion, I will examine select accounts of the conquest, examining them for changes and continuities in the narrative. As it would be difficult to include each and every account up to the modern day, I restrict my survey to the six centuries following the conquest. I have tried to include as many of the well-known histories as possible, including those of al-Ḥakam, al-Balādhurī, and Ibn ‘Idhārī. Because my purpose is neither to determine what is factually correct nor to refine the currently accepted version of the conquest, I will only briefly touch on the matter of the reliability of the sources. The information this paper contains will be useful to historians wishing to further investigate the Muslim conquest, especially those who hope to refine our current knowledge with an investigation into the accuracy of the modern version of the story.

I. Historiography

One of the primary difficulties in interpreting accounts of the conquest is inherent in the structure of Muslim historiographical tradition itself. Medieval historians had a very utilitarian approach to history: the intent of historical texts was to instruct the audience, rather than to propagate ideas.¹ Accordingly, Muslim historians did not re-interpret historical data; instead, they repeated information found in earlier texts or gleaned from oral storytellers. Because historical tradition did not allow them to re-interpret the facts, historians would show their biases

¹ F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 90.

through the information they chose to include (or not).² They often cited this information in the form of an *isnād*, a transmission chain, going back all the way to the original eyewitness of an event.³ There was less room for independent query or questioning the accuracy of the information itself. However, it is this pattern of transmission history that enables us to accurately compare and contrast the conquest narratives, with the possibility of identifying the source of the informational discrepancies.

The dubious quality of some of the Muslim histories has led a few modern historians, notably Roger Collins, to reject their use as a reliable source of information. Collins advocates a return to “skeptical scholarship” regarding the Arabic narratives, citing the difference in the literary practices of the Arabic and Latin traditions. The Arabic narratives often have a paucity of “non-literary” evidence, as the original historians themselves tended to invent narratives in order to fill in the gaps in their knowledge. Because of this, Collins believes that historians should focus primarily on Latin accounts of the conquest, namely the *Chronicle of 754*, using Arabic sources to fill in the gaps.⁴

Nicola Clarke, on the other hand, advocates a more moderate approach. She takes a literary view of conquest narratives in an attempt to understand the context of the narratives through each author’s personal history. The knowledge of each author’s background is in this way important in understanding the narrative undertones as they apply in each formulaic narrative. Clarke believes that there are grains of the truth in each narrative, but that one must take them within the context of Muslim historiography. In this manner, Clarke holds that

² Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, 60-68.

³ J. Robson. "Isnād." in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2014), [Reference](#), University of Oklahoma, accessed November 15, 2014

⁴ Roger Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain, 710-797* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 3-4 and 24-36.

scholars can separate the facts from the context of the authors' stories.⁵ Although she herself does not undertake to establish an outline of what actually occurred based on these accounts, her discussion of the narrative tradition is useful in considering the evolution of the accounts of the Spanish conquest.

II. Historical Overview

Although each account differs slightly from the others, historians have come to a consensus about the general sequence of events. In order to provide context and comparison for my analysis of the conquest narratives, I will endeavor to provide here what has become the most widely accepted and disseminated version of the conquest, which occurred in a larger context of Arab expansion out of the Middle East. The late seventh century saw Arab expansion into northwest Africa, and in 708, an Arab named Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr was appointed governor of Ifrīqiya (modern-day Tunisia). The native Berbers of this region became instrumental in the conquest of Spain, as they formed the backbone of the new Muslim armies of North Africa. Motivated by a desire for booty, the expansion of the Muslims into Spain was the next logical step in the series of conquests.

At the beginning of the eighth century, Spain was ruled by the Visigoths, a Germanic people who had been in Spain since the fifth century. The Visigoths had converted to Roman Catholicism, and the Visigoth Church played an influential role in society. A weak monarchy characterized the Visigoth government in Spain – the nobles elected the king, who was of the aristocracy, and there was no fixed law of succession. Around the time of the Arab invasion of Spain, the Visigoth kingdom was fragmented, with Akhila, the son of the former king Witiza, ruling in the north, and Roderic, a usurper, ruling in the south. A weak army added to the

⁵ Nicola Clarke, *The Muslim Conquest of Iberia* (Abingdon: Routledge 2012), 1-7.

political disunity, and there were many unhappy serfs and Jews who had been suffering from persecution.

The political disunity and unhappiness among the masses contributed to the ease that the Muslims experienced in conquering Spain. According to legend, a certain Count Julian of Ceuta, seeking revenge for Roderic's rape of his daughter, encouraged the Muslims to invade the peninsula. Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād, himself a *mawlā* of Berber descent, led the invading army, which consisted mostly of Berber converts to Islam. They invaded Iberia in 711, easily defeating Roderic's army and from there continuing to take city after city. In many places, they received help from Jews, who welcomed them as a relief from their Visigoth persecutors. Mūsā, the governor of Ifrīqiya, became jealous of Ṭāriq's success and brought his own army to Spain to join Ṭāriq's in taking much of the peninsula. In 714, the caliph recalled Mūsā and Ṭāriq to Damascus, and the conquest continued under Mūsā's son 'Abd al-'Azīz, whom he had appointed as governor of al-Andalus.⁶

Although the conquest continued in one way or another for many years after Mūsā's departure from al-Andalus, I will end my comparison of the conquest narratives with his return to Syria. This provides a convenient division as it is the end of the preliminary phase of the conquest and the exit of the primary characters from Iberia.

III. Introduction to the sources

While there are many accounts of the conquest of Iberia, there are only a few relatively early versions. The earliest, and perhaps one of the most famous, is the anonymous Latin *Chronicle of 754* which, as the name suggests, was written sometime in the middle of the eighth

⁶ W. Montgomery Watt and Pierre Cachia, *A History of Islamic Spain*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 2008), 1-11.

century, four or five decades after the events it describes.⁷ Although it was not one of the Arabic narratives, I will include a brief overview of the *Chronicle* in order to provide a basis for comparison, as it is the earliest record we have. Of the Arabic accounts, the two earliest are al-Balādhurī's *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān* and al-Ḥakam's *Futūḥ Miṣr*, both written sometime during the ninth century. Tenth-century accounts include Ibn al-Qūṭīyya's *Ta'riḫ Ibn al-Qūṭīyya* and al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'riḫ al-Rusul wa 'l-Mulūk* which, despite the reputation of its author, provides only a skeletal account of the conquest. In addition, the anonymous eleventh-century *Akhbār Majmū'a* is a very detailed account of the conquest, and is one of the most important sources of information about the early years of al-Andalus. The final, most recent account that I include is the fourteenth-century *al-Bayān al-Mughrib* of Ibn 'Idhārī.

The author of the anonymous *Chronicle of 754* was likely a native Iberian clergyman, and possibly even served as an official at the Muslim court. The author cites political rather than religious reasons for the success of the conquest. He is also remarkably neutral religiously, focusing on relating events rather than initiating polemic against the Muslims. His account follows the pattern of a universal chronicle with little personal narration. It contains an account of events in the East beginning with the emperor Heraclius, including information on both the Byzantine and Arab empires.⁸ The *Chronicle* describes Roderic as a usurper who did not have the support of all of the nobility. He and his army lost to the invading army of Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād, who had been sent by Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr in 711. According to the author, the Arabs had already engaged in raids prior to the invasion. Mūsā later joined Ṭāriq in Spain and, with the help of one of Roderic's rivals, conquered Toledo and convinced other cities to surrender peacefully. The following year, the caliph ordered Mūsā to return to Syria. He took with him much of the booty

⁷ Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain*, 27.

⁸ Kenneth Baxter Wolf, "An Andalusian Chronicler and the Muslims" in *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, ed. Kenneth Baxter Wolf, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1990), 29-31 and 40-44.

he had acquired, but the caliph al-Walīd was angry with him and fined him a large amount.⁹

Of the two Arabic accounts from the ninth century, that of al-Balādhurī is the less detailed. Al-Balādhurī follows the general outline of the Arab conquest as mentioned in section II above, but he does so with less elaboration than do other Arab historians. Al-Balādhurī (d. ca. 892) himself was likely from Baghdad, and his *Futūh al-Buldān* is well-known as a valuable source on the conquests.¹⁰ However, al-Balādhurī's contemporary, the Egyptian Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, wrote a very extensive account of the conquest of al-Andalus in which he included multiple accounts of certain events, such as Roderic's death and Mūsā's return to Syria. Al-Ḥakam (d. 871) spent most of his life in Egypt, and his comparative nearness to the Maghreb could be one reason for the additional detail in his account.¹¹ His *Futūh Miṣr* contains many of the anecdotes that have since become legendary, such as the story of the rape of Julian's daughter, the origin of the name Gibraltar, and the full legend of Solomon's Table. Both authors mention al-Wāqidī as one of their sources, though only al-Balādhurī makes reference to him specifically for the information on al-Andalus.¹²

The two tenth-century accounts I examine here are striking in their differences. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), who was originally from Persia but spent much of his life in Baghdad, is one of the earliest and most well-known of Arab historians.¹³ Despite his reputation, he devotes no more

⁹ "The Chronicle of 754," in *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, edited by Kenneth Baxter Wolf (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1990), 130-134.

¹⁰ Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūh al-Buldān*, trans. Philip Hitti in *The Origins of the Islamic State*, volume 1, by Philip Hitti (New York: Columbia University, 1916), 365-366; "al-Balādhurī." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2014), [Reference](#), University of Oklahoma, accessed October 12, 2014.

¹¹ F. Rosenthal "Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2014), [Reference](#), University of Oklahoma, accessed October 12, 2014.

¹² See pages 365-366 of Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūh al-Buldān* for reference; see page 349 of Charles Torrey's *The History of the Conquest of Egypt, North Africa and Spain, known as the Futūh Miṣr of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam* for an index of al-Wāqidī's appearance in text.

¹³ "al-Ṭabarī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2014) [Reference](#), University of Oklahoma, accessed October 12, 2014.

than a paragraph and a few lines of his *Ta'rikh* to the conquest of al-Andalus.¹⁴ Like al-Balādhurī, he spent much of his time in Baghdad and therefore likely had more access to or interest in material on Eastern history. Also like al-Balādhurī, al-Ṭabarī cites al-Wāqidī as one of his sources about the conquest of Spain. Al-Ṭabarī's narrative follows the same general, accepted outline of events as do the rest of the narratives, though his account is skeletal at best and contains no more than the bare minimum of information.¹⁵ In contrast, the *Ta'rikh* of Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, from the same century, is a wealth of information. Ibn al-Qūṭiyya (d. 977) was an Andalusian Muslim of Visigothic and Arab descent; in fact, he claimed as his ancestor Witiza, who was king of the Visigoths before Roderic. He was renowned as a scholar and a relator of *akhbār*.¹⁶ Because of his use of the *akhbār* tradition, he does not make use of *isnād*.¹⁷ Despite his lack of citations, Ibn al-Qūṭiyya's account is very detailed, likely because of his relevant location and evident interest in his own ancestry. More so than most of the other sources, he provides extensive information on the last of the Visigothic kings, including many anecdotes involving his own ancestors.¹⁸ This additional information is likely due to his ancestral connection with the Visigoths and the figures involved in the conquest on the Visigothic side.

The anonymous *Akhbār Majmū'a* has become a staple in any research on the conquest of Spain, due to its inclusion of many detailed anecdotes. There are many theories as to both its authorship and the date of its creation. Modern scholars tend to disagree, but have come to a general consensus regarding its origin. It is likely a compilation of several different accounts of

¹⁴ al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al- al-Ṭabarī, Volume XXIII: The Zenith of the Marwanid House*, trans. Martin Hinds (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 182.

¹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, 182, 201.

¹⁶ David James, Introduction to *Early Islamic Spain: The History of Ibn al-Qūṭiyya* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009) 22-25.

¹⁷ James, *Early Islamic Spain*, 22-25.

¹⁸ Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, *The History of Ibn al-Qūṭiyya*, trans. David James in *Early Islamic Spain: The History of Ibn al-Qūṭiyya* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 49-54.

early al-Andalus by different authors. There are also a variety of opinions about the date of its compilation; the theories range from an origin in the ninth century to one in the thirteenth or fourteenth.¹⁹ However, recent scholarship seems to favor the idea of a later formation, likely sometime during the eleventh century.²⁰ Because this relative date seems to be the general consensus and is somewhere towards the median of the theories advocating earlier or later compilation, I will utilize this date as the reference point for the *Akhbār Majmū‘a*, keeping in mind that this date is not the only possibility. Like the others, this narrative does not deviate far from the acceptable outline of events. It contains an account of Julian’s role, Ṭāriq’s invasion and defeat of Roderic, and the discovery of the Table of Solomon, as well Mūsā’s anger with Ṭāriq. However, it also contains details that are not generally included in less-detailed accounts, such as the role of the Jews and an anecdote involving Witiza’s sons.²¹ Because it is in the form of *akhbār*, the *Akhbār Majmū‘a* does not cite any of its sources.²²

The final text that I include in this study is Ibn ‘Idhārī’s *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, which dates from circa 1312. Ibn ‘Idhārī was a North African historian of the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century, about whom we know little.²³ However, his account of the conquest of al-Andalus is very thorough. He follows the standard outline of events, providing multiple accounts of Roderic’s death, as well as of the discovery of Solomon’s Table. He also includes detailed information on the conquest of Cordoba, and then an account of Mūsā’s anger with Ṭāriq and their eventual return to Damascus.²⁴ This segment of the text is notable in its similarity to parts

¹⁹ David James, Introduction to *A History of Early Al-Andalus: the Akhbār Majmū‘a* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).

²⁰ Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain*, 3.

²¹ *Akhbār Majmū‘a*, Ed. Don Emilio Lafuente y Alcántara (Madrid: Rivadeneyra, 1867), 2-15.

²² James, *A History of Early Al-Andalus*, 8.

²³ J. Bosch-Vilá, "Ibn ‘Idhārī." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2014), Reference, University of Oklahoma, accessed October 12, 2014.

²⁴ Ibn Idhari, *Al-Bayan al-Mughrib* in *Histoire de L’Afrique du Nord et de l’Espagne Musulmane*, volume 2, ed. G.S. Colin and E. Lévi-Provençal (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1967), 1-23.

of the *Akhbār Majmū'a*, which I will examine in detail later.

While there are other accounts of the conquest of al-Andalus, I have chosen to work with these seven because they represent authors from a variety of parts of the Muslim world. They are also products, for the most part, of reputable historians and are the primary accounts that modern historians utilize in examining this time period in Spanish history.

IV. Evolution of the narrative

Although each account of the conquest is different in its nuances and in the detail it includes, there are certain areas in which most, if not all, of the accounts agree. These continuities form the basis of the modern-day version of the conquest. Most of the dates the texts contain are fairly consistent, with small disparities in the form of months rather than years. Because the accounts are all in agreement with the general timeframe of the conquest – from Ṭāriq's invasion to Mūsā's departure for Syria – this section will treat the dates as a given continuity rather than reflecting the small divergences. Additionally, not all of the authors give dates for every event, especially because many of them follow the *akhbār* tradition of history rather than the more date-centered *ta'rīkh* form.

With regards to the information the accounts differ on, I will focus on a few select motifs and anecdotes in order to illustrate the changes. For this purpose, I will first focus on the general differences between the version given in the *Chronicle of 754* and those versions of the early Arab historians. Then, I will go on to describe the general evolution of the Arabic accounts in terms of content quantity and inclusion of notable legends. Among these legends, I will examine the role of Julian in the conquest and the discovery of Solomon's Table, as well as the appearance of lesser-known legends such as that of the locked room of the Visigoth kings, the Muslims' pretense at cannibalism, and the role of Umm Ḥākīm.

A. Early Narratives: Arabic vs. Latin

Although the earliest chronicles of the conquest of al-Andalus – the Latin *Chronicle of 754* and the Arabic histories of al-Balādhurī and al-Ḥakam – do not agree on everything, they do concur on the outline of events. These commonalities within the earliest accounts are important as they lend credence to the general timeline historians have come to accept. There is also much value in the agreement of sources across language barriers, especially as one of these sources is the closest in date to the events that it describes.²⁵ Of the points that these three sources differ on, most revolve around the legends that have grown out of the conquest (as opposed to the timeline of events).

One instance of agreement amongst the three works is the role of Roderic in Visigothic Spain. The *Chronicle* mentions in fair detail that Roderic had been involved in civil war in Spain, and had taken over the kingdom.²⁶ Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam’s *Futūḥ Miṣr* also mentions Roderic as the ruler of Spain, though it says little else about him.²⁷ Al-Balādhurī does not mention the rulers of the Visigothic kingdom, though this is unsurprising due to the general lack of detail in his account. A possible reason for the greater detail in the *Chronicle* is the Iberian background of the author. A second point of agreement between all the works is the Caliph al-Walīd’s recall of Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr to Damascus. According to the texts, the caliph – al-Walīd or his successor Sulaymān – was angry with Mūsā and fined him a significant amount of money. The texts also agree that someone advised Mūsā about the fine or pled with the caliph on Mūsā’s behalf and caused the punishment to be mitigated. According to the Arab texts, Mūsā’s helper was someone

²⁵ Roger Collins argues for increased reliance on the *Chronicle of 754* because of its early dating. (Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain*, 26).

²⁶ “The Chronicle of 754,” 130-131.

²⁷ Al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, trans. Albert Gateau in *Conquête de l’Afrique du Nord et de l’Espagne* (Alger: Éditions Carbonel, 1947), 91.

by the name of Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab.²⁸ According to the *Chronicle*, this person was Urban, a Christian from North Africa who had been with Mūsā in Spain.²⁹ Regardless, all three agree that Mūsā was fined and that someone offered him advice and/or intervened on his behalf. This similarity is significant because the Latin chronicler shows significant knowledge of events at the caliph's court, suggesting that perhaps rather extensive communication existed between Damascus and even the Romance speakers of al-Andalus.

The texts disagree about the legend of Count Julian, a legend that has become conventional today. According to most of the Arabic narratives, Julian was the ruler of Ceuta who aided the crossing of Ṭāriq's forces over the strait. This same narrative holds true in the accounts of both al-Ḥakam and al-Balādhurī.³⁰ Significantly, the *Chronicle* makes no mention of Julian in the context of helping the Muslims cross into Spain. There is, however, a certain Urban, whom the chronicler describes as a Christian noble of Africa, who advised Mūsā to pay his fine to the caliph without complaint. The chronicler also mentions that Urban accompanied Mūsā "throughout the whole of Spain."³¹ Some historians consider Urban and Julian to be one and the same, but others firmly disagree.³² Regardless of whether or not they are the same person, the figure of Julian in the Arabic narratives is much more prominent than the Urban of the *Chronicle*. This inspires the question of why, if Julian actually played such an important role in helping the Arabs into Spain, the *Chronicle* does not take more note of him, especially because the author is much closer in time and space to the events he describes than al-Ḥakam and al-Balādhurī.

Despite minor differences such as the role of Julian, the Latin *Chronicle* and the Arabic

²⁸ Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān*, 366. Also Al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 111.

²⁹ "The Chronicle of 754," 134.

³⁰ Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān*, 365. Al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 89-90.

³¹ "The Chronicle of 754," 134.

³² Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain*, 36.

accounts of al-Ḥakam and al-Balādhurī generally agree on the main points of the conquest narrative. These include anecdotes such as the role of Roderic as the ruler of the Visigoths and the parts played by Ṭāriq and Mūsā in the conquest. In addition, the three authors agree – in general details – that Mūsā was fined upon his return to Damascus. The agreement of all three early sources across language barriers and geographic distance lends credibility to the initial story, even without taking into account later Arabic narratives.

B. Detail in Arabic narratives

As we can expect, the recounting of legends in a text depends to an extent on the initial level of detail the text contains. Narratives of the conquest tended to grow longer and more complex as time progressed – generally speaking, the earliest accounts are less detailed than are the later ones, and the most detailed texts were written by authors who lived in the west. These western authors such as al-Ḥakam and Ibn al-Qūṭayba likely had more access to oral and written histories on the region. The two least detailed accounts are those of al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī, both of whom spent the majority of their lives near Baghdad. In addition, both men lived in the ninth or early tenth century.³³ It is possible that oral histories on the conquest of Spain were not prevalent in the Middle East at the time, and that written material was scarce; both authors cite al-Wāqidī almost exclusively as their source on the conquest of Spain.³⁴ This is unsurprising, as al-Wāqidī (d. 822) was a very well-known and well-informed historian of the early Islamic conquests, and he lived and worked in Baghdad.³⁵ As such, his work would have been very accessible to both al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī. Much of his work, including a piece that contained information on the conquest of Spain, has since been lost to us, but al-Wāqidī clearly remained

³³ "al-Balādhurī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Also "al-Ṭabarī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

³⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, 182; Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futuh al-Buldan*, 365.

³⁵ S. Leder, "al-Wāqidī." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2014), [Reference](#), University of Oklahoma, accessed October 19, 2014.

very important as Ibn ʿIdhārī in the fourteenth century cites him as well.³⁶

In contrast to the relatively early works of al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī, whose accounts are short and who relied heavily on the work of al-Wāqidī, the authors from North Africa and Spain seem to have had access to much more material. Although the Egyptian al-Ḥakam is a contemporary of al-Balādhurī and precedes al-Ṭabarī by half a century, his text is much more detailed than either of the other two. He also relied on a mixture of both written and oral sources.³⁷ After al-Ṭabarī’s account, which is the outlier, shorter and less complex than that of his predecessor al-Ḥakam, the conquest narratives become progressively longer and more detailed. That of Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, who was a native Andalusian, is significantly more elaborate, especially with respect to the history of Visigothic Spain up to and during the conquest. Al-Qūṭiyya, who was himself was a relater of *akhbār*, relies primarily on oral sources.³⁸ We can imagine that because he himself had Visigothic ancestry and because he lived in Spain, he had easy access to *akhbāris* who related local histories. Besides the Latin chronicler of the *Chronicle of 754*, Ibn al-Qūṭiyya *Taʾrīkh* is one of the earliest remaining Andalusian accounts of the conquest. Both the *Akhbār Majmūʿa*, which was likely compiled in the eleventh century, and Ibn ʿIdhārī’s fourteenth-century *al-Bayān al-Mughrib* contain extensive detail.

It is suspicious that the accounts grow increasingly elaborate as time goes on. It is of course possible that this is due to increased dissemination of more obscure original texts or *akhbār* narratives, but it is unlikely that such an extent of reliable new material could surface. At some point, due to the embellishments and liberties of story-tellers, it is likely that additional “information” was added to the narrative to make for a more interesting story or to fill in gaps.

³⁶ Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 7 and 20; for al-Ḥakam’s citations of al-Wakidi see the index of Torrey’s edition of *Futuh Miṣr*. Note that he does not al-Wakidi directly in reference to the material on Spain, but he clearly knew of his work as his name appears in other parts of the text

³⁷ Torrey’s “Introduction” to al-Ḥakam’s *Futūḥ Miṣr*, page 3

³⁸ James, *Early Islamic Spain*, 25.

After this occurred many times it could result in such an extensive and detailed narrative as *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*.

While a great number of people are mentioned as sources throughout the various narratives, there is little broad consistency. As already mentioned, al-Wāqidī, of course, was extremely important as a source for many of the historians from the ninth century up to the fourteenth. Others who are cited in multiple works on the Andalusian conquest are al-Layth ibn Sa'ad and Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Rāzī.³⁹ Al-Ṭabarī himself appears as a source in *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, but Ibn 'Idhārī does not cite any of the other earlier authors this paper examines.⁴⁰ Many of the other sources whose names are mentioned once or twice and who we know little about were possibly *akhbāri*. Some of the authors, *akhbāri* themselves, such as Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, cite very few sources. The *Akhbār Majmū'a* does not cite any sources at all, though it contains more detail than any other text except perhaps that of Ibn 'Idhārī.

C. The Arabic Texts: evolution of legend

The amount of detail in each account tends to be related to the quantity of legends the account relates. Both the *Akhbār Majmū'a* and the *al-Bayān al-Mughrib* contain significant detail about the conquest of individual cities, while the *Futūḥ al-Buldān* and al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* contain nothing more extensive than a general outline. Some important points of comparison include the coverage of Visigothic Spain, the role of Julian in the conquest, the legend of Solomon's Table, and the accounts of the conquest of individual cities.

With regards to the information on Visigothic Spain, the earlier narratives are unquestionably more vague. The *Chronicle of 754* provides a brief account of the state of the Visigothic government – it mentions that Roderic, who was not of royal blood, had seized the

³⁹ For references to al-Layth ibn Sa'ad see Al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 105; as well as Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 17. For a reference to al-Razi, see Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 25.

⁴⁰ Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 16.

throne from Witiza, the rightful king.⁴¹ The first Arab accounts are very similar to the *Chronicle* in their lack of detail: al-Ḥakam mentions only that Roderic was the king of Spain and his capital was at Toledo.⁴² Al-Ṭabarī provides similar information.⁴³ Al-Balādhurī is even less forthcoming, completely forgoing mention of anything about the state of Spain prior to the Arab invasion.⁴⁴ He does not even mention Roderic's name, something every other author makes note of.

Beginning in the tenth century, the authors began to provide more substantial information about Visigothic Spain. With Ibn al-Qūṭīyya's account, we return to the *Chronicle*'s specification that Roderic seized the throne and was not the rightful king.⁴⁵ Ibn 'Idhārī agrees with this, reporting that Roderic had killed the old king and corrupted the kingship.⁴⁶ The *Akhbār Majmū'a*, too, says that Roderic was not of royal blood, but it gives a more favorable impression of Roderic than do either Ibn al-Qūṭīyya or Ibn 'Idhārī, saying that Roderic took the throne because the sons of Witiza were not well-liked.⁴⁷ Ibn al-Qūṭīyya, on the other hand, claims that Roderic took seized the throne while Witiza's sons were still young, and presumably unable to fight back.⁴⁸ While this information on the state of Visigothic Spain at the time of the Arab invasion is not included in the histories of al-Balādhurī, al-Ḥakam or al-Ṭabarī, it was clearly passed down to later Arab authors in some manner. Because it is included in the *Chronicle of 754*, which is by far the earliest account of the conquest that we have, we know that the claim that Roderic usurped the throne from his predecessor did not develop out of the elaborations of

⁴¹ "The Chronicle of 754," 130-131.

⁴² Al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 91.

⁴³ Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, 182.

⁴⁴ Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān*, 365.

⁴⁵ Ibn al-Qūṭīyya, *The History of Ibn al-Qūṭīyya*, 49.

⁴⁶ Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 3.

⁴⁷ *Akhbār Majmū'a*, 5.

⁴⁸ Ibn al-Qūṭīyya, *The History of Ibn al-Qūṭīyya*, 49.

later Arabic authors. The information could simply have been unavailable to the earliest Arabic authors of the ninth and tenth centuries, or if it was available they chose not to include it.

One notable legend that almost all of the accounts include is the story of Julian – only the eastern accounts do not mention it. The popular account of the conquest places the responsibility for inviting the Arabs on the figure of Julian, the ruler of Ceuta. According to the legend, Julian had sent his daughter to the court of Roderic at Toledo for her education, as was the custom. Roderic seduced her, and in revenge Julian persuaded the Arabs to invade the peninsula.⁴⁹ However, where does this legend begin? As this paper previously mentioned, the three earliest sources are not unanimous about the figure of Julian. The *Chronicle of 754* scarcely makes mention of him, if indeed Urban and Julian are even one and the same.⁵⁰ Al-Ṭabarī also does not mention him at all, though this is unsurprising due to the lack of general detail in the text. With these two exceptions, every other text – beginning with al-Ḥakam in the 9th century – agrees that Julian transported Ṭāriq and his men across the straits to al-Andalus. Most agree also that Julian was the ruler of Ceuta; only Ibn al-Qūṭiyya says differently, claiming Julian to be a merchant who traveled frequently between Iberia and North Africa.⁵¹ Ibn ‘Idhārī, who gives four separate versions of Julian’s role in inviting the Arabs, includes one account that is remarkably similar to that of Ibn al-Qūṭiyya. In that specific version of the story, Julian was a merchant and left his daughter with Roderic to keep her safe while he traveled. He returned one day to find that Roderic has seduced her. Telling Roderic he left some goods in North Africa, he returned to Tangiers to ask Ṭāriq to invade al-Andalus so he could take his revenge.⁵² Because Ibn ‘Idhārī lived in al-Maghreb, he and Ibn al-Qūṭiyya likely had access to similar local sources, one of

⁴⁹ Watt and Cachia, *A History of Islamic Spain*, 8.

⁵⁰ “The Chronicle of 754,” 134.

⁵¹ Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, *The History of Ibn al-Qūṭiyya*, 51-52.

⁵² Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, *The History of Ibn al-Qūṭiyya*, 51-52; Ibn ‘Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 8.

whom must have given this account. The eastern historians al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī, who both cite al-Wāqidī as their primary source, might not have heard this anecdote at all. While al-Ṭabarī mentions nothing on the subject, al-Balādhurī says only that Julian was the commander of the straits and transported Ṭāriq and his men across them; there is no further explication of his motive.⁵³ Taking into account the time period and geographical location of the authors, it appears that the story of Roderic's rape of Julian's daughter was firmly established in the west by the time of al-Ḥakam in the 9th century.

Of all of the legendary anecdotes of the conquest of Spain, none remains as constant throughout all of the sources as does that of Solomon's Table. According to legend, Solomon's Table is a magnificent bejeweled table that once belonged to the Biblical Solomon, son of David. Legend also says that the Table was taken from Jerusalem as booty at one point.⁵⁴ While he was conquering the cities of al-Andalus, Ṭāriq heard that the Table was in a city near Toledo. He obtained the Table, and carried it off as booty.⁵⁵ Historians from al-Ḥakam in the ninth century to Ibn 'Idhārī in the fourteenth almost all describe the Table. The only exceptions are Ibn al-Qūṭiyya and the *Chronicle of 754*. Even al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī, who are very brief in their accounts of al-Andalus, make a mention of it. Al-Balādhurī alone does not reference the connection to the Biblical Solomon, saying just that Ṭāriq carried off a "wonderful table."⁵⁶ A mere half-century later, al-Ṭabarī connects the Table to Solomon. This could be because he uses more sources on al-Andalus than did al-Balādhurī, who mentions only al-Wāqidī; al-Ṭabarī cites

⁵³ Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān*, 365.

⁵⁴ J. Walker and P. Fenton, "Sulaymān b. Dāwūd," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2014), [Reference](#), University of Oklahoma, accessed October 21, 2014.

⁵⁵ Al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 95; Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān*, 366; Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, 201; *Akhbār Majmū'a*, 15; Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 12.

⁵⁶ Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān*, 366.

in addition Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar as his source regarding the Table.⁵⁷ Apart from al-Balādhurī’s lack of connection between the Table and Solomon, there is only one other notable departure from the narrative, and this is in al-Ḥakam’s *Futūḥ Miṣr*. Like the others, al-Ḥakam says that Ṭāriq found the Table near Toledo. However, al-Ḥakam also elaborates on this story, saying that Ṭāriq took off one of the Table’s ornate legs, replacing it with another simple one. Later on, when Mūsā and Ṭāriq returned to Syria, the Caliph was able to tell that Mūsā lied about having been the one to find the Table because Ṭāriq presented him with the original leg.⁵⁸ This is an interesting extension of the narrative, but it does not appear again until the fourteenth century in Ibn ‘Idhārī’s *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*. Even then, Ibn ‘Idhārī tells only of how Ṭāriq removed a leg of the Table; he does not mention Ṭāriq showing it to the Caliph to prove his honesty.⁵⁹ Overall, the anecdote of Solomon’s Table is a permanent fixture of histories of the conquest; it does not change significantly from one author to the next, and is present in some form throughout the six centuries this paper encompasses.

Other than Solomon’s Table, there are many legends interspersed throughout the conquest histories. However, Solomon’s Table is unique in that it is nearly ubiquitous across the centuries. The other legends are more obscure and do not appear in the majority of the accounts. One of these legends, which only appears in al-Ḥakam’s *Futūḥ Miṣr*, is that of Umm Ḥākīm. She was supposedly a slave girl who accompanied Ṭāriq to Spain, though he left her behind at one of the places they conquered, which was then named after her.⁶⁰ This story does not appear again, even in the account of Ibn ‘Idhārī, who includes much of the information from the earlier accounts. Like al-Ḥakam, Ibn al-Qūṭiyya includes a story that is unique to his account.

⁵⁷ Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān*, 365; Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, 201.

⁵⁸ Al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 95 and 107.

⁵⁹ Ibn ‘Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 16.

⁶⁰ Al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 89-93.

According to this legend, while Ṭāriq was crossing the strait from Morocco he dreamt that the prophet Muḥammad appeared and told him to continue with his plans to invade al-Andalus.⁶¹ As with the story of Umm Ḥākim, this tale does not appear again in the six accounts this paper surveys.

There are also several stories that reoccur from time to time but that never become firmly entrenched in conquest narratives. Of those stories, one of the most fascinating is the tale of the locked room. It appears in the accounts of al-Ḥakam, Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, and Ibn 'Idhārī. Essentially, as the legend goes, there was a locked temple in Spain that the kings of the Visigoths were not permitted to open. When Roderic seized the throne, however, he opened the door. Inside he found pictures of the Arabs and their horses, as well as a written warning that when the room was opened and the pictures seen, the people in the pictures would invade and conquer al-Andalus.⁶² There are minor differences between each the version each text contains; al-Ḥakam, for example, says that each king of al-Andalus added a new lock to the door and that Roderic refused to add a new lock to the door without seeing what was inside.⁶³ Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, on the other hand, claims that inside the temple were the Gospels upon which the kings took their oaths. The temple was kept closed as required by custom and by Christianity, but Roderic chose to open it anyways.⁶⁴ Ibn 'Idhārī's version of the locked temple is similar; he merely adds that the people of al-Andalus disapproved of Roderic's actions.⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that this particular legend does not appear at all in the *Akḥbār Majmū'a*, despite the fact that it otherwise contains a highly detailed account of the conquest. Apparently, the story was not ubiquitous among western accounts (supposing the *Akḥbār Majmū'a* did indeed originate in al-Andalus or

⁶¹ Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, *The History of Ibn al-Qūṭiyya*, 52.

⁶² Al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 93; Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, *The History of Ibn al-Qūṭiyya*, 51; Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 3.

⁶³ Al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 93.

⁶⁴ Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, *The History of Ibn al-Qūṭiyya*, 51.

⁶⁵ Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 3-4.

North Africa). Because al-Ḥakam mentions it, we also know that story clearly existed when al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī were writing their histories, yet neither includes it. While the legend of the locked room never became endemic to the conquest narratives as did the legend of Solomon's Table, it also never truly disappeared.

In addition to the legends, which appear throughout the conquest accounts, there is more mundane information regarding the conquest of cities. However, the early accounts – all the way from the *Chronicle of 754* to Ibn al-Qūṭīyya in the 10th century – contain very little, if any, information on the conquest of specific cities. With the *Akhbār Majmū'a* in the eleventh century comes the first detailed record of the cities. The *Akhbār Majmū'a* describes in detail the conquest of Écija, Cordoba, Orihuela, Carmona, Seville and Mérida.⁶⁶ Strikingly, Ibn 'Idhārī's fourteenth-century *al-Bayān al-Mughrib* contains an almost identical record of the conquest of the same cities, even, in some cases, down to exact sentences. For example, one location in which the accounts are very similar is in the relating of the conquest of Cordoba. Says Ibn 'Idhārī, “naza 'Mughīth 'amāmatuhu, fa-nāwalahu ṭarfan, wa irtaqa bihā hatā kathiru bi-al-suwar.”⁶⁷ The wording in the *Akhbār Majmū'a* is identical, except for the slight modification of “irtaqa” to “irtaqā al-nās.”⁶⁸ Whether Ibn 'Idhārī utilized the *Akhbār Majmū'a* as a source for his history or whether the *Akhbār Majmū'a* and *al-Bayān al-Mughrib* have a third source in common is unknown, but there is clearly a great deal of similarity between them, and *al-Bayān al-Mughrib* evolved from the earlier source.

Conclusion

The 711 conquest of Spain was another step in the continued expansion of the Islamic

⁶⁶ *Akhbār Majmū'a*, 9-18.

⁶⁷ Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 10.

⁶⁸ *Akhbār Majmū'a*, 11.

world. While many accounts of the conquest exist, only a few date from the first two centuries after the events they describe. These are the Latin *Chronicle of 754*, al-Ḥakam's *Futūḥ Miṣr* and al-Balādhurī's *Futūḥ al-Buldān*. All three of these accounts contain the same general sequence of events, giving credence to at least the basic facts of the traditional narrative of the conquest. Later accounts uphold the same broad narrative, although they are more complex and contain more detail, especially regarding the conquest of individual Andalusian cities. One part of the narrative that has become commonly accepted today is the story of Count Julian, who invites the Muslims into Spain. Although there are many legendary stories in the conquest narratives, the only one that remains fairly constant is the story of Solomon's Table. Other legends, such as that of the locked room, appeared and disappeared with time. The popular legends were for the most part firmly established by the time of al-Ḥakam in the ninth century, though the conquest narrative continued to evolve, becoming more elaborate after the eleventh century.

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