SOME COMMENTARIES ON “THE EARLIEST MUSLIM INVASION OF SPAIN”

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While reading the work of M. Šaghīr Ḥasan al-Maṣūmī,1 I saw the possibility of finding an explanation for a mysterious piece of information in a Christian text of the mid-8th century (A.D.). This explanation would, in addition, corroborate—with some modifications—the thesis of Mr. al-Maṣūmī with regard to the first invasion as related by al-Ṭabarī.

We refer to the so-called Crónica de Alfonso III whose text is known in two versions: “oivetense” and “rotense.” Both are compilations of previous texts by several authors.2 The “oivetense” was compiled during the reign of García I (910-913) and the “rotense” during the reign of Ordoño II (914-924).3 Professor Ubieto dated the first fragment of the Crónica which goes from Wamba to Pelayo as being from the mid-8th century.4 The text which interests us is found precisely in this first fragment, and since it is included in both the “oivetense” and the “rotense” versions we can be sure that we are not dealing with a later interpolation and that it comes, therefore, from a text—or from some annals—of the mid-8th century. The texts in question follow:

“Rotense”

“Illius quoque tempore CCLXX nabes sarracenorum Spanie Litus sunt adgrese; ibique omnes pariter sunt delete et ignibus concremate.”5

“Ovetense”

“Illius namque tempore ducentae septuaginta naves Sarracenorum Yspaniae littus sunt adgressage; ibique omnia eorum agmina ferro sunt deleta, et classes eorum ignibus concrematea. Et ut tibi causam introitus Sarracenorum in Yspaniam plene noteceremus, originem Eruigii regis exponimus.”6

This attack, according to the text, takes place during the reign of Wamba (672-680). The two versions are textually almost identical:7 the “oivetense” version includes at the end a commentary in which there is an attempt to establish a causal relationship between this first
abortive invasion and the successful invasion of Tāriq b. ‘Amr b. Ziyād and Mūsā b. Nuṣayr (711). Before proceeding to an analysis of the text, I should like to insist on the attempt in the “ovetense” version to establish a causal nexus, especially since this fact has not merited the interest of the majority of researchers who have examined the text.8 In fact, as far as I know, only Francis X. Murphy, in his work on Julian of Toledo and the fall of the Visigothic Kingdom in Spain, shows any curiosity:

The author of this particular version “Ovetense” of the Chronicle sees some causal connection between Erwig’s oriental background and the Arabic invasion, though there is no way of knowing whether he is referring to an internal weakening of the Visigothic state, or to something more sinister.9 Wamba’s successor was Erwig, son of a Byzantine named Ardabasto who sought refuge in the court of Chindavisto (642-953). Because of Erwig’s manner of obtaining the throne,10 it is possible to think that the author of the “ovetense” version was in fact alluding to the progressive weakening of the Visigoth monarchy, entangled in endless internecine struggles. On the other hand, we must not forget the genealogy established by the author: Cixilo, Erwig’s daughter, marries Egica (687-702); the son of this union is Witiza (700-710); the author attributes the Muslim invasion of 711 precisely to the “treachery of the sons of Witiza.”11

Thus, it seems probable that the author sees in this blood relationship the cause, first, of the deterioration and, secondly, of the crumbling of the Goth monarchy.12 What is difficult to determine is whether for the author the decisive element in the corruption of the Goth monarchy—in his view, clearly initiated with Erwig—is the treacherous manner of gaining the throne or the oriental origins—with the pejorative cultural and racial connotations which the Christian West has carefully manufactured. Mr. Murphy, who must understand these things, seems to allude to this when he says “or to something more sinister.”

What is important for us is that the author of the “ovetense” has established a relationship between this frustrated attempt at invasion and that of 711, which is much more than modern Spanish historiography, for whom the invasion of 711 continues to be the result of an accident,13 has “chosen” to do.

The dates (672-680) in which the Christian text situates this first invasion do not agree with those proposed by al-Ṭabarî (647-648.)
But I believe that we can reach a reasonably satisfactory solution, since the Christian text from the mid-8th century establishes without any doubt the historical exactness of that first invasion in the last third of the 8th century.\textsuperscript{14}

The greatest difficulty in reconciling the two views rests on the fact that al-Ṭabari's text seems to imply that the Arabs already established themselves in the Peninsula in this first invasion. On the other hand, it is worth noting that not all the texts—themselves depending, to a greater or lesser degree, on the al-Ṭabarī text—concur "unanimously"\textsuperscript{15} with this. For example, it is difficult to reach this conclusion after a close reading of the passage under discussion in the Kitāb ar-Rauḍ al-mīṭārī fī khabar al-aqīr of al-Ḥimyārī.\textsuperscript{16} The only thing we can conclude with certainty is that ʿUthmān was recruiting a contingent to attempt the conquest of al-Andalus. Al-Ḥīmyārī proceeds to affirm—basing himself on Kaʿb al-ʿAḥbār\textsuperscript{17}—that ʿUthmān also said: "grupos de gentes atravesarán el mar hacia al-Andalus y realizarán su conquista: serán fáciles de reconocer por su esplendor en el día de la Resurrección."\textsuperscript{18}

We must take into account that al-Ṭabarī—from whom the other texts are substantially derived—writes a considerable while after the conquest of al-Andalus (he dies in 922). It is quite possible, consequently, that al-Ṭabarī became confused in trying to situate chronologically three undoubtedly certain facts: 1) the evident change in maritime policy between ʿUmar and ʿUthmān; or, more precisely, the recognition by ʿUthmān of the need for a naval policy against Byzantium\textsuperscript{19}; 2) the historical fact of an Arab naval expedition against Hispania; 3) the growing and irresistible conquest and Islamization of North Africa.

Six forty-nine is the true beginning of the maritime war against Byzantium; in 655 is the first great Arab naval victory (battle of Mats). The assertion of Mr. al-Maʾṣūmī that "the whole of Ifriqiyyah up to the Atlantic was under the rule of ʿUthmān" is incorrect. ʿUthmān, advised by ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd, organized a campaign against Ifriqiyyah which, while producing important booty, did not signify the decisive establishment of the Arabs in Ifriqiyyah; this campaign took place around the year 27/647-8.\textsuperscript{20} The total conquest of Ifriqiyyah (Tunec) was realized by ʿUqba b. Nāfiʿ in 670. It is worthwhile noting also that Ifriqiyyah does not geographically include Magrib, as Mr. al-Maʾṣūmī seems to affirm, citing Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī.\textsuperscript{22}

The conquest of Magrib was extraordinarily difficult, as can be
seen from reading Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam. In fact Berberia offered constant resistance until at least 710 when the pact between chief gūmārā Julián and Ṭāriq b. Ziyād was established; this pact led to the invasion of Hispania in 711. Taking this into account, Mr. al-Maʿṣūmī’s statement that “after subjugating Ifriqiyyah and Marrākush, it was natural that the Muslims invaded the mainland of Spain across the sea particularly when they had become the masters of the sea” is correct if applied to the period 709–11. But the crossing of the Straits of Gibraltar took place with the boats of Julian, al-gūmāri.

The first maritime expeditions launched from Egypt and Tripolitania against Sicily and Magrib date from 675; in 681 the famous march of ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’ to Tanger takes place; and in 683 the defeat and death of ‘Uqba before an army of Rūm and Berbers led by Kusayla b. Lamzam occurs.

These facts, I believe, allow us to see how al-Ṭabarī’s confusion was possible. Consequently, al-Ṭabarī’s text, which Mr. al-Maʿṣūmī cites to prove the existence of an Arab group in Hispania: “The affair of al-Andalus continued to be like the affair of Ifriqiyyah till the time of Hishām; the Berbers protecting their land and those in al-Andalus remaining in their own state,” can be interpreted in a somewhat different manner. The mention of Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik places us around 730. The conquest started in 711. Therefore, “those in al-Andalus” refers to the successors of Ṭāriq and Mūsā who were successfully laying the bases for the Islamization of the Peninsula. In contrast with this, there was the difficult situation in Maqrib where the Berber tribes were in continual rebellion; later, these disruptions were to be felt in al-Andalus.

On the other hand, the absolute lack of chronical or even legendary references to this Arab settlement in the Peninsula in 647–8 in the Christian texts is, in my opinion, a conclusive proof that it did not exist. But taking into account the “ovetense” text and its early date, I think it is impossible not to conclude that there was a maritime expedition against Hispania, corroborated by the substantial veracity of the al-Ṭabarī text. Bearing in mind furthermore the number of ships (270) which took part in the expedition, I think it is possible to fix its date around the year 675–6. I base this on two considerations: the Christian text in two versions, the publication date of these (+750) and the large number of ships. The Arabs could only be capable of assembling such an armada after 655 when they began to use the arsenals of Alexandria (evacuated by the Byzantines in 642) and Syria.
Furthermore, the first systematic maritime expeditions along the coasts of Maʿrib date precisely from 675-6.\textsuperscript{32}

Thanks to the work of Mr. al-MacsM and the texts which he opportunely cites, we can today state that there was a first attempt at invasion; that this attempt was determined by 1) the very same expansive dynamic as in North Africa and 2) the awareness of the need to control the Mediterranean as a prime requisite for neutralizing the Byzantine armada and commerce; the security of North Africa required the control of the Andalusian coasts. Even more so, for this need was already consciously articulated in the political strategy of ʿUthmān in 647-8. All of this allows us, I believe, to attack at its foundations one of the most tiresomely pertinent myths of Spanish historiography—Castillian historiography, in fact—: the “accidental” nature of the invasion of the Peninsula, the transformation of Hispania into al-Andalus.\textsuperscript{33}

NOTES


   See Ubieto, op. cit., p. 13.


7. The “ovetense” version uses a relatively more “cultured” language than the “rotense”, as all the investigators have observed. See especially on this question Miguel Stero, “El latín de la ‘Crónica de Alfonso III’ “, Cuadernos de Historia de España, IV; Buenos Aires, 1946, pp. 125-133.

8. See note 2. It is interesting to note that the fiercely polemical tone characterized—and continues to do so—all the research on the text. And when a polemic has this endemic character, it means that fundamentally what is at play are irreconcilable ideological positions.

10. The Visigoth monarchy was elective. According to the *Crónica de Alfonso III* in both versions—"ovetense" and "rotense"—Erwig prepares a drink for Wamba with a certain herb called *spartus*; Wamba drinks it and falls asleep unconscious. Then an archbishop is called who put the discipline of penance on him, rendering him incapable of returning to the world. When Wamba regained consciousness he had no other recourse than to name Erwig his successor (see: *Crónica...*, pp. 12—15). Obviously this is a legend; as Mr. Murphy concludes: "There is no supporting testimony for the story of Wamba's deposition as here recorded...." (Op. cit., p. 18).

11. *Crónica...*, pp. 21 & 23. For relations between this text and Muḥammad b. 'Īsā see my doctoral thesis, *Julían y los hijos de utsīza* (Estudios acerca de las bases ideológicas de dos problemas historiográficos), (Universidad de Valencia); to be published in 1970.

12. Above all bearing in mind the favourable opinion held by the author on the reign of Wamba (*Crónica...*, pp. 11-13). The reign of Wamba was characterized by a series of rebellions—Paul, the Basques—which in some way the monarch managed to control, and by extensive legislation. All this reflects some profound social contradictions which, for a time, Wamba was able to neutralize. See, for example, E. A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain*, Oxford, 1969, pp. 219-231. Also José Orlandis, *Estudios Visigodos*, III, C.S.I.C., Rome-Madrid, 1962; pp. 50-52, 92 & 99.

13. See Note 33.

14. If I have understood it correctly, this seems to be the prime objective of the article of al-Maʿṣūmi. And he is correct in insisting on the substantial veracity of the text of al-Ṭabarî, as opposed to the opinion of the Rumi historians. ("The earliest Muslim invasion...", pp. 98-101).


17. It is important to remember that long before the conquest of al-Andalus legendary news about Hispania and prophecies about her conquest were circulating in Egypt.
The initiators of such traditions were converted Jews to Islam, one of the most important of them was Ka'b al-Abbār (d. 32 or 34/652 or 654). See Maḥmüd Makkī, “Egipto y los orígenes de la histioriografía arábigo-española” in Revista del Instituto de Estudios Islámicos en Madrid”. in V, 1-2; Madrid, 161-162). It seems to me then that this particular text constitutes no proof at all of an actual invasion of Hispania.


21. In his “Futūḥ Iṣrā'īliyya wa-1-Andalus,” Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam affirms that the conquest of Iṣrā'īliyya took place in the year 27/647-8 (Ed. Eliseo Vidal Beltrán, Textos Medievales, Valencia, 1966, p. 26). But, in my opinion, one cannot speak of a total conquest of Iṣrā'īliyya until the foundation of Qayrawān by ‘Uqba b. Ẓā‘ī in 670, as we learn from the reading of the same “Futūḥ” by Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (pp. 26-31).


25. As it is well known, the invasion of 711 was preceded by an expedition led by Ẓāfīr abū Zar’a in July 710/Ramaḍān 91 (Levi-Provençal, “España musulmana (711-1031 d. de J.C.), Historia de España, directed by R. Menédez Pidal, T. IV; pp. 10-13)

26. Mr. al-Maṣūmī refers to 647-8.


32. Most probably, the mysterious text Crónica Mozárabe de 754 must also be placed in the context of Arab-Byzantine maritime warfare for the possession of the East coast of al-Andalus. Teodomir (later Tüdmir) during the co-reign of Egica and Witiza (697-702)"...in graecos qui aequoreo navalique descenderant, sua in patria de palma victoriae triumpharerat." (ed. Flórez, España Sagrada, t. viii, pp. 292-293). E. A. Thompson, mentioning this fact—which he calls "astonishing"—concludes that "we know nothing whatever of the context of this strange event." (The Goths in Spain, p. 249). Placed in this new context, the fact no longer appears astonishing nor the event strange.

33. On this point, the great majority of Spanish historians agree: the Arabs were called by the sons of Witiza to intervene on their side in the struggle provoked by Rodrigo's election to the throne. Ţāriq and Mūsā, once the weakness of the Visigoth state had been proven (battle of Guadalete, June, 711), conceived of the conquest "betraying" in turn the "traitors". (See Sánchez Albornoz, "El Islam de España y el Occidente, L'Occidente e L'Islam..., T. I, 1965. pp. 149-150 and 331-334). For a critique of the sources on which this "accidentalism" of the conquest and its ideological implications is based, see my doctoral thesis (cited above).
OBITUARY

AL-SHAYKH MUHAMMAD AL-FĀDIL B. ʿĀSHŪR

Muslims all over the world are deeply aggrieved on the tragic death of the grand Mufti of Tunis, al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Fādil b. ʿĀshūr. The Shaykh was one of the leading savants of Islam in this age. Besides being a great orator and writer, he played a great role in disseminating the teachings of Islam in the North-West parts of the Continent of Africa. He served a number of Islamic organizations including the Rābiṭa al-ʿĀlam al-Islāmi of Mecca as a very important and enthusiastic member. He also advised the Islamic University of Medina in the capacity of a member of its Syndicate.

The Ministry of Education and National Reconstruction, Syria, nominated him as a corresponding Member of the reputed scientific journal, مجلة اللغة العربية now designated مجلة المجمع العلمي العربي of Damascus.

The Shaykh expired on Monday, ʿṢafar 13, 1390/April 20, 1970 at Tunis. He was in his sick-bed for a long time. His funeral was attended by a number of scholars from al-Maghrib (Marrakush) headed by al-Wazir al-Ḥajj ʿĀḥmad Berkash and other dignitaries of Tunis and other Muslim Countries.

The Marrakush Minister personally conveyed the condolence of Shah Ḥasan to President Ḥābib Abū Raqība and the Prime Minister of Tunis.

It will not be out of place to recall my happy memory of meeting the grand Mufti of Tunisia for the first time in a banquet held by President Bu Raqība in the honour of the Stateguest of Mauritania in October, 1964. The grand Mufti later on, granted me an interview in his great seat of learning, Jāmiʿa Zaitūna, where we exchanged our views on the plans for infusing true Islamic spirit into Muslim masses, and for bringing them back to the Qur’ān and Ḥadith.

His untimely death indeed caused an irreparable loss to the country he belonged and to the whole Muslim world at large.

Let us pray, Allah may forgive him and favour him with His Mercy. May Allah enable his successors to ably carry on with all his noble deeds! We also pray: Allah may console the hearts of his family and grant them ability to endure the great calamity that befell them!

اَنَا لَنَّهِ وَأَنَا لِلَّهِ رَاجِعُونَ

Surely we belong to Allah, and to Him Alone we shall return.

M. Ş. H. Maʿṣūmī.
In the article “Further Notes on al-Šābi’s Kitāb al-Ṭājī” by Wilferd Madelung, Islamic Studies, vol. IX, 1, pp. 81-88, some printer’s errors have occurred in the undotted Arabic words which need correction as follows:

should read:

P. 83  l. 23  مسلا  لمسلا
1. 24  سمالله  شمالله
1. 26  حالكا  حانكجا
1. 32  حالكجا  حانكجا
1. 37  حملحا  حانكجا
1. 40  حانكجا
P. 84  l. 2  حالكجا  حانكجا
1. 27  حسكيه  حانكجا
P. 85  l. 1  سرين  سرين
1. 7  للحاسب  حاسب
1. 25  ماكوعي  بآكوع
1. 25  فاكوشي  فاكوش
1. 26  فاكوشي
P. 86  l. 23  سهرسما  سهريسه

The printer’s errors in the diacritical marks of the transcribed words will, no doubt, be easily recognized by the attentive reader.