

‘They are the most treacherous of people’: religious difference in Arabic accounts of three early medieval Berber revolts¹

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‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb, a jurist and historian who died in the middle of the ninth century, concluded his account of the eighth-century Muslim conquest of his native Iberia with an extended dialogue scene, set at the court of the Umayyad caliphate (r. 661-750) in Damascus. The dialogue is between Mūsā b. Nuṣayr, the commander of the conquest armies, and Sulaymān b. ‘Abd al-Malik, who had recently succeeded his brother al-Walīd as caliph. It takes a conventional form: a series of terse questions from the caliph (“Tell me about al-Andalus!”) are met with responses that have the ring of aphorism. Here stereotypes dwell, not least in the comments on Berbers:

[Sulaymān] said, “Tell me about the Berbers.” [Mūsā] replied, “They are the non-Arabs who most resemble the Arabs (*hum ashbah al-‘ajam bi-al-‘arab*) [in their] bravery, steadfastness, endurance and horsemanship, except that they are the most treacherous of people (*al-nās*) – they [have] no [care for] loyalty, nor for pacts.” (Ibn Ḥabīb, 148)²

The conquest had taken place over a century before this narrative was written. By all accounts, Berbers – recruited during the long conquest of North Africa – had made up the overwhelming majority of the army that crossed the sea to Iberia. Subsequent decades brought waves of additional Arab settlers to al-Andalus (Islamic Iberia), but Berbers remained an important demographic force in the Peninsula. Politically, however, they were out in the cold for long stretches of Andalusī history, and culturally their position was an ambiguous one. Indeed, in the literary sources – the chronicles and geographies of the Andalusī past and present – we really only hear of Berbers in four contexts: as members of the army; as mercenaries or invaders from North Africa; as semi-idolatrous ethnographic curios over the sea in North Africa; and as rebels, often sectarian ones. Indeed, the very term ‘Berber’ is a problematic one, imposed upon a great diversity of peoples and languages by hostile observers: an expression of contempt derived from the Latin *barbarus* (barbarian, itself derived from βάρβαρος in Greek)³ and associated with the verb *barbara* (to babble, speak nonsense) in Arabic. As Michael Macdonald has noted about Roman discussions of the Arabs, often the terminology tells us as much or more about the namers than the named (279-80, 290-7). Since alternative terms are linked to a greater or lesser degree with modern nationalist movements, however, and are often in their own way exclusionary, I will continue to use ‘Berber’ as an (imperfect) umbrella term, while remaining aware that I am in some measure contributing to the Othering discourse under discussion (Hoffman 2007, 13-22; Brett and Fentress 4-7).

It is the image of the Berber as rebel that I intend to discuss in this article. I shall examine the role that sectarian messages played in the development of Berber revolts, with a

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² The same passage appears some 450 years later in the North African historian Ibn ‘Idhārī’s (d. c. 1307) *Bayān al-mughrib* (II, 21).

³ An onomatopoeic coinage meaning ‘those whose speech is blah, blah (*bar, bar*)’.

particular focus on how and why non-Berber Muslim authors used the language of heterodoxy to describe these rebels. My goal is to investigate the literary category of ‘Berber’ in al-Andalus, and whether the use and presentation of this category changed over time, notably in works written after the fall of the Iberian Umayyad caliphate in 1031. I shall begin by discussing the present state of research on patterns of Berber settlement in al-Andalus and medieval understandings of heresy in Islam, followed by an outline of the literary stereotyping that medieval Arabic writing attached to the figure of the ‘Berber’. I shall conclude by looking in detail at presentations of three early medieval revolts.

Berber settlement patterns

Medieval and modern scholars alike have long sought to trace a connection between the shape of Muslim settlement in al-Andalus – where settlement was concentrated, and the forms it took – and ethnic groupings within Andalusī society. Medieval commentators, such as the easterner al-Ya‘qūbī (d. c. 900), portray an ethnic divide, with Arabs living primarily in towns and Berbers in more remote, mountainous areas such as Extremadura (354-5). More recent work, where it has not simply taken the division for granted, has attempted to build evidence for this picture, with varying degrees of success (Guichard 1977; Ṭāha 166-82; Kennedy 16-18; Cruz Hernández 61; Fierro 2005, 201, 206-7). Pierre Guichard has argued on the basis of Arabic texts, possible Berber toponym survivals, material remains of household organisation, and patterns of irrigation, that the medieval Berbers lived in segmentary clan groups in rural areas like Valencia, with little day-to-day reference to wider political or social organisation (1998, 148-9 and 151-5; 1977, 223-5 and 249-50).

This putative ethnic-territorial divide has sometimes been portrayed as a consequence of Arab chauvinism driving the Berbers from political and economic centres, and from more fertile land. Arabs, and increasingly also the Hispano-Roman Muslim converts known as *muwalladūn*, dominated administrative posts and the cultural patronage associated with the Umayyad capital of Córdoba (Oliver Pérez 2001, 329-3; Guichard 1992, 690-1; Fierro 2005, 216-17; Vallvé 1985, 576). But it is also possible that Berbers had compelling reasons to choose such lands – that they were herders rather than farmers, for example. Furthermore, Guichard has pointed out that mountainous areas were distant from not just urban life, but centralised control (1977, 251-3); groups might, therefore, have opted to trade comfort for autonomy. Many of the regions most strongly associated with Berber settlement were frontier zones; when Córdoba’s reach was weakened by political circumstance, these were the regions where ambitious individuals and families – whether Arabs, Berbers, or *muwalladūn* – could carve out autonomy for themselves, or accumulate power for a strike at the centre. In the late ninth century, a Berber clan, the Banū Tajīt, ruled outright in Guadiana (Guichard 1977, 198); our eastern observer al-Ya‘qūbī seems to have been aware of this possible link between separation and power when he noted that the Berbers of Valencia in his day, as he put it, “do not offer obedience to the Umayyads” (355). The phrasing is an important one, and I shall return to this point below.

It should be noted that other work, however, has challenged the picture of ethnic-territorial – and lifestyle – division. Eduardo Manzano Moreno has argued that the Berbers were not the nomadic, rural blank slate that medieval Arabic sources often portray them as; in fact, large sections of the Berber population of North Africa were urbanised – and Romanised – long before the Muslim conquests (1990, 417; Rushworth 86-8; Brett and Fentress 50-80), and many may well have been Latin speakers (Wright 2012a, 2012b). Nor did the coming of Islam to North Africa spell the end for Roman and Byzantine cities there, as has often been suggested (Fenwick 10-11, 14-16, 20-30). Berber as a language disappeared quite quickly in Iberia, for the most part (Vallvé 1985, 569), but Berber-Arabic bilingualism persisted in some

areas (Glick 2005, 203-4). Andalusī biographical dictionaries show us Berber families that produced urban official and scholars aplenty in the early period – albeit often through clientage links with Arab families, especially the Umayyads (Fierro 2005, 204-5). Guichard’s arguments about Valencia have yet to be borne out conclusively by archaeological investigation (Glick 1996, 193-9; Bazzana 1992, 187-202),⁴ and research by Manuela Marín has been unable to confirm the predominance of endogamy on which much of Guichard’s formulation rests (Marín 22; Manzano Moreno 2006, 139-46).

Finally, while the so-called *ḥiṣn-qarya* model of land ownership – that is, a fortification (*ḥiṣn*) overseeing and protecting a neighbouring agricultural village (*qarya*) – may seem to indicate decentralised social organisation along tribal lines (Bazzana 1998, 222-3 and 232-3), there is no evidence that such arrangements were the sole province of Berbers, nor that they were truly autonomous. The *ḥiṣn* functioned differently in different times and places; some date from the ninth century, but most are from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, and their primary purposes seem to be defence in frontier zones (Bazzana 1998, 228-9) or the protection of shared irrigation sources (Glick 2002, 116-20). There is now increasing acceptance that the *qā'id* who controlled the *ḥiṣn* was an agent of the central government, not an independent ‘lord’ or clan head (Boone and Benco, 61-2).

Literary stereotyping

Whatever the reality of the Berbers’ place in Andalusī society, a certain ‘Berberphobia’ within the Arabic-language literary tradition is undeniable: the dominant culture drew an essentialising portrait of the subordinate group. Parallels between this situation and Roman descriptions of the Arabs were noted above; the Arabs themselves, in turn, used their pens to belittle a whole range of non-Arabs in the early Islamic period, not just the Berbers.⁵ In our texts, individual Berbers may be lionised, particularly Mūsā’s deputy Ṭāriq b. Ziyād, who launched the conquest of Iberia, her hero of most accounts (Clarke 25, 62-4, 98-100). But as a group, Berbers were subject to considerable hostile stereotyping in literary texts, whether Andalusī, Egyptian, or eastern. The overriding portrayal is of the Berbers as ‘*ajam*: non-Arabic speaking barbarians who are barely controllable, barely civilised, and barely Muslim. Speculations on the Berbers’ origins emphasised their lack of close kinship with the Arabs (Shatzmiller 147-9),⁶ or else cast them as antagonists to the grand march of monotheistic history: the Egyptian jurist Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam in the ninth century, and the eastern travel writer al-Mas‘ūdī in the tenth, for example, both name the paradigmatic barbarian Goliath (*Jālūt*) as the ancestor of the Berbers, with the former claiming the Berbers migrated westwards from Palestine after Goliath’s death (Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam 170; al-Mas‘ūdī §§ 93, 100-1, 1106).⁷ Al-Ḥamdānī (d. 945) wrote that the Berbers had received nine-tenths of the world’s violent character (Glick 2005, 208). The very name ‘Berber’ could be used as an insult (García Gómez, 10). Even the *Chronicle of 754* – an Andalusī Christian work written in Latin, fifty years after the Muslim conquest – appears to

⁴ Glick also notes (201-4) that any community engaging in irrigation must have contact with its neighbours up- and downriver. Bazzana highlights cultural parallels in the material evidence, like large communal serving dishes and the organisation of living space (e.g. large central courtyards) in Andalusī houses, but notes that there is no sign of separation of male and female space.

⁵ This sparked something of a backlash in the form of the pro-non-Arab literary movement known as the *shu‘ūbiyya*, which primarily involved Persians (Gibb; Goldziher 1966; Mottahedeh; Savant), but did also create some ripples in al-Andalus (Monroe).

⁶ Often they were said to be descended from Noah’s son Ham, not Shem like the Arabs (de Felipe 380-4; Norris 33-4); the Berbers responded with their own myths of kinship with the Arabs (Shatzmiller 145, 152).

⁷ The latter also notes (§1167), that some believe the Berbers came from Yemen, an argument that re-emerged in Moroccan schools in the mid-20th century (Hoffman 2007, 14).

have picked up on Arab antipathy. Describing a skirmish during the Berber revolt of 740 – the first of many (Berber) challenges to (Arab or Arabicised) state authority in the Muslim west – its anonymous author writes that an Arab cavalry charge “recoiled instantly due to the colour of the Moors’ [i.e. Berbers’] skin” (§84), drawing an explicit line of racial difference and physical repulsion between Arab and Berber Muslims.

This trend of generalised hostility to the idea of Berbers became more pronounced after the fall of the Córdoba Umayyad regime in 1031. The Umayyad family, once rulers of the entire Muslim empire from their capital at Damascus, had found refuge in al-Andalus during the 750s, after a coup back east saw a rival family, the ‘Abbāsids, seize power. This distant western province was so far from Damascus, and so apparently unremarkable in the grand scheme of Islamic empire, that the ‘Abbāsids never expended the effort to stop the surviving Umayyads re-establishing themselves there. There is a certain irresistible parallelism about Umayyad fortunes in al-Andalus: they arrived, in 756, in the wake of one Berber revolt – that of the 740s, the first revolt discussed below – and their regime was overthrown less than three centuries later by what has often been characterised as another. The two decades leading up to their fall (1009-31) are widely labelled by the Arabic chronicles as a *fitna*, a term used to denote major upheaval or civil war, and which has explicitly religious connotations. The first century of Islam had been shaped and scarred by a pair of *fitnas* – expressions of competing ideas about religio-political authority and belonging, in the first of which lie the roots of the Sunnī-Shī‘ī split – whose rights and wrongs chroniclers and jurists continued to theorise about, well beyond the period under discussion. A *fitna* was a trauma, a division at the heart of a community (the Muslim *umma*) that should not be divided. To call something a *fitna*, then, was both to heighten its emotional charge, and to make a claim for its religious significance.

In the wake of 1031, to judge from the surviving literary works, many blamed the *fitna* on recent Berber immigrants: that is, the North African mercenaries introduced into the Andalusī army by the Umayyad caliph al-Ḥakam II from the 970s (Scales 68-73, 165), as distinct – perhaps – from the earlier waves of Berber settlers in al-Andalus. A number of writers who lived through or after this period were extremely hostile to Berbers. Ibn Ḥayyān (d. 1076) – on whose chronicle, the *Muqtabis*, we are dependent for much of our history of the caliphate – lost everything in the *fitna*, for which he held the Berbers responsible (Scales 3), whose bad character he was not shy about tracing back into pre-*fitna* history. Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) likewise castigated the more recently-arrived Berbers for their lack of assimilation to polite Andalusī – that is, Arabic and Islamic – norms (Manzano Moreno 1990, 425). Even a post-1031 work in praise of the Berbers – the anonymous *Kitāb mafākhīr al-barbar* – comments that they were widely seen as “the most contemptible of peoples (*akhass al-umam*)” (*Tres textos*, 125-6). This last work only gave the label of Berber to tenth-century and later arrivals, leading Joaquin Vallvé to question whether the earlier ‘Berbers’ of the literary sources were actually Berbers at all (1992, 58-9).

Andalusī geographical works discussed Berbers’ past paganism and present heterodoxy,⁸ and they used eastern models of describing barbarian Others to categorise, explain, and condemn the Berbers. Just as the Andalusīs had seen their world upended by ‘barbarian’ outsiders, so, in 1055, had the Arabic and Persian writers of the east watched a clan of Turkic nomads become the *de facto* rulers (‘*sulṭāns*’) in Baghdād. Turks, as mercenaries and slave soldiers of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate for several centuries, had long been scapegoated as a disruptive force, and many literary works linked these outsiders with the eschatological horrors of Gog and Magog (*Yājūj wa-Mājūj*), by postulating a shared descent from Noah’s son Yapheth (al-Bakrī §567). Andalusīs borrowed and adapted this idea; the

⁸ Al-Bakrī §§1092 and 1102 (worship of idols), 1274 (a note on the presence of Khārījites, on whom see below).

geographer al-Zuhrī, for example, writing in the latter half of the twelfth century, makes the same link, but adds the Berbers to the family (§161). As with the idea of the Berbers' kinship with Goliath, we see writers in Arabic expressing their discomfort with Berbers by constructing them as not only ethnic but scriptural Others.

Post-1031 geographical writing also features anecdotes about magical talismans, erected to ward off Berber invasion. One comes from the Andalusī geographer al-ʿUdhri (d. 1085):

It was related that, in the vicinity of the city of Elvira, [there was] a stone image (*ṣūra*) of a horseman, which children used to ride. Part of it was broken. It was said that in the year when the *ṣūra* was broken, the *fitna* overwhelmed Elvira, and the Berbers entered it. That was the first year of its ruin. (88)

This is a re-working of a literary trope common in medieval Arabic accounts of the Muslim conquest of Iberia, used here to explain why the *fitna* came to afflict this particular part of al-Andalus: the statue is a protective seal that keeps the land inviolate until the day when it is destroyed, whether through human folly or fate, just like the so-called 'House of Locks' in Toledo is said to have been penetrated by the Visigothic king Roderick in 711, and so brought about the Muslim invasion and his kingdom's fall (Clarke 33-5, 149-50).

Another notable warding statue is said to have existed at Cádiz, as part of the lighthouse there. Earlier Andalusī writers, like Aḥmad al-Rāzī (d. 955), had followed Classical and Late Antique authorities in attributing this to Hercules (Lévi-Provençal), but after the 1031 *fitna*, the story changed to fit a new context. Yāqūt (d. 1229), an enormously influential eastern geographer, says that the Cádiz statue was built – by a suitor competing for a local woman's hand – with the aim of protecting Iberia against the Berbers (IV, 290). This legend is an adaptation, recalling one that Graeco-Roman tradition associated with Sicily (*Fragmentary* II, 177);⁹ and it was evidently constructed with hindsight, since al-Zuhrī reports that the statue was destroyed in 1145-6, some time before Yāqūt wrote his account. He adds, rather more prosaically than some of his fellow scholars:

The people of al-Andalus used to think that it was a talisman related to activity in the sea, and that if it was destroyed no-one would be able to enter the sea. But when it was destroyed, nothing changed. (§239)

In short, Berbers were a sinister Other for many of the historians, geographers and other writers whose literary imagination shapes our knowledge of al-Andalus: a threat to the social and political order. And in the medieval Islamic world, society and politics were inseparable from religion.

Heresy in Islam

Before we turn to more detailed case studies, it is necessary to discuss, briefly, conceptions of heresy and heterodoxy in Islam. It is frequently pointed out that heresy, in the Christian sense, is not a concept that fits easily into an Islamic context (Lewis 52). There is no single Muslim church, universally recognised as having the authority to make pronouncements on correct and incorrect doctrine; nor is there a Sunnī, or a Shīʿī one, although for a time various Shīʿī sects were led by lines of *imāms*, spiritual (and, where

⁹ Alaric, we are told, could make the crossing to Sicily because of a magical statue, built to keep away both barbarians and 'the fires of Etna'; once destroyed, its protection was removed and Sicily was ravaged.

possible, political) authorities by virtue of their descent from the Prophet Muḥammad's nephew and son-in-law, 'Alī. After the death of the Prophet, the fledgling community was united under the religio-political authority of the caliphs, but – as noted above – competing ideas as to who was entitled to be a caliph, and on what grounds, soon challenged that unity. For the group that would become the Shī'a, the community's rightful ruler – and the illuminator of its doctrine and laws – could only come from the line of 'Alī (Halm 2004); for the Khārijites, who will be discussed further below, those who 'went out' from the community during the first civil war, the leader could be anyone, if they were a strict adherent of scriptural law, and agreed upon communally.

What eventually became known as the Sunnī conception of authority took several centuries to develop, and resided largely in the interpretation of a body of tradition: that is, in the Qur'ān and the *sunna* of the Prophet (accumulated anecdotes of his words and deeds). This knowledge was passed down by legal scholars, orally and in writing, and used by them to make legal judgements. Some jurists had state-sponsored roles, but the training and affiliation of jurists lay with their peers, who over time came to be grouped into four main legal schools. But even a legal school (*madhhab*) did not operate as a body, issue corporate judgements that it could expect to be universally accepted, or have the collective authority to determine heresy as we understand it. Islamic law was about many individual authorities, who not infrequently disagreed; Islamic orthodoxy, likewise, was in the eye of the beholder, and endlessly mutable, even if it was always couched in the language of tradition. This is not to say medieval Islam was a free-for-all; medieval Muslims certainly held that there were correct and incorrect beliefs (Melchert 85-7, 89-93). Rather, the question of who was entitled to circumscribe and enforce correct belief belonged in multiple hands and minds.

Nonetheless, individuals and groups were targeted by authorities for holding – or, perhaps more pertinently, displaying and proselytising for – wrong beliefs (Fierro 1987, 101-2, 113-18). States and rulers did, usually in conjunction with particular schools or individually influential scholars, pick a definition of orthodoxy against which to judge their opponents, who were duly rendered religious deviants (Judd). The most famous example of this is the *miḥna* ('inquisition') of the early ninth century, when the 'Abbāsīd caliph al-Ma'mūn attempted to use a disagreement over the nature of the Qur'ān to force the burgeoning scholarly elite of Baghdad to acknowledge his authority to formulate doctrine; he failed, and thereafter Muslim rulers largely had to approach such issues in conjunction with scholars (Cooperson 113-21; Melchert 8-16; Turner). The Umayyad rulers of al-Andalus, for their part, forged a relationship with the Mālikī school; Mālikī jurists provided the *amīrs* and caliphs with legal advice and public support, in return for official backing and preferential treatment for the school's jurists: the appointment of Mālikīs to the post of chief judge (*qāḍī*), for example.

Medieval Islam lacked a catch-all term like 'heresy', although a word like *zandaqa* – meaning 'Manichaeism', initially – came to cover that ground to some degree, and its use in al-Andalus has been explored by Maribel Fierro (1987-88, 251-8). More common were charges whose shades of meaning are indicative of the medieval Islamic community's priorities and preferred discourse, such as *bid'a* (impermissible innovation, i.e. a deviation from tradition, although one generation's innovation could be the next's accepted practice), or *ridda* (apostasy, which could mean not only an active change of religion but also the denial of core Islamic religious duties, like paying *zakat* [alms tax]) (Kraemer 36-7). Most important for present purposes is the conflation of terminology for revolt, heterodoxy, and apostasy. Since a Muslim ruler's authority was ordained by God, rebellion against a ruler, a threat to the established order, was a strike against God too. This was something the Umayyads in al-Andalus were particularly keen to emphasise – through public ceremonial, literary patronage, and regular military campaigns – given their breakaway independence (after 756) from the

wider Islamic caliphate, whose legitimacy they rejected, and the frequency with which they faced revolt at home (Safran).

To medieval heresiographical scholars, too, perhaps the most famous of whom was Shahrastānī (d. 1153), sectarian division was rooted in error, and error lay chiefly in failure to obey rightful rulers (22-7).¹⁰ Obedience, to a ruler and to one's communal duties as a Muslim, was a cardinal virtue; disobedience threatened the unity of the community, insulting God and threatening the well-being and salvation of all. In many ways it was the act, rather than wrong belief, that was the issue; a degree of difference in opinion could be tolerated, provided that communal duties were fulfilled, as is most famously exemplified through the protection (*dhimma*) and freedom of worship afforded to Christians and Jews (known as *dhimmīs*), in return for payment of a state poll tax. Being a medieval Muslim was a communal endeavour: leaving the community was a religious statement, and legal writings on apostasy and heterodoxy focus very much on encouraging apostates to "return to obedience" and rejoin the community (Qur'ān 49:9; Kraemer 48-9). In theory, rebellion was only a capital crime if an attempt was made to justify the disobedience using a *ta'wīl* (a reading of the Qur'ān that was excessively different from accepted norms) (*EP*² X, 390-2); in practice, however, an Andalusī *amīr* would condemn any rebel as an apostate.

It has been argued in the past, by scholars such as Ignaz Goldziher (1963 91-6), that al-Andalus was somehow a uniquely conservative Muslim state, and that the Mālikī law was a uniquely intolerant, even "fanatical" one. This is a picture shaped largely by the likes of Ibn Ḥazm – a detractor of the Mālikīs, with whom he had clashed, as well as of the Berbers – and has been challenged in recent years. Al-Andalus was more diverse, religiously, than used to be appreciated (Aguadé 54-60). Nevertheless, the *amīrs* and caliphs clamped down on any heterodox movement they had the resources to deal with, seizing upon such movements as way to display their orthodox piety and ability to protect the community from rogue elements. The Umayyads of Córdoba, after all, had a point to prove, both at home and abroad, since they did not offer allegiance to the new, usurping 'Abbāsīd rulers in the east; and after 929, when the Umayyad 'Abd al-Raḥmān III (r. 912-61) dropped the subordinate title of *amīr* for the universalist one of caliph, he was laying claim to religious authority over the whole Islamic world. In doing so, he raised the stakes at home, and made a statement abroad: rebelling against a regional *amīr* was one thing; rebelling against a caliph was something else entirely.

Revolt 1: The Berber Revolt

Unrest and conflict were endemic in al-Andalus in this period, although the levels waxed and waned according to the strength of the regime, and perhaps also due to broader trends, such as grain prices (Marín-Guzmán 186 and 218). It was not simply a case of Arabs against Berbers (or either against *muwalladūn*). There were, as discussed above, social, political and geographical distinctions between ethnic groups, but each group was also internally divided along political and factional lines: the Arabs into *baladīs* (the earliest post-711 settlers) and Syrian *junds* (settlers of the 740s wave) (Manzano Moreno 1998, 86-8), for example, or the powerful old families resisting Córdoba centralisation, as in the late ninth-century revolt of Seville, which resulted briefly (c. 899-913) in an autonomous amirate (Carabaza 41-3; Guichard 1992, 683-4). Among the Berbers, there was conflict between tribal elites – many of whom relied for their power and status at least in part on their relationship with the Umayyads – and religious leaders (Manzano Moreno 1991, 256-7).

¹⁰ Shahrastānī did not advocate that a believer should follow a ruler blindly, without reflecting on what was being asked, however (41).

Most the revolts of the eighth and early ninth centuries centred on groups of Arabs or Berbers, although as the ninth century wore on, *muwalladūn* also became involved (Guichard 1977, 306-7). These rebels were often prominent families with a regional power-base, such as the Banū Qasī ('the sons of Cassius'), who dominated Aragón until the ninth century (Guichard 1974, 1508; Kennedy 69-72).

The Berber uprising of the 740s is easily the most famous of the episodes under discussion in this article, to the extent that it is known simply as 'the Berber revolt' in modern scholarship (Aguadé 64-5; Brett and Fentress 87-8; Manzano Moreno 2010, 590-3), and even in some medieval works (Ibn al-Qūṭīya 14: "*thawra al-barbar*"). I shall concentrate here on two contrasting accounts of these events. Writing the tenth century, at the height of the Córdoba Umayyad caliphate's confidence and power, was the grammarian Ibn al-Qūṭīya (d. 977). As his name ('son of the Gothic woman') indicates, Ibn al-Qūṭīya had Visigothic ancestors, and his chronicle is unique in the way he weaves the fortunes of his Christian forebears into the narrative of Andalusī history – particularly in terms of the special relationship they had enjoyed with the Umayyad dynasty since the conquest (Fierro 1989; Christys 179-81; García Moreno 311-12). The second account comes from the *Akhbār Majmū'a* ('Miscellaneous Reports'), an anonymous compilation that merges historical material from multiple genres, including poetry; it contains tenth-century material, but the date of its composition probably belongs to the eleventh century or later.¹¹

Both accounts have broadly similar outlines: the revolt begins in Tangiers, before spreading through the Maghreb – where it is led by one Maysara – and into al-Andalus, threatening to destabilise the entire region and provoking the caliph to send troops from Syria; the rebels are eventually defeated, but the Syrians become embroiled in a further with the (Arab) governor of al-Andalus, representing the interests of the *baladiyya*, the peninsula's original Muslim settlers. The most immediately obvious way in which the accounts differ is how they are structured: Ibn al-Qūṭīya spends less than two pages on the Berber revolt, and six on the conflict between the caliph's forces and the Andalusīs (14-15 and 15-20, respectively); the *Akhbār Majmū'a*, more prolix in general, devotes twelve pages to the Berbers, but only six to the fight with the Syrians (28-40 and 406).

As this might suggest, Ibn al-Qūṭīya is dismissive of the Berber revolt; Maysara was known as 'the contemptible one' (*al-ḥaqīr*, a word containing overtones of ignominy and of lowly origins), he says, noting that before he became a rebel, Maysara was merely a water vendor in the *souq* of Qayrawān (14). But for the *Akhbār Majmū'a*'s compiler – and/or for his sources – the revolt is a more serious episode, and Maysara gets no such contemptuous nickname. A religious cast is given to the Berbers' unrest; they were partisans, we are told, of "the Ibādīya and Ṣufriya" (28), two sub-sects of the Khārijites.

'Khārijite' – derived from the verb *kharaja*, 'to go out' – is an umbrella term for an ideology that emphasised activist piety, and required its adherents to abandon any community or ruler that did not measure up to its standards of behaviour (Watt ch. 1; Lewinstein; Robinson 109-24; Kenney; Sizgorich 196-230; Gaiser; Hoffman 2011). Khārijites are viewed with a fear and suspicion in the Arabic historical and heresiographical tradition that, for the most part, far outweigh their actual significance (Shahrastānī 118-41); they are also presented as being perhaps more numerous than they truly were, in the sense that scholars such as Shahrastānī labelled anyone who rebels against "the legitimate ruler (*imām*)" a Khārijite, regardless of what – if any – doctrine they actually espoused (118).

Nonetheless, they could be a force to be reckoned with in the Maghrib – an Ibādī polity was established in the region only a few decades after the revolt (Rushworth 88-95)¹² -

¹¹ Molina (513) notes the impossibility of pinning it down, since it contains such a variety of reports and styles; Manzano Moreno (1992, 43), suggests that there is at least a substantial amount of tenth-century material in it.

¹² The Rustamids, centred on Tāhart, from 761 onwards.

and from the angry, Berber-distrusting perspective of the eleventh century it seems that equating Maghribi Berber unrest with what was widely perceived to be the anarchism and violence of Khārijī ideas was irresistible. The *Akḥbār Majmū‘a*’s tone when describing these rebels is not casual patrician dismissal, but outrage: they massacre the population of Tangiers, including its children (28), and Maysara’s “uncountable” force of Berbers (a dehumanising adjective that Arabic chronicles tend to reserve for animals, or loot) faces off against an army whom the text calls simply, and repeatedly, “the Muslims” (32-3). The Berbers have left the community of believers, and thus placed themselves beyond the civilised pale. Their grievances are listed, but these are rendered invalid, we are told, by the fact that the Berbers are rebelling against their rightful rulers (*a’imma*, pl. of *imām*), and that they have chosen the iconography of notorious earlier rebels, including shaving their heads, to express their discontent (32).

Whereas Ibn al-Qūṭīya makes little connection between the later unrest in al-Andalus and the revolt in North Africa, attributing the conflict with the Syrians largely to political opportunism on the part of the Andalusī governor – and noting that “the Arabs and Berbers of al-Andalus” are ranged on his side against the Syrians who might steal their land (14, 17-20) – the *Akḥbār Majmū‘a* paints the episode as primarily an ethnic and religious conflict. In the latter text, the Arabs of al-Andalus send supplies to the beleaguered Syrians fighting in North Africa, while the Berbers of al-Andalus shave their heads “in imitation of Maysara” (40) while driving the Arabs out of several regions of the peninsula (37-40). At length, God gives the Muslims victory over the Berbers (40).

Ibn al-Qūṭīya’s narrative was one of Umayyad authority being challenged but ultimately triumphing in al-Andalus; his interest lay in portraying the Peninsula as chaotic, and its governors untrustworthy, prior to the arrival of direct Umayyad control there in 756, not in targeting the Berbers as specifically disruptive. But by the time the *Akḥbār Majmū‘a* was being compiled, Umayyad authority was a thing of the past, and the precarious new world was the creation of North African Berbers. Ripples of the revolt were also felt farther afield, although these were somewhat muted by the more successful regional revolt of the same decade, the ‘Abbāsīd ‘revolution’; nonetheless, the event, and the attendant notion of a vast Berber insurrection in the Maghrib as a possible precursor to the End Times and the coming of the Mahdī, left traces in apocalyptic literature as far away as Egypt and Syria (Madelung 13-14, 20-1).

Revolt 2: Shaqyā, c. 768-77

The second of my chosen revolts came close on the heels of the first (Ibn al-Qūṭīya 32; *Akḥbār Majmū‘a* 107-11; *Faṭḥ al-Andalus* 102; Ibn al-Athīr V, 605-6, and VI, 9, 35, 42, 49-50; Ibn ‘Idhārī II, 54-5; Fierro 1987, 28-9; Aguadé, 65; Manzano Moreno 1991, 238-48). The sources show some confusion over the dating (although they largely agree on the sequence of events), but it seems to have lasted the better part of a decade. This revolt was launched by one Shaqyā b. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid,¹³ a Miknāsa Berber and teacher (*mu‘allim*) from the district of Shantābariyya (Santaver, roughly corresponding to the present-day districts of Guadalajara and Cuenca). It was a region strongly associated with Berber settlement (Manzano Moreno 1991, 142-3; Ṭāha 174-7). In the course of the uprising, Shaqyā and his followers killed the governor of Shantābariyya and took the town of Coria (some two hundred km away to the west). They then led the authorities a merry dance for several years, disappearing into the mountains – the almost canonical refuge of Berbers, as we have seen –

¹³ Or Shaqnā (*Faṭḥ al-Andalus* 102) – there is no difference between this and ‘Shaqyā’ in unpointed Arabic script – or Sufyān (*Akḥbār Majmū‘a* 107).

whenever an expedition was sent to deal with him (*Akhbār Majmū‘a* 107; *Fath al-Andalus* 102; Ibn al-Athīr V, 605, and VI, 9, 35, 42). Eventually he was killed by what seem to have been some of his own followers, perhaps indicating a power struggle.

Again I want to consider the language in which the accounts of Shaqyā’s revolt are couched. On the taking of Coria, for example, the *Akhbār Majmū‘a* – hostile to Berbers, as we saw in the previous section – uses the verb *ghalaba* (to overcome), rather than *fataha* (to conquer), the latter being more usual when discussing the military activity of Muslims; in other words, it is being made clear that this is not a legitimate conquest, in which God works through the warriors, but a usurpation of proper authority (107). The same text also says that Shaqyā “spread corruption through the land” (107), wording that undoubtedly comes from a verse of the Qurān (5:33) that declares it is obligatory for Muslims to put a stop to such behaviour:

Indeed, the punishment of those who fight God and His Messenger and spread corruption in the land is to be killed, crucified, have their hands and feet cut off on opposite sides, or to be banished from the land. That is a disgrace for them in this life, and in the life to come theirs will be a terrible punishment.

The wording may be a trace of legalistic justification used for the campaigns against Shaqyā, but it is also an indication of how such revolts were conceptualised, as a source of unacceptable disorder. Shaqyā is never called a *zindīq* (heretic), or an apostate; his rebellion is a *khurūj*, or going-out, again linking him to the Khārījites, and emphasising again the way that a rebellion involves leaving the community. Others are more dismissive: Ibn ‘Idhārī, probably following the lost work of the Andalusī Aḥmad al-Rāzī (d. 955),¹⁴ calls Shaqyā’s followers a ‘rabble’ (*ghawghā’*) (II, 54), a favoured term to describe the followers of Berber religious or rebel movements.¹⁵

Language is also key to the religious dimension of this revolt’s presentation. A recurring detail in the accounts is that Shaqyā’s mother was named Fāṭima, like the Prophet’s daughter, and that Shaqyā called himself al-Fāṭimī, thus claiming ‘Alid descent. In other words, he was – or was portrayed as – a proto-Shī‘ite. As is so often the case with unsuccessful (apparently) heterodox movements, it is difficult to be sure whether ‘al-Fāṭimī’ was a genuine self-identification by Shaqyā, or a label applied by his enemies. ‘Alid lineage offered an alternative source of legitimacy to anti-Umayyad rebels, without requiring an appeal to the ‘Abbāsids, and someone had made similar claims only a few years before (Fierro 1987, 29). But the fact that most of the accounts agree about Shaqyā using it – with the exception of Ibn al-Qūṭīya, who opts for a different phrasing¹⁶ – should not necessarily be taken as corroboration; the agreement is a function not of multiple independent witnesses to events, but of our various chroniclers drawing upon each other’s work, and each apparently continuing to find the term meaningful for the effect they wished to create. As Maribel Fierro has demonstrated, ‘Fāṭimī’ was for a long time a derogatory term applied to rebels and rivals – especially by the ‘Abbāsids – rather than something that proto-Shī‘ites claimed for themselves: a way of belittling ‘Alid claims by linking them with a woman (1996, 153-5). Even the dynasty that historians today call the Fāṭimids (r. 909-1174) – the Córdoba Umayyads’ great regional rivals, who did claim descent from Fāṭima – did not use the term of

¹⁴ See Clarke (ch. 2) for further discussion of Ibn ‘Idhārī’s sources.

¹⁵ Followers of another teacher’s uprising in the marches, in 850-1, were also called *al-ghawghā’* (Ibn al-Athīr VII, 66; Ibn ‘Idhārī II, 90).

¹⁶ Ibn al-Qūṭīya does not name him, saying only that “a man claiming descent from ‘Alī [b. Abī Tālib] rebelled (*thāra*) in al-Hawwārīyīn” (32). The place name indicates a strong Berber identification with the area; Hawwāra Berbers were among those who settled in district of Shantabariyya after the conquest (Tāha 175).

themselves until over a century after they came to power (Fierro 1996, 144-7). It is therefore possible that the accounts' use of the title is simply a way of mocking Shaqyā, or else retrospectively discrediting him by association with the external enemies of Umayyad al-Andalus. It is notable, in this regard, that Ibn ʿIdhārī also calls Shaqyā a *dāʿī* ('propagandist'), a term specific to Fāṭimid missionaries active outside their own borders – anachronistic for Shaqyā's own time, but certainly meaningful to later audiences, as will be discussed below.

Revolt 3: Ibn al-Qiṭṭ

This article's final revolt, which took place in the year 901, we know largely from one of the surviving portions of Ibn Ḥayyān, who drew on two tenth-century sources, ʿĪsā b. Aḥmad al-Rāzī (d. 989, son of the al-Rāzī mentioned above) and al-Shabīnasī (Ibn Ḥayyān 127, 133-9; Fierro 1987, 106-11, 123-4; Aguadé 66-7 and 70; Manzano Moreno 1991, 56 and 253-5; García-Arenal 90-1). The revolt's leader, Ibn al-Qiṭṭ, was not a Berber but an Umayyad prince (Ibn ʿIdhārī II, 140); his army, however, was overwhelmingly Berber, to the tune of – it is said – 60,000 people (Guichard 1992, 684). With the Córdoba government crippled by Umayyad infighting, the reign of ʿAbd Allāh (r. 888-912) was a period when frontier clans flourished; furthermore, with the Christian kingdom of León pushing southwards under the ambitious Alfonso III (r. 866-910), it was a period of regular warfare.

The shifting allegiances of the *muwallad* rebel Ibn Ḥafṣūn – who, in aid of his many alliances, at various times converted to virtually every religious tradition going – are the best known example of life in this period (Ibn al-Qūṭīya 90-4 and 103-15; *Akhbār Majmūʿa* 150-2). From his fortified base at Bobastro, he took advantage of the regime's disorder, withholding tax and generally proving a headache for the Umayyads for several decades. His motives have been much discussed (Oliver Pérez 1993; Acién Almansa 1994, 87, 111-13; Marín-Guzmán; Fierro 1998, 299-328), in large part because he has seemed to some scholars to be an example of 'nativist' reaction to Arab-Muslim rule, owing to a conversion to Christianity accompanied by a genealogy detailing no fewer than seven generations of his non-Muslim ancestors (Wasserstein, 270, 288-93). But his re-conversion to Islam ten years later – specifically, to the Fāṭimid branch of Shīʿism – suggests that his career is better understood as an example of how religious identity and allegiance could be exploited by opportunistic individuals, than as a proto-Reconquista fightback from within.

Ibn al-Qiṭṭ was not nearly as successful as Ibn Ḥafṣūn, but accounts of his brief career show a similar strategy at work: building up a following through a combination of religious appeal, propaganda, and military campaigning. Unlike Shaqyā, Ibn al-Qiṭṭ's life as a rebel did not begin with ready-made credibility and kinship connections among the Berbers. Accordingly, his religious message was more overt – he preached *ḥisba* (correct behaviour) and *jihad* (holy war) – and it had a clearly-defined target, Zamora, a former Muslim city that had been conquered and refortified by the Christians in 893 (*EF*² XII, 842). Ibn al-Qiṭṭ also had a publicist, one Abū ʿAlī al-Sarrāj, a wandering ascetic – portrayed as riding on a donkey and wearing sandals (Ibn Ḥayyān 135) – with a history of meddling on the frontiers; he had, earlier in his career, been associated with the two most prominent semi-autonomous Hispano-Roman Andalusī clans, the Banū Ḥafṣūn and the Banū Qasī (García-Arenal 90). Having been unsuccessful in forging an alliance between these two – which would have been a serious threat to the Umayyads – Abū ʿAlī al-Sarrāj now lent his voice to Ibn al-Qiṭṭ's cause, selling him to the Berbers as the Mahdī (messiah). Rising to power on the back of a charismatic preacher and a disaffected Berber clan or two was a time-honoured tradition in the medieval

Islamic west,¹⁷ and there are strong echoes of narratives of the origins of the Fāṭimid dynasty in North Africa: they, too, had a public face, Abū ‘Abd Allāh, who recruited the Berber army that brought his patrons to power in the same decade as Ibn al-Qiṭṭ’s revolt (Halm 1996, 38-43, 134-5; Brett 73-100).¹⁸ In al-Andalus, however, Ibn al-Qiṭṭ’s *jihād* against Zamora was apparently going well until those untrustworthy Berbers got tired of being merely followers and deserted their leader (Ibn Ḥayyān 135-6, 139). Ibn al-Qiṭṭ was then defeated and had his severed head displayed on the gate of Zamora for his trouble.

Again, the language used to describe all this is instructive. Ibn Ḥayyān calls Abū ‘Alī al-Sarrāj the “*dā’ī* of the *fitna*” (127), identifying him with both the subversive agents of the Fāṭimids and the traumatic chaos of civil war and communal division, as discussed above. Both he and Ibn al-Qiṭṭ are accused of “tempting” people to follow them, and the revolt is once again a *khurūj* (133, 138); in case the insinuations of Shī‘ī practices were not enough to condemn the rebels, the text’s audience is asked to recall the Khārijites at the same time. Even though he and his followers were not directly threatening the regime, or attacking fellow Muslims, the fact that Ibn al-Qiṭṭ set himself up as an alternative source of religious authority (by claiming to be the Mahdī) and usurped the Umayyad ruler’s role in leading a *jihād* meant that he – like Shaqyā – had “gone out from obedience” and was threatening the unity of the community. Still, Ibn Ḥayyān and his sources save some of their invective for the Christians: Zamora is a city of “unbelief”, and appeasement of the *mushrikūn* (polytheists, a common name applied to Christians) is to be avoided (134).

Conclusion

The involvement of Berbers in revolts against state authority in al-Andalus has often been seen as a testament to the cohesion of their shared identity – although by no means all Berbers took part in all revolts – and to their sense of frustration at being politically and socially disenfranchised within al-Andalus. Rebelling in the name of sectarian movements gave religious legitimacy to both their separateness and their opposition to Arab rule. But it is important not to overlook the nature of the accounts upon which we rely for information on these events: with a few exceptions, Berbers were outsiders to Andalusī literary production,¹⁹ leaving the task of discussing their moral character and political activities entirely to writers with varying degrees of disdain or hostility towards them. The fact that the Berbers became the scapegoats for the calamities of the early eleventh century only made matters worse; whereas a number of ninth- and tenth-century writers in Arabic had portrayed the Berbers as untrustworthy and unruly, these writers’ embittered post-1031 successors sharpened their pens on the rebels of prior centuries, using Qur’ānic phrases and code words borrowed from the Fāṭimid Shī‘ī enemy to create an image of the Berbers as not only disorderly and uncivilised, but heterodox threats to the very social and religious stability of al-Andalus, perpetual fifth-columnists who were easily swayed into carrying out campaigns of violence by demagogues and foreign agents. For these writers, every Berber revolt foreshadowed the end of the Golden Age of al-Andalus.

¹⁷ This applies to both Khārijites (e.g. the Rustamids of Tāhart, the Midrārids of Sijilmāsa) and ‘Alids (e.g. the Idrīsids) (Love 177–9; Abun-Nasr 42-59).

¹⁸ He met representatives of the Kutāma tribe while in Mecca for the *hajj*, and returned with them to North Africa to lead the conquest of Ifrīqiya (modern-day Tunisia), before unveiling the Fāṭimid *imām* to the troops once victory was achieved.

¹⁹ Some of the exceptions were not overly impressed by their fellow Berbers’ lack of culture, either: Ibn Mann Allāh al-Hawwārī (d. c. 1102), a Berber from Qayrawān, mocked Berber efforts to claim superiority over the Arabs who had at various times so thoroughly defeated them (Norris 9).

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