

***Through the Eyes of the Historical Record:
Convivencia and 800 Years of Tolerance and Intolerance in
Islamic Al-Andalus***

Lecture for February 5, 2004

I. Introduction

- a. Last week, we completed an introductory discussion to the issues of tolerance and intolerance in medieval Islam.
- b. In particular, how surahs from the Qur'an, the Constitution of Medina, and the 8th century Pact of Umar may have guided Islamic action. Each document provides a basis for understand tolerance and intolerance in medieval Islam
- c. Also, I briefly mentioned the concept of the Jizya, the religious tax on non-Muslims as well. A form of monetary violence against minorities, or simply a religio-administrative fee? Maybe both.
- d. Today, we will investigate how did these documents formed the basis of the multi-religious society in Islamic Iberia, or al-Andalus from 711-1492. I had also hoped to peek at how Islamic ideals may have impacted Spanish Christian ideas of religious tolerance in the late medieval period—but alas, we simply do not have the time to do justice to the issue.
- e. While it is extremely difficult to find references to the above mentioned documents in the historical record, what does exist is are specific events, people and other documents that appear to reflect the “spirit” of the Qur'an, the Constitution of Medina, and the Pact of Umar. In essence, I am arguing that they underlie the formal and informal interactions of Muslims, Jews, and Christians in medieval Iberia.

- f. Our path today includes:
- i. A brief exposition of the political chronology of Iberia from 27 BCE to 1502 CE.
 - ii. A introduction to the Iberian social theory of Convivencia – the Spanish concept of tolerance and intolerance in medieval Iberia.
 - iii. And lastly, a brief view of specific interfaith events, documents, physical evidence from Muslim. Three items we will specific review include:
 1. The Surrender Treaty of Tudmir
 2. Early Islamic Coinage at the time of the Islamic conquest
 3. The Rule of Caliph Abd al-Rahman III

II. Brief Chronology of the Region

- a. Roman Spain (27 BCE – 411CE)
- b. Visigothic Spain (411 – 711)
- c. Islamic Conquest and Rapid Consolidation (711-716)
 - i. Tariq enters April 28, 711.
 1. With no more than a party of 7,000 Berber troops under the command of Tariq ibn Ziyad, the Muslims began their invasion of the peninsula at the Rock of Gibraltar on or about April 28, 711. By July, the peninsula's future was sealed in a battle on the banks of the Guadalete River where the Muslims engaged the Visigothic king,

Roderick, routing his army of 100,000 (exaggeration?) men and killing him in the battle.

- ii. Visigothic Toledo falls 711
 - iii. Control of central and southern Iberia by 712
 - iv. Cordoba made the Islamic capital in 716.
- d. Battle of Portiers – 733 – Charles Martel stops movement north.
- e. Islamic Consolidated and Fragmented Authority 711-1492.
- i. 711-756: Era of the Islamic Military Governors
 - 1. 750 – Umayyad Caliphate of Damascus deposed by the Abbasids. One survivor, Abd al-Rahman I takes refuge in Berber North Africa.
 - ii. 756 – Abd al-Rahman I enters Al-Andalus and establishes an independent Amirate.
 - iii. The establishment of the Caliphate of Cordoba by Abd al-Rahman III in 929.
 - 1. It is during Abd al-Rahman III's reign (912-961) that Spanish Islam flowers with dramatic literary, philosophical, artistic, and technological achievements. Under Muslim religious law, Christians and Jews are protected minorities, the dhimmi, and they coexist and flourish in Al-Andalus.
 - 2. Creates his administrative palace city, outside Cordoba, known as Madinat al-Zahra. "City of Zahra" or "City of Fatima"... "favorite daughter of Prophet" = "Fatima". To counter the notion that the Fatimids "owned" the Prophet's lineage.

3. Zenith of Islamic power in Spain, but also critical period, or “Golden Age” of the Jews as well.
 4. Conflict of the Caliphates in the Medieval World
 5. By 929, 3 caliphs in Islamic world:
 - a. Abbasids (Sunni) in Baghdad, since 750
 - b. Fatimids (Shi’is) in Cairo, since 950
 - c. Umayyads (Sunni) in Cordoba, beginning 929.
 - iv. Fragmentation in the Islamic political unit begins in the late 10th and early 11th century, when the Caliphate of Cordoba disintegrates into multiple smaller Islamic states known as Taifa, or Party Kingdoms. These Party Kingdoms will never again re-amalgamate to govern Al-Andalus and will eventually be ousted by 1492.
- f. For your information, regarding the Spanish Reconquest, but will not be discussed today.
- i. After their humiliating defeat in 711, the remnants of the Visigothic Monarchy retreated into the north and independently forming Spanish Christian kingdoms in the north.
 - ii. In contrast to the Muslims, the Christians started at a point of political fragmentation in the 8th century and slowly coalesced into a single political dynasty of the Kingdoms of Aragon and Castile in the late-15th century under King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella.
 - iii. However, the road to Christian political unity in Spain first passed through the Reconquista and the retaking of Muslim al-Andalus/Spain.

- iv. In the 13th and 14th centuries, the Reconquista gained new momentum at the decisive battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212)
- v. Confronted by these demographics, King Alfonso X “The Wise” (1252-1284), the Spanish Christian King of Castile and Leon, found it beneficial to use the fundamentals of the Muslim dhimmi religious contract to govern this complex population.
- vi. 1492 – Granada recaptured by the Christians.
 - 1. Jews expelled in 1492 – creating the Sephardic Diaspora to Everywhere, including the New World.
 - 2. Muslims expelled in 1502 – many went to the Maghrib (present-day Morocco and Tunisia) and Ottoman lands.

III. Convivencia – The Iberian Variant of Tolerance and Intolerance

- a. The word and theme as we know it was coined by Americo Castro (1885-1972), a 20th-century Spanish historian that was attempting to reintroduce and acknowledge Spain’s mixed cultural, ethnic, and biological (“sangre”/”blood”) heritage. There have been significant fights over the issue – as some would rather not acknowledge the mixture.
- b. The origins of the word “convivencia” can be traced back to Ramón Menéndez Pidal, the philologist and historian, whose historical work on the Spanish language Orígenes del español (Origins of Spanish) used the term convivencia de normas (coexistent of norms) to characterize the contemporaneous existence of variant forms in the early Romance languages of the peninsula. Castro, an academic apprentice to Pidal, built his foundation of the coexistence of

- peoples using this framework. What is quite fascinating is that Castro's *convivencia* could not have come into existence without an external actor. The Muslim invasion of the Iberian Peninsula provided for "rare interplay...of the three civilizations of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity."
- c. Castro's *convivencia*, his myth, is an attempt to explain the nature of intercultural life in medieval Spain and Al-Andalus. For Castro it meant more than the physical coexistence of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, it meant the productive tension, cooperation, and conflict produced by their interaction.
 - d. In Thomas Glick's estimation of Castro's idea, he describes *convivencia* as "loosely defined as 'coexistence,' but carries connotations of mutual interpenetration and creative influence, even as it also embraces the phenomena of mutual friction, rivalry, and suspicion."
 - e. What may be the most intriguing portion of Castro's definition of *convivencia* is the conscious role he assigns to the ethnic groups that act out the interactions. He states that they must be self aware of this coexistence and must value "becoming something" in the transformative process. Put simply, Castro requires his historical subjects to be cognizant of the events unfolding around them. Further, *convivencia* becomes a part of each group's consciousness.
 - f. Thomas Glick elaborates:
 - i. The cultural group must attain the ability to express this self-awareness in some form of high culture that becomes, thereby, the moving force of society. Within this idealist construct it therefore follows that the Christians' struggle with Jews and Muslims takes place within the consciousness of Christians; and the same is true...for the other two castes. It is here that *convivencia* attains its special meaning: it is the

coexistence of the three groups, but only as registered collectively and consciously in the culture of any one of them.

- g. Another critical element of Castro's *convivencia* is that it allows Jews, Muslims, and Christians to step out of their pre-defined ethnic roles and to interact in new manners with other ethnic groups. The ability to step out of these roles during the medieval period was extremely difficult due to sharply structured ethnic and religious prescriptions, as well as social class delineations.

IV. **The Islamic Record of Convivencia—Early and Late Variants**

a. Surrender of Cities – *The Treaty of Tudmir*

- i. As was the case in the Middle East, the relatively bloodless surrender of major population centers (cities and towns) was the norm during the abbreviated conquest of Spain. To accommodate these surrenders, treaties were crafted by the Muslims to guarantee protection to the Christians in return for (1) loyalty to the Muslim rulers and (2) the payment of tribute.
- ii. One such agreement from this time period is the *Treaty of Tudmir* of 713, which facilitated the peaceful surrender of the Christian cities of Valentilla, Alicante, Mula, Bigastro, Ello, and Lorca (Constable 37).
- iii. The peace treaty between the Muslim Abd al-Aziz and the local ruler of Murcia, Theodemir, established that the Christian population was a protected entity that would “not be killed or taken prisoner” (Constable 37).
- iv. Abd al-Aziz also guaranteed that, “They [the Christians] will not be coerced in matters of religion, their churches will not be burned, nor will sacred objects be taken from

the realm, [so long as] he [Theodemir] remains sincere and fulfills the conditions that we have set for him” (Constable 37).

- v. These conditions included the payment of yearly taxes and not aiding the enemies of the Muslims (Constable 37).
- vi. Like the *Constitution of Medina*, the *Treaty of Tudmir* governs the general social relationship between the Muslim political authority and the disempowered Christians. In essence, the treaty implemented the existing Muslim norms established by Muhammad and Caliph Umar by guaranteeing minority religious protection in return for loyalty.

b. The Numismatic Record

- i. Next, let us turn to the early numismatic (coinage) record Islamic Medieval Iberia. Here to we can see *convivencia* in action – cooperation and tension not just between Muslim and Christian – but also Muslim and Muslim.
- ii. Allow me to elaborate...
- iii. It is during the first decade of Muslim rule over Iberia, a period of political and cultural transformation, that a most unusual set of Islamic coins appeared in the historical record. Hidden within the substantial collections of the American Numismatic Society are two unique Islamic coins from early medieval Iberia (712) that speak to the central historical issues of political authority and cultural accommodation.
- iv. These are two gold dinars (the standard Islamic coin) catalogued as items HSA 13222 (referred to as Hybrid Coin A) and HSA 57.2138.5 (referred to as Hybrid Coin

B) (Balaguer 1979, 232-233). Hybrid Coins A and B occupy a unique position in the political and cultural transition of early medieval Spain since both reveal Islamic and Christian (Byzantine and Visigothic) influences. These two coins were selected since they are but a few of the material culture elements that remain from the first year of the Islamic conquest of Hispania. They speak to the nature of the time of the conquest and the complex patterns of Christian and Muslim cultural interaction. Clearly, as we will see, they speak of new Islamic authority over and accommodation of the Visigothic Latins.

- v. Similarly, these two coins appear to be representative samples of the Islamic Iberian coinage minted in 712, according to Anna Balaguer, the author of the first study presenting these coins. In addition, my own investigations of scholarly resources confirmed Balaguer's assessment that these coins are representative.
- vi. According to Balaguer, when the Muslims re-conquered Carthage in 699, they followed the tradition of previous conquests by producing coinage that "perpetuated the types previously struck in the region". Thus, before stepping into the Iberian Peninsula in 711, the Muslims had established a standardized minting process that would influence transitional, hybrid coinage for Spain. This occurred in spite of the creation of new standards in Islamic coinage in the East in 692 by Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik (who was back in Damascus).
- vii. What is so remarkable about these coins? The coins were minted under the auspices of the early Islamic governors of Iberia (711-756) and to be expected, did not utilize the pre-existing Visigothic coinage standards. However, surprisingly, the coins were also a radical

departure from medieval Islamic reform coinage standards of the period, which dictated, among other elements, that Arabic was the only language to be used on Muslim coins.

- viii. These early Iberian coins are exceptional because they utilized Latin and Roman numerals to communicate fundamental Muslim religious beliefs to the Christian population majority.
- ix. With an authoritative voice, these coins proclaimed to the Christians, **“In the name of god there is only the sole god and he has no partner,”** and **“In the name of god there is only the sole god, one god, no other god.”** In essence, these Islamic Iberian hybrid coins demonstrated Islam’s political and religious hegemony not only over the subjugated Christian population majority of Iberia, but their language as well.
- x. Furthermore, the Muslims employed Christianity’s holy language (Latin) to dismember its fundamental beliefs, namely the Trinitarian nature of the Christian god, and to reset the Christian’s time-keeping from Christ’s birth to that of Muhammad’s hijrah (the Muslim emigration) from Mecca to Medina in 1/622.
- xi. However, the hybrid coins also hint at another fascinating determination—that is, the Muslims may have found themselves in a tenuous, threatened political and cultural position that necessitated better cross-cultural communication.
- xii. Simply put, the Muslim governors lacked a common language to communicate their authority to the Christian population. The only immediate solution to this problem was to bridge the cultural gap with the use of the Latin language on Islamic Iberian hybrid coins. Muslims utilized the limited political and economic

power of the pre-modern state to mint coinage to communicate “why” the Muslims were the new rulers of Iberia.

- xiii. The new Islamic Iberian hybrid coins declared to the native Iberians, in a language that they could understand, that the Muslim god had granted the Islamic civilization the right to preside over Iberia’s future. Thus, only through the accommodating tool of the Latin language could Muslims bridge the cultural communication gap between themselves and the native Iberians, and in doing so, further their political consolidation over early medieval Iberia.
- xiv. Yes...another case of tension and cooperation—*convivencia*—in Islamic Spain.

c. Cultural Effervescence under Abd al-Rahman III

- i. Lastly, let us take a quick tour of Caliph Abd al-Rahman III’s rule of Islamic Spain. More importantly, let us examine “why” he might have continued to pursue the path of *convivencia*—of selective tolerance.
- ii. As I stated before, as the Spanish Muslim state began to form on the Iberian Peninsula, the religious protection and regulation of Christians and Jews went far beyond the *Pact of Umar’s* basic rules, and was converted into what is known as Spanish *convivencia*.
- iii. It is during 8th century Islamic political consolidation that *convivencia* reaches new heights under the growing power, wealth, and establishment of the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba by Abd al-Rahman III in 929 (Vicens Vives 36).
- iv. From Abd al-Rahman III’s reign (912-961) flowed dramatic literary, philosophical, artistic, and

technological achievements. Abd al-Rahman III, like his father before him, “pursued an ethnically and religiously inclusive policy dedicated to the pacification and unification... [of] al-Andalus” (Gampel 15).

- v. Abd al-Rahman III showered support on the arts and sciences and “sparked a general cultural efflorescence” (Watt 1965, 61-78). In addition, the caliph encouraged Christians and Jews to pursue their own intellectual interests by providing a social structure that was both cultural inclusive and that respected religious minorities (Gampel 15).
- d. Why do this? What began as Muslim toleration and regulation of the Christians and Jews in the 8th century, transformed into a productive partnership between the Muslims and the *dhimmi* in the 9th and 10th centuries. Why was this the case?
- e. A Competition with Christian Kingdoms and the Fatimids and Abbasids
 - i. In addition to a commitment to honor Muhammad’s belief that the Christians and Jews were a protected population, there was a significant need by the Umayyads of Cordoba to militarily compete with the fledging Christian kingdoms in the north of Spain, and to politically compete with the rival Fatimids in Egypt and the Abbasids in Baghdad.
 - ii. With the Spanish Christian *Reconquista* gaining momentum in the 10th century, Muslims needed the economic support from those that lived under their authority. Perhaps the strongest rationale for why *convivencia*, and toleration of the *dhimmi* was possible in Islamic-ruled areas was the simple

economic need for it—it was economically impractical to isolate religious minorities (Meyerson 216).

- iii. While it may have been in the ruling party's interest to restrict the activities of other religious groups, this would have jeopardized the economic stability of the society.
- iv. Similarly, during the 10th century, the second Umayyad Caliphate was in a bitter dynastic confrontation with its brothers, the Abbasids and the Fatimids. The future leadership of the expansive Islamic Empire was at stake as each of these three Muslim political entities competed for political legitimacy and hegemony. One element of the political competition was the status and economic circumstances of the *dhimmi*.
- v. According to Janina Safran, the Umayyads' legitimacy was predicated on successfully communicating that (1) "the caliphs inherited their authority;" (2) they were committed "to the unification of the community;" and (3) "their success and the prosperity of the kingdom proved God's favor" (Safran 20, 51).
- vi. The Umayyad's audiences for this political legitimacy message included the rulers and inhabitants of Al-Andalus, the Christian north, and Muslim North Africa, and "all who might hear of Cordoba, within and outside the Islamic world, now and in the future" (Safran 111).
- vii. Safran's findings are pertinent to the tolerance argument because they suggest that a unified Spanish Islamic community (*umma*) demonstrated that the Umayyads were effectively integrating their

dhimmi, just as Muhammad had done in Medina. A free and tolerated *dhimmi* would demonstrate the Umayyad Caliph's successful imitation of the Prophet Muhammad.

- viii. Likewise, if the Umayyad Caliphate, the state, were to continue to bring prosperity to itself and its inclusive *umma*, this would also be a reflection of their political legitimacy and superiority to the Abbasids and Fatimids. Thus, due to complicated, interlocking rationales such as facilitating swift city surrenders and political legitimacy, the Iberian Muslims continued to implement the values of tolerance (with regulation).

V. In closing, what we see from the historical record is a story of transmission of values of tolerance and intolerance from the seeds of the Qur'an, the Constitution of Medina, and the Pact of Umar. These are characterized and truly communicated in the three examples we viewed today—the Treaty of Tudmir, the hybrid Islamic coinage, and the rule of Abd al-Rahman III. What remains difficult for us today is to accurately interpret “why” these actions, events, and artifacts were created. Rather, we can only theorize that the Muslims were relative consistent, over the long term, in their treatment of religious minorities.