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By Dr Amira Bennison

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The Islamic Conquest of Iberia

The Islamic conquest of Visigothic Spain was a continuation of the process of Muslim expansion beyond the Arabian peninsula which began in the mid-seventh century AD. One of Prophet Muhammad's most cherished but unrealised projects was the Muslim conquest of Syria, viewed as a holy land by Muslims as well as Christians and Jews. When he died in 631, his immediate successor, Abû Bakr, decided that the integrity of the fragile Muslim community depended on the fulfilment of the Prophet's wishes. He was proved dramatically right: as conquest followed conquest, the community went from strength to strength.

By 644 Syria, Iraq, Iran and Egypt were all in Muslim hands and Arab armies were pushing into North Africa and Central Asia on the flanks of the empire. The Berbers of West Africa, or the Maghrib, put up considerable resistance but by the early eighth century most of the Berbers had made their submission to the ruler of the Islamic empire, by now the Umayyad caliph in Damascus. This left the way open for the conquest of Visigothic Spain.

The conquest of Iberia was undertaken by newly-converted Berber client troops of the Arab army in the west. Two Berber chiefs, Târiq ibn Ziyâd and Tarif ibn Mullaq, in fact initiated the campaign, and it is possible that the Berbers had already envisaged the conquest of the Visigothic state, weakened as it was by internecine strife and opposition from its Christian and Jewish subjects. Tarif ibn Mullaq led a reconnaissance expedition across the straits and captured Tarîfa, which still bears his name. In 711 Tarif ibn Ziyad led a Berber army across the straits. Córdoba fell in the same year and in 712 the Muslims defeated the Visigoths and took their capital of Toledo. Since the Visigothic kings were anointed in Toledo the fall of the city had symbolic as well as strategic significance and marked the collapse of Visigothic resistance. The Berbers were soon joined by an 18,000-man Arab army led by General Ibn Nusayr.

By 715 the Muslims had moved as far north as Narbonne. They faced almost no resistance until they reached Gaul, where their over-extended supply lines and the opposition of Charles Martel and his son, Pepin the Short, halted their advance. The huge swathe of Iberia which had been added to the Umayyad

empire, known in Arabic as al-Andalus, was initially part of the province, or wilâya, of Ifrîqiya, which had its capital at Qayrawân in modern Tunisia. The Berbers, who had played such an important role in the conquest, were sidelined and an Arab military elite, primarily from Syria, assumed power over a population which was still predominantly non-Muslim.

The region remained part of the Umayyad wilâya of Ifrîqiya until 740, when a huge revolt against the Umayyads broke out in Morocco, cutting al-Andalus off from the Islamic east. The Umayyad caliphate also faced opposition in other quarters: in the east of the empire, in Iran and Central Asia, a more serious challenge to their rule developed from Iranian converts to Islam (mawâlî) who resented Arab monopolisation of government and its concomitant privileges. This movement also drew support from Muslims who believed that members of the Prophet's family should rule the empire, rather than the only distantly related Umayyads. A descendant of the Prophet's uncle, 'Abbâs, was chosen by the rebels as the new caliph, and in 750 the 'Abbâsid army defeated the Umayyad army in Iraq. The new 'Abbâsid caliphate swiftly emerged, accompanied by a purge of the Umayyad family to prevent their partisans resisting the new political order. One of the Umayyads, 'Abd al-Rahmân ibn Marwân, fled west into the Maghrib to avoid his fate. After unsuccessful attempts to carve out a political base in North Africa he continued to al-Andalus. 'Abd al-Rahmân, nick-named 'al-dakhîl', the immigrant, received a warm welcome from Umayyad partisans in the peninsula, in particular from the Arab army leaders. In these circumstances the Umayyad governor of al-Andalus, Yûsuf al-Fihri, who had enjoyed the status of an independent ruler since 740, was forced to cede his authority to the last Umayyad and a new phase in Muslim Spain's history began.

The Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba (756-1031)

The descendants of 'Abd al-Rahmân turned al-Andalus into an independent and prosperous Muslim state, which incorporated two thirds of the peninsula, leaving only the small Christian kingdoms of the northwest—Galicia, Asturias and old Castile—untouched. They presided over the Islamisation and Arabisation of the peninsula, and a flowering of Islamic civilisation which made al-Andalus the centre of western Islamic culture for centuries, and deeply influenced the subsequent Christian culture of the Iberian peninsula.

In the imagination of the Muslims of the west, the Umayyad period in al-Andalus remains a golden age. It is possible to identify three main phases in its history: an initial period of state formation and consolidation accompanied by Islamisation and Arabisation (mid-eighth to ninth century); the high caliphal period (tenth century); and finally a period of decline and political fragmentation (early eleventh century).

During the first century and a half of Umayyad rule, the goal of the Umayyad amîrs was to consolidate their position by integrating recalcitrant Muslim-controlled areas into the state and stabilising the Muslim-Christian frontier in the north. From their capital at Córdoba they gradually asserted the power of central government over local governors and military leaders. This was not an easy process, as many Arab and Berber clans involved in the conquest of al-Andalus were reluctant to relinquish their control over the towns they had conquered and settled. They also pushed northwards, forcing the Christian kingdoms of the north to recognise the frontier. Military activity was accompanied by the creation of a network of fortifications along the frontier: watchtowers, rural forts, fortresses and fortified towns. Stabilisation of the frontier and its secure defence allowed the gradual settlement of Muslims further north and the development of intensive agriculture.

Córdoba, with its Umayyad qasr (fortress-palace) and great mosque, Seville, Toledo, Granada and Valencia all became bustling Muslim towns living off their hinterlands. Commerce also began to develop both with the Muslim Mediterranean and with Christian Europe. Al-Andalus began to serve as a conduit

for Islamic goods to enter Europe, and although she was the lesser partner in trade with the Muslim east, she dominated exchange with Europe, which lacked Andalusian industrial and technological sophistication.

Material incorporation of most of the Iberian peninsula into the Umayyad state was accompanied by gradual acculturation of the disparate groups living under Umayyad rule. This process was facilitated by the Islamic definition of Christians and Jews as *ahl al-dhimma* (people of the covenant), whom Muslims were obliged to protect in deference to their common Abrahamic heritage. In effect Christian and Jewish communities had a religiously defined position within Muslim society which made them inferior to Muslims, but gave them security of life and property, and freedom of (discreet) worship, in return for payment of the *jizya*, or poll tax. Although the status of Jews and Christians fluctuated with economic and political circumstances, the Umayyads maintained a consistent stance towards them. The Jews in particular found themselves in a much better position under Muslim rule than under the Visigoths, who had sporadically engaged in forced conversion of Jewish communities. They rapidly learnt Arabic and became prominent in the trade and administration of Umayyad al-Andalus.

The Christian subject population reacted differently. Assimilation to the dominant Arabo-Islamic culture proceeded apace, creating a large convert population known as the *muwalladûn*. These Hispano-Muslims quickly came to resent their second-class status vis-à-vis the Arab elite, and several revolts occurred, indicating the tensions created by the integration of diverse communities into a single Hispano-Muslim society. The most serious *muwallad* revolt was that of Ibn Hafsûn near Granada in the late ninth century. During the rebellion Ibn Hafsûn dramatically converted to Christianity to signal his rejection of Arab elitism. This revolt also had the support of Arabised Christians who had not converted to Islam, the *musta'ribûn*, or Mozarabs, who also resented their low status within the state.

During this period al-Andalus was politically isolated from the bulk of the Islamic world where the 'Abbâsids of Baghdad held sway. The Umayyads did not recognise the authority of Baghdad, but neither did they actively challenge it. The 'Abbâsids, for their part, simply ignored al-Andalus, which seemed an isolated backwater perching on the western edge of the Islamic world. Despite this mutual lack of political recognition, al-Andalus was linked to the eastern Islamic world, both culturally and commercially.

Andalusian Muslims travelled eastwards to study and trade, and returned to al-Andalus carrying eastern culture, technology and goods with them. Use of the horizontal loom, techniques for the glazing of pottery and irrigation methods all found their way to al-Andalus along the east-west trade axis. In the cultural sphere, the Umayyad elite did not let political antipathy stop them emulating and imitating the glittering 'Abbâsid court at Baghdad and then Samarra as they forged a new Muslim culture on the frontier.

In the early tenth century the efforts of a century and a half came to fruition, and the Umayyad state entered a new phase of cultural and political self-confidence. 'Abd al-Rahmân III (912-961) quelled the last of the *muwallad* revolts and took action against the particularistic tendencies of ruling lineages in Toledo and Seville. Having asserted his political control over the country, 'Abd al-Rahmân instituted a new ethnically and religiously inclusive policy towards the Christian and Jewish minorities. This policy was later called *convivencia*, a term implying the intimate co-existence and cultural sharing of different groups within a single society.

By the tenth century Hispano-Muslim society had crystallised into a Muslim majority with large Christian and Jewish minorities. Arabic was the dominant language, but some members of all faiths also spoke Romance languages. The hallmark of *convivencia* was the Muslim ability to allow Christians and Jews to participate economically, socially, culturally, and sometimes even politically in al-Andalus. Jews and

Christians began to rise to high positions in the state, and find court patronage for their scientific and literary endeavours.

The flowering of Hispano-Muslim society within al-Andalus was accompanied by political changes elsewhere in the Islamic world which enabled al-Andalus to assert a new role in the Islamic ecumene. The 'Abbāsids of Baghdad found themselves puppets to warlords from Daylam, the northeast Islamic fringe, and in Tunisia a Shī'ī Ismā'īlī propagandist drummed up huge Berber support for the Fâtimid movement. The Fâtimids, who claimed to be descendants of the Prophet's daughter, Fâtima, hoped to expand westwards towards Spain and eastwards into Egypt and create a new caliphate. They therefore came into conflict with the 'Abbāsids in the east, but also with the Umayyads of Córdoba who had thriving trade connections with Morocco and Algeria. Up until this time only the 'Abbāsids had claimed caliphal status.

In Muslim political theory, the ideal situation is the unification of all Muslims under a single religio-political leader, the caliph, the English form of the Arabic word for deputy/successor, khalīfa. The caliph is thus the deputy of the Prophet who was the closest representative of God on earth. The position is an exclusive one. The size of the Islamic empire rendered it impossible for a single caliph to maintain exclusive political control, but, following the first four successors of Muhammad and then the Umayyads of Damascus, only the 'Abbāsids called themselves caliphs until the tenth century, since the assumption of the title by another dynasty would have been equivalent to a declaration of war. Although the three centuries of Umayyad rule in Spain are commonly described as the caliphate of Córdoba, prior to the tenth century the Umayyads had held the title of amīr, a military title which also implied princely status and was generally used by political leaders in the Islamic world.

When the Fâtimids began to make caliphal claims, the Umayyads countered the expansion of their influence in the west by themselves assuming caliphal status. In 929 'Abd al-Rahman III officially changed his title to caliph and assumed the regnal title, al-Nâsir li-Din Allâh, meaning the Champion of God's Religion. His regnal title indicated his intention to champion Sunni orthodox Islam against the doctrine of the Fatimids, considered heretical in many quarters, but 'Abd al-Rahmân III also intended to stress his defence of al-Andalus against the Christians, and the imperial span of his power. His right to assume the title was perhaps better than that of any other in the Islamic world, since his ancestors had been the Umayyad caliphs of Damascus, and dynastic iconography quickly reflected this link.

To emphasise his new role, 'Abd al-Rahmân constructed a new royal complex three miles from Córdoba called Madīnat al-Zahrâ'. Throughout, complex decorative styles, including mosaics, evoked memories of Syrian Umayyad architecture: the great mosque of Damascus, the Dome of the Rock, and Syrian desert palaces such as Khirbat al-Mafjar. Madīnat al-Zahrâ' was intended to be the most splendid palace in the Islamic world, an architectural indication that the Umayyads of Córdoba had surpassed both the 'Abbāsids and Fâtimids. It was also the focus for Umayyad court life, for the recitation of poetry and for the cultural exchange which marked the era of convivencia. Under the patronage of 'Abd al-Rahmân and Hasdai ibn Shaprut, the head of the Jewish community, Jewish and Muslim scholars and poets were drawn to Madīnat al-Zahrâ', whilst Bishop Recemundo played an important role in finding Byzantine craftsmen to assist in the caliph's construction projects. Madīnat al-Zahrâ' indeed stood as a symbol for the new pivotal role of al-Andalus in the Muslim world.

Politically, the Umayyad caliph of Córdoba became the foremost Sunnî ruler in the Islamic world, and culturally the western Islamic world began to export its wares—philosophy, poetry and mathematics—to the east. Commercially, the decline of the 'Abbāsids led to the demise of Baghdad as a major trading hub and the development of Mediterranean trading networks linking the two poles of Islamic power, Córdoba and Fâtimid Cairo. A busy trading axis developed from the eastern ports of al-Andalus to Sicily-Tunis and then on to Egypt. The vitality of this route attracted Indian Ocean trade away from the Persian Gulf to the

Red Sea and Egypt, further stimulating east-west commerce. As in earlier periods, al-Andalus funnelled the products of the east into Europe while also deepening trade connections with North Africa, especially Fes and Tlîmsân. This high period lasted for under a century.

By the early eleventh century the Umayyad state was beginning to disintegrate as various members of the military aristocracy began to strain against the over-arching power of the caliphate. In order to supplement the Arab military elite in al-Andalus, the Umayyads imported slave troops from the Black Sea, the saqâliba or Slavs, and Berbers from North Africa. The Berbers in particular proved to be an unruly element and in the early eleventh century, revolted against al-Mansûr, the over-mighty chief minister of the caliph. In 1008 the Berbers sacked Madînat al-Zahrâ', the symbol of the caliphate, and civil war erupted all over al-Andalus.

After over twenty years of civil strife, the caliphate was abolished in 1031. The authority previously held by the Umayyads splintered between Arab, Berber and Slav warlords who possessed their own armies of Berber and Christian mercenaries. This fragmentation of the Umayyad state heralded the era of the mulûk al-tawâ'if, the Party Kings, known in Spanish as the Taifas Reyes.

The Mulûk al-Tawâ'if (1031-1086)

The mulûk al-tawâ'if were the Muslim warlords who ruled the small principalities which sprang up as the Umayyad caliphate broke apart, each jealous of its power and hostile to encroachment by other warlords. This process mirrored political developments in the rest of the Islamic world, where the political power of the 'Abbâsid caliphs was gradually usurped by local military governors and warlords. In al-Andalus the emergence of principalities or city-states was accompanied by the contraction of the area controlled by Muslims. The Christian marcherlords of Castile and Aragon exploited Muslim divisions to push southwards while Muslim rulers, keen to maintain their positions against rivals, hired Christian mercenaries and allied with Christian warlords to gain temporary advantages. The actions of the mulûk al-tawâ'if facilitated Christian penetration of Muslim territory and by the mid-eleventh century many Muslim princes were obliged to pay tribute to Castile.

Despite the disintegration of Muslim central power, the era of the mulûk al-tawâ'if had its positive aspects. The great Muslim cities of al-Andalus remained centres of artistic and literary achievement, since their new rulers were keen to improve their reputations through the patronage of the Islamic arts and belles lettres. Nonetheless, by 1082 the mulûk al-tawâ'if were so concerned by the process of Christian expansion they had set in motion that they appealed to the rising power in Morocco, the Almoravids, to assist them in halting the Castilian advance. They repeated their appeal in 1085 when Toledo fell to the Castilians and in 1086 the Almoravid armies entered al-Andalus. This inaugurated two centuries of North African Berber rule in Iberia as the peninsula became part of the Almoravid and then the Almohad empires.

The Almoravids in al-Andalus (1086-1148)

The Almoravids were Sanhaja Berbers from the Sahara who were inspired by a preacher called Ibn Yâsîn to launch a movement of religious reform which enabled them to create an empire including the Sahara, Morocco, West Algeria and Muslim Spain. The Almoravid Yûsuf ibn Tashfîn conquered North Morocco between 1070 and 1086 and then led his army into al-Andalus in response to the pleas of the mulûk al-tawâ'if. He defeated the Castilians in 1086 at the Battle of Zallâqa and in the next few decades the Almoravids incorporated al-Andalus into their empire. This halted the Christian advance for over a century, but offered scant comfort to the mulûk al-tawâ'if, who lost their independence in the process. The relationship between the Almoravids and the mulûk al-tawâ'if was awkward from the onset:

the mulûk al-tawâ'if resented the over-mighty but rough Saharan nomads, while the Almoravids despised the Andalusians' religious laxity and tendency to fraternise with the enemy.

In 1091 the Almoravids captured Seville, despite its ruler's petition to the Castilians to help him. In 1110, Saragossa, the northernmost Muslim principality, was absorbed by the Almoravids and in 1115 the Balearics also came under Almoravid rule. Al-Andalus became part of an empire whose heart was Morocco, and which nominally owed allegiance to the 'Abbâsids in Baghdad: the Almoravid rulers paid lip-service to the notion of a single caliph and therefore acknowledged the 'Abbâsids, well aware that they had no power to exert any real control beyond Baghdad itself.

The empire was ruled by an Almoravid elite and a corps of jurists, or fuqahâ', who applied the Almoravid principle that the correct form of Islam was a rigorous and literal interpretation of the texts of the Mâlikî school of law. Although al-Andalus was not the political centre of the empire, it exerted considerable cultural influence upon the Almoravids, an influence which persuaded the third Almoravid ruler, 'Alî ibn Yûsuf, to reside in al-Andalus rather than Morocco. Andalusian secretaries were prominent in the administration, and the artistic styles of al-Andalus were used in Almoravid construction throughout the empire.

During this period Andalusian poets, philosophers and scientists such as Maimonides, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Hazm and Ibn Tufayl gained renown throughout the Islamic world. Al-Andalus also became more closely integrated into North African trading networks and Andalusian gold dinars found their way as far south as the Sahara. Despite Almoravid acculturation to the norms of al-Andalus, deep divisions remained between the incursive Berber ruling elite and the established Arabo-Berber Andalusian population.

During the late eleventh century Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, had begun to spread in al-Andalus, where it found a ready audience among the sophisticated thinkers of the region. The addition of mysticism to the theosophical and philosophical background of the Andalusian intellectual elite deepened their resistance to the naive literalism of the Almoravids and their fuqahâ'. The gap between Almoravid doctrine and contemporary Islamic thought was symbolised by the public burning of the works of al-Ghazâlî, the eminent eastern scholar who advocated the assimilation of mysticism with orthodox Islam in order to create an intellectually and emotionally satisfying faith. The clash between the religious position of the Almoravids and the sophisticated, philosophical and nascent mystical trends in Andalusian thought undermined Almoravid rule.

The second factor undermining the Almoravid position in al-Andalus was a succession of military setbacks in the confrontation with the Christian kingdoms of the North. The Almoravids launched two unsuccessful attempts to regain Toledo in 1109 and 1113, and although they managed to stem the Portuguese push south in the west, Alfonso of Aragon captured Saragossa in 1118. The unsettled nature of the northern marches persuaded the Almoravids to use Granada, rather than Seville or Córdoba, as their capital. At the same time the relationship between Muslims and the Arabised Christian and Jewish communities in Muslim areas suffered, and the convivencia which had existed under the Umayyads began to disappear. Arabised Christians (Mozarabs) came to be seen as a potentially seditious group and mass deportations to Morocco ensued. Jews suffered a similar fate: first the Almoravids subjected Jewish communities to heavy poll taxes. Then, after suspicions were raised that Alfonso of Aragon had Jewish backing for his campaigns, Jews were also deported to Morocco. Damage to the Almoravids' military reputation, popular disruption and dislike of Almoravid religious doctrine all combined to fuel an Andalusian rebellion against Almoravid rule which took the form of a renewal of particularist politics.

In 1145 Ahmad ibn Qasi of Merola proclaimed independence from the Almoravids, and in 1147, the ruling lineages of Córdoba, Málaga and other towns followed suit. The Christians were quick to exploit the

situation and in 1148 Alfonso III of Castile grabbed Córdoba and besieged the Muslim-held citadel. Andalusian rejection of Almoravid rule weakened the empire's ability to deal effectively with a new Berber religio-political opposition movement which emerged in the High Atlas mountains in South Morocco. In a dramatically short time the Almohad movement, as it was known, destroyed the Almoravid empire to create an even larger Berber empire in Spain and North Africa.

The Almohads in al-Andalus (1148-1236)

The Almohads killed the last Almoravid ruler in 1145 and as they pressed their advantage in Morocco, they also entered al-Andalus. After a short period of confusion they took control of Córdoba and the Muslim southwest, leaving the Muslim east, Valencia and Murcia in the hands of Ibn Mardanish, a Christian convert to Islam. Having shored up the Muslim position in al-Andalus, the Almohads then turned their attention to consolidating and expanding their empire in North Africa. In a short time they had conquered the whole region as far as Tunisia, where they expelled the Normans who had recently taken Sicily and several points on the North African coast.

In the reign of Abû Ya'qûb Yûsuf (1163-1184), the Almohads consolidated their position in al-Andalus, which had now become a peripheral part of a great North African empire. Abû Ya'qûb Yûsuf crossed into al-Andalus twice: firstly in 1172, when he persuaded the rulers of Valencia and Murcia to submit to his rule; and secondly in 1183, when he relieved Santarem, Córdoba, Granada and Málaga from a joint Portuguese-Castilian offensive. He died from wounds received during this campaign.

Abû Ya'qûb was succeeded by Abû Yûsuf Ya'qûb al-Mansûr (1184-1199), who stemmed the Christian advance at the battle of Alarcos (1195). Ya'qûb al-Mansûr also ordered the construction of the Almohad great mosques of Seville, Rabat and Marrakesh. Although the Almohads were as religiously austere as the Almoravids they did not reject orthodox mysticism or philosophy and became great patrons of Andalusian philosophy. Both Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Rushd, known to Europe as Averroes, were members of the Almohad court, and regularly discussed philosophy and medicine with the Almohad caliphs. The Almohads were nonetheless uncompromising in their views, as the stern beauty of their monumental architecture, now represented in Spain by the Giralda of Seville, implied.

In the early thirteenth century, the tide suddenly turned and the Christian offensive against Muslim Spain abruptly intensified. At the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212) the Castilians defeated the Almohads, whose authority in Spain immediately crumbled. As the power of the Almohads waned and their empire fragmented into successor states, the Castilians and Aragonese surged forward. Valencia and Murcia fell, and then, in a single Castilian campaign down the valley of the Guadalquivir, Córdoba (1236) and Seville (1248) were captured. Just as the fall of Toledo in 1085 had marked a stage in the Christian advance south, the fall of Córdoba was of deep significance. Although the attack was unplanned and caught Ferdinand III off guard, he rushed to Córdoba and celebrated the city's fall with a symbolic Te Deum of victory in the great mosque. Córdoba was never recaptured by the Muslims and served from that time as the main Castilian base for the conquest of the Muslim south. Its fall also marked the start of Christian population movements south and the displacement of Muslim populations who sought refuge in Granada. The reconquista had begun.

The Last Muslim Outpost: Nasrid Granada (1237-1492) Nasrid Granada, along with the principalities of Niebla in the west and Murcia in the east, emerged as the Almohad empire fell apart. Whilst Niebla and Murcia were soon absorbed by Castile and Aragon respectively, Granada held its ground as the last Muslim state in the Iberian peninsula for two and a half centuries. From the mid-thirteenth century Muslims in Spain had either to accept Mudejar, or subject, status under Christian rulers, or to migrate to Granada. Many chose the latter option and, as a result, Granada became the site of a late flowering of

Islamic culture in the peninsula which deeply influenced decorative styles in Marinid Morocco.

The character of Granada was very different from the culture of Umayyad Córdoba. Whereas the Umayyad state had encouraged cultural exchange in a period of Muslim self-confidence, Granada cultivated an exclusively Arabo-Islamic tradition which had no place for the Christian Mozarabs, or for any language but Arabic. The battle-lines were now drawn and, although Muslims and Christians continued to interact, change sides, and on occasion put politics before religion, the convivencia of Umayyad al-Andalus was gone. Even the emergence of Nasrid Granada followed a paradigm of state formation more common to North Africa than Spain: a charismatic religious leader from the countryside, Muhammad ibn al-Ahmar, led his followers to capture a key city which then became the capital of a new state. After the establishment of the state, in this case Granada, charismatic religious beliefs were quickly swapped for orthodox establishment Islam which allied the state and the urban elite against the Christian advance. Granada survived through a combination of astute diplomatic manoeuvring with the Christians and sporadic appeals to the Marínids of Morocco for assistance.

Granada was greatly helped by its geo-political position: protected from the Christians to the north by the Sierra Nevada, it also enjoyed access to the trading networks of the Muslim Mediterranean. This access enabled Granada to continue to export silk and lustreware pottery and import foodstuffs if necessary. The most famous Granadan contribution to Islamic material culture in Spain was the Alhambra, or al-Hamrâ' (the Red) palace. The unification of Aragon and Castile through the marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile signed Granada's death warrant. The emergence of a united Christian bloc undermined Granada's ability to use one Christian power against another. At the same time the demise of the Marínid dynasty in Morocco left Granada without a strong Muslim ally to call on. During the 1480s Christian forces gradually nibbled away at Nasrid territory, reaching Granada in 1492. The ruling Nasrid, Abû 'Abd Allâh Muhammad, decided to negotiate the town's surrender rather than withstand a siege. In return for guarantees of freedom of worship for the Muslims of Granada, he handed the keys of the al-Hamrâ' to a representative of the Most Catholic Kings and left Granada. Muslim political control in the peninsula finally came to an end but large numbers of Muslims remained. The intolerance of the new Catholic establishment and its inability to recreate any kind of convivencia or assimilate Muslim populations led to a series of Muslim revolts and expulsions. These marked the real end of Islam in Iberia.

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