Pick Up the Broken Peaces: The Rise and Fall of the *Taifa* Kingdoms in Islamic Iberia

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Following over three hundred years of Muslim rule on the Iberian Peninsula, the Christian *Reconquista*,[1] so long dreamed of, began to become a reality. In the twenty-first century lands of Portugal and Spain, Muslim warriors ruled with very little challenge from 711 until late into the eleventh century. They called their beloved new territory *al-Andalus* in reference to the Slavic Vandals who dominated the headland prior to the arrival of Islam. Upon acquisition, the Muslims did not annihilate the ethnic Christians and Jews of the domain. Instead, they allowed them to coexist in a subordinated role. They did, however, attempt to remove political opposition. But the remnants of the Visigothic kingdom managed to maintain their own territories in the far north of the peninsula.[2] It would take several centuries until the Christians grew powerful enough to challenge the Muslims, but once able they began the process of land reclamation. The Christians used a variety of instruments to achieve their objectives. Some were diplomatic, in the form of alliances and truces; others were militaristic and included

[1] *La Reconquista*, or "The Reconquest," is a Spanish term that deals with the Christian Kings of the Iberian Peninsula who, together with the Papacy in Rome, used religious ideology to remove opposing belief systems (Muslim and Jewish) and political groups from the region of modern Spain and Portugal. It is worth noting that this retaking of land took centuries to complete, while the Muslim conquest of the 8th century took roughly two years.

[2] The Visigoths were an East Germanic people who, after sacking Rome in 410 CE, established kingdoms in southern-France and Iberia.

advances in siege weaponry. While these tools were important, they were not the decisive element in what made the *Reconquista* attainable. To understand what truly made it possible, one must turn away from the Christian enterprise, for it was the overwhelming force of disunity and betrayal amongst the Muslim kingdoms themselves that presented the Christians with the opportunity to wrestle control away from their Muslim overlords.

Soon after the start of the eleventh century, long before the papacy in Rome would begin to flex its ideological muscle in Iberia, the peninsula was divided into independent Muslim kingdoms known as *taifas*. In the pivotal year 1031 there existed 21 such *taifas*, but that number would eventually expand to 38. Their radius extended from the northern frontier lands bordering the Christian kingdoms and moved south across the Straits of Gibraltar and into North Africa.[3] The mere fact that the number of kingdoms was expanding indicates that the factionalism amongst the rulers was growing.

As indicated, the Christian kingdoms, although pushed into the inhospitable regions of the Pyrenees Mountains of the north, had managed to maintain some level of self-determination during the era of *al-Andalus*. To gain a full understanding of how their presence - combined with the attitudes of the Muslims themselves - eventually led to the downfall of Islamic rule in Iberia, one must understand the situation of the Visigoths at the time of the initial Muslim raids. It was in July of 710 that a small contingent of ships crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, which separates Europe and Africa.[4] The expedition was

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[3] David Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party-Kings* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 82-98.

[4] Jan Read, *The Moors in Spain and Portugal* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 21.

comprised of indigenous North African Muslims known as Berbers. At the head of this convoy was a man named Tarif Ibn Malik, whose mission was to scout the area and discern the merit of a larger invasion. When he brought back riches and Spanish captives, the governor of the region, Musa Ibn Nusayr, was motivated to send a much larger force. This army was again comprised of the recently converted Berbers from North Africa. They moved quickly and easily through a much divided Visigothic kingdom. Before the coming of the Muslims, the population of Iberia had shrunk from about six million in Roman times to about four million in the late Visogothic period due to "plague and war."[5] The findings of archaeologists indicate that once great cities had fallen into ruin, and the area was encompassed by small isolated settlements.[6] To make matters worse for the Visigoths, and much better for the Muslims, the kingdom had been recently and continuously divided by civil war. A priestly chronicle written around 754 CE described the situation as "Roderick lost both the crown and his realm in the general destruction caused by wicked rivalries."[7]

The success of the Berbers under the general Tariq Ibn Ziyad must have been appreciated by the Caliphate on some level. However, the rapidity of their advance caused a great deal of alarm amongst to the ethnically Arab Umayyads. The fear was that these African Berbers had become too powerful, and their expansion was going unchecked. The Umayyad governor, Musa Ibn Nusayr, gathered an even larger force and led them into Iberia. This army, in contrast to its predecessor, was made

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[5] Hugh Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Inc., 1996), 2.
[6] Read, *The Moors in Spain and Portugal*, 34.
[7] *Continuatio Isidoriana Hispana ad annum 754,* in *Christians and Moors I*, ed. Colin Smith (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1988), 11.

up mostly of Arabs from the aristocracy in Yemen. While it is difficult to discern the mindset and motives of Ibn Nusayr, it is clear that the Arab Umayyads did not relish the idea of Berbers dominating this newfangled territory in Europe. In fact, when Musa finally caught up to Tariq he lashed out at him with his whip.[8] This response by Musa Ibn Nusayr would not have been surprising to the Visigoths. One contemporary account stated

> Altogether pitiless, destroying everything as he went, Musa reached the royal city of Toledo. He separated off the areas around it by offering deceitful peace, and beheaded certain noblemen who had for some reason stayed...He speedily burned fair cities, sentenced noble and leading men of the time to be tortured, and had children and nursing mothers beaten to death.[9]

In the details of this initial excursion into Iberia we are already shown the depth of conflicts, not only between the Muslims and the Visigoths, but between the Islamic conquerors themselves. The theme of ethnic disunity was prevalent from the very beginning. It would be one of the primary driving forces that would lead to the fall of the *Taifa* kingdoms and thus of *al-Andalus* as a whole. In the meantime, however, the Muslims on both sides were extremely pleased with the riches they were accumulating in their new territory.

While the raiding calmed and the settling started, the factionalism persisted. The Arabs settled into the fertile lands, such as the Guadalquivir, while the Berbers were left with the harsh and unfertile mountainous regions.[10] It is important to understand that this demographic separation encouraged the Berbers to settle with the

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[8] Read, *The Moors in Spain and Portugal*, 24.
[9] *Continuatio Isidoriana Hispana ad annum 754*, 13.
[10] Read, *The Moors in Spain and Portugal*, 37.

Christians and Jews. This would parlay into an area of importance in the centuries to come. The Arab Muslim's harsh treatment of the Berbers, on whom they had relied so heavily in the initial excursions into Iberia, eventually erupted into open revolt. By 740, the situation was out of the control of local Arabs, and a huge force of men was dispatched by the Caliph in Damascus. Eventually, the Berbers were repressed, and the *Andalusian* capital in Cordoba was kept intact. The Caliph's soldiers had been originally decreed to return to their Arab homelands. However, they were not eager to abandon the rich lands they had won for their Caliph. In the end, the vast majority of them stayed on in Iberia. These men, known collectively as *junds,*[11] came largely from Egypt and the new Islamic center of Syria itself. As historian Hugh Kennedy noted

> The events of 741-43 profoundly changed the political character of Muslim Spain. It substantially increased the Arab element in the population, especially in those rural areas in the south which were to be the heartland of al-Andalus for centuries to come. It also increased the Syrian element.[12]

In the coming years the fall of the Umayyad caliphate in Damascus allowed for the remaining Umayyads in *al-Andalus* to strengthen their hold on power there.

The 'Abbasids gained the caliphate in the Middle East from the Umayyads, and ties were largely broken to Iberia. Thereby the social order in *al-Andalus* was, more or less, allowed to develop unrestricted by the caliphate in the East. During their bloody rise to power, the

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[11] Literally "army" - *Junds* is a term used to describe the members of an Arab reinforcement sent by the Caliph in Damascus. Their aim was to quell the rebellion of the Berbers. Their settlement in the Iberian Peninsula following the end of the rebellion provided the Arab contingent in *al-Andalus* with a ready made army that was pro-Arab. This setup was known as the *Jund* system.

[12] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 26.

'Abbasids attempted to violently snuff out all semblances of the Umayyad caliphate. Very few members of the Umayyad clan escaped, but the young grandson of the great Caliph Hisham was one. His name was 'Abd al-Rahman bin Mu'awiya. His mother was a Nafza Berber from Tunisia, but his father was of the Arab Quraysh tribe (of the Prophet Muhammad) and an Umayyad. It was this strong lineage that provided 'Abd al-Rahman with the credentials to become the ruler of Muslim Iberia.[13] This idea of notable lineage would prove instrumental in asserting the legitimacy of rulers in *al-Andalus* for centuries to come.

Immediately al-Rahman set forth the precedent of isolating *al-Andalus* from the caliphate in the East. As one historian noted, "The successors of 'Abd al-Rahman I continued his policy, ignoring the 'Abbasids so far as possible, being largely ignored by them in their far-off corner of the Islamic world."[14] By 928, his ancestor 'Abd al-Rahman III had established the Umayyad's of Iberia as an entirely separate new Caliphate. His presumption of the title of Caliph was addressed in a grouping of letters he sent to his regional governors which proclaimed

> We are the most worth to fulfil [sic] our right...to put on the clothing granted by the nobility of God, because of the favor which He has shown us...He has made our name and the greatness of our power celebrated everywhere; and He has made the hopes of the worlds depend on us...and their rejoicing at good news be about our dynasty...We have decided that the *da'wa*[15] should be to us as Commander of the Faithful and that letters emanating from us or coming to us should be [headed] in the same manner.[16]

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[13] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 31.
[14] David Wasserstein, *The Caliphate in the West* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1993), 9.
[15] Literally meaning "call" or "invitation," typically in reference to a person being called to Islam.
[16] Wasserstein, *Caliphate,* 11 – Wasserstein notes that this text is found in the works of Ibn al-Khatib (1956: 30); Ibn 'Idhari (1948: 198-9); as well as some Anonymous sources.

The situation in *al-Andalus* proved largely stable for generations. However, things began to unravel for Muhammad I, who came to power as *Amir* in Cordoba in September 852.[17] His administration began by appointing many *mawali wazirs*. These *mawali* were non-Arab converts to Islam. As *wazirs,* a term for a high ranking official, they held a great deal of power and prestige. Naturally, this was upsetting to those of Arab ethnicity who dominated the capital. Again, Hugh Kennedy surmised the situation succinctly when he stated

> Mass conversion, however, brought different problems: in particular, it undermined the fiscal basis of the Umayyad state. People who converted no longer had to pay the *jizya,*[18] which was an important source of revenue for the amirs, so conversion actually weakened the Muslim state apparatus.[19]

In addition, descendents of the Syrian *junds,* who had come to the aid of the Cordobans of Iberia in 740 (and then stayed despite their proposed intention not to), had to pay taxes or perform military service. These new *mawali* converts were exempt from such payments, which created a situation ripe for ethnic hostility. Muhammad, however, was initially able to avoid further tensions by exempting the *jund* descendants from military service.

Muhammad's control was constantly challenged by the *muwallad*[20] 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Marwan al-Jilliqi who maintained his separatist leadership in Merida near the city of Badajoz. As a further

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[17] The importance of the title of *Amir* stems from the leaders of the early Muslims who were known as *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, or "Commander of the Faithful."

[18] *Jizya*, as defined by Encyclopedia Britannica is a "head or poll tax that early Islamic rulers demanded from their non-Muslim subjects." http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/304125/jizya.

[19] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 68.

[20] *Muwallad* is a term referring specifically to a native of Iberia who had converted to Islam.

demonstration of ethnic hostilities a fierce anti-*Muwallad* coalition in Cordoba convinced the *Amir* Muhammad to lead an expedition against those of native heritage. However, as Kennedy tells us, the rebel Ibn Marwan "...was able to preserve his independence by disappearing, when he was under threat, into the no man's land (of the) north...where Umayyad forces were unable to pursue him."[21] This was accomplishable, in part, because Ibn Marwan was "able to receive intermittent support from the Christians."[22]

In the Ebro Valley of Northeast Iberia, the hostilities between Arabs and Berbers erupted once again. The Cordoban appointed Arab leadership was violently removed from power by Berber factions, most notably the Banu Qasi tribe. Their conquest was complete following a violent massacre of the Arab population. Tribal unity, so important in the world of the early Muslims, remained a powerful force at this time. This is supported by the story of an Umayyad, Ibn al-Qitt, who proclaimed himself as 'Messiah'and who led a *jihad*[23] against the Christians in the north. However, he was only able to sustain success through the cooperation and aid of the Nafza Berber tribe around Merida, and when they withdrew their support, his efforts failed.[24]

In addition to the strife present in the hinterlands, the *Amir* Muhammad I was forced to deal with rebellion close to home. 'Umar Ibn Hafsun, a *muwallad* from southern Spain, had converted to Christianity and taken the name Samuel. He began a revolution in Cordoba in the

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[21] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 71.
[22] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 71.
[23] A *jihad* as defined by Merriam-Webster is "a holy war waged on behalf of Islam as a religious duty; *also*: a personal struggle in devotion to Islam especially involving spiritual discipline." http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/jihad.
[24] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 71-2.

year 879.[25] His rebels consistently raided small towns centralized around Cordoba. As one historian noted, Ibn Hafsun "began a Robin Hood career of brigandage" by leading a coalition of fellow *muwallads* combined with disaffected Berbers.[26] Here it is important to remember that the Berbers had been forced to settle with the native Visigoths after the arrival of Arabs in the Peninsula. The historian Ibn 'Idhari recorded the words of the rebel leader, Ibn Hafsun, as he addressed his troops. The tone of his speech clearly indicates that Ibn Hafsun focused on securing the aid of the Berbers. He said

> For too long…you have borne the yoke of a government which seizes your belongings and loads you with heavy taxes, while the Arabs humiliate you and treat you as slaves. I desire nothing but to render you justice and to deliver you from your bondage.[27]

Campaigns by this rebel faction continued past Muhammad's death and even circumvented the efforts of his successor al-Mundhir. Interestingly, a prophetic document from around this time sighted references in the Christian Bible that proclaimed the downfall of the Islamic hold in Iberia. The text utilized the prophecy of Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39, which stated

> As indeed the same prophet says again to Ishmael (ancestor to the Arabs): 'Since you have abandoned the Lord, I will abandon you and hand you over to Gog (Goths such as the Visigoths),

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[25] Charles Melville and Ahmad Ubaydli, eds., *Christians and Moors in Spain: Volume III Arabic Sources (711-1501)* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1992), 32.
[26] Read, *The Moors in Spain and Portugal*, 68.
[27] Ibn 'Idhari, "Kitāb al-bayān al-mughrib fī ākhbār mulūk al-andalus wa'l-maghrib (Book of the Amazing Story of the History of the Kings of Spain and Morocco)," in *The Moors in Spain and Portugal,* ed. Jan Read (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 68.

> who will give you your deserts. After you have punished them 170 times, he will do to you as you did to him.[28]

Undoubtedly, such religiously motivated predictions were used by rebellious converts such as Ibn Hafsun. In 891, Ibn Hafsun attacked Cordoba itself, and the failed response of the new *Amir* 'Abd Allah showed how completely ineffective the military of the Umayyads was at this time.[29] Compounding his inability to pacify his own realm, 'Abd Allah was unable to counteract the forces of Arab lords around Seville, and in 891 an Arab coalition slaughtered the leading *muwallads* in the area, along with the Umayyad governor.

Several years later, Ibrahim Ibn al-Hajjaj organized a dinner-time massacre of his rivals and became undisputed ruler of Seville. He ruled as a king, fully recognized by 'Abd Allah in the capital of Cordoba, from 899 until his death around 910.[30] Here again, Ibn Hafsun comes into the picture. He had attempted to procure the favor of this new king in Seville, Ibn al-Hajjaj, as he had many of the *Amir's* other enemies in *al-Andalus*.[31] However, his conversion to Christianity that same year put him at odds with a broad spectrum of the Muslim leadership. Even without such aid he was able to survive with the help of similarly disgruntled individuals, many of whom were Muslims who were willing to overlook his abandonment of Islam. One historian noted that this was a time of severe strife and disunity in *al-Andalus*, which "suffered from internal disintegration on a scale unparalleled since Tariq's landing."[32]

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[28] Dulcidio, "Chronica Prophetica," in *Christians and Moors in Spain Vol. I*, ed. Colin Smith (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1988), 49.
[29] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 72-4.
[30] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 76.
[31] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 78.
[32] Read, *The Moors in Spain and Portugal*, 69.

Ibn Hafsun's ideological uprising lasted for nearly fifty years, being eventually carried on by his sons after his death in 917.[33] If nothing else his conversion and insurgency gives credit to the inroads made by the Christian church in the lands controlled by Muslims. It also points to the extreme divisions between different ethnic factions of Muslims. Upon the defeat of these converts, the famous chronicler Ibn Hayyan wrote of Ibn Hafsun "the non-Arab (*'ajam*)...confided in the Christian *dhimmis.*[34] He favoured [sic] them with his words, supported them and preferred them."[35] After the defeat of the rebels at Bobastro, the leader of the Muslim army, al-Nasir li-Din Allah,[36] desecrated Ibn Hafsun's grave. Finding that he had been buried according to Christian customs, al-Nasir tore apart the corpse and had the limbs hung from stakes at the gate of the city. On either side of him were the stakes used to crucify his two sons, Hakam and Sulaiman, who had died in the final battle.[37] At the time of their occurence, the gruesome deaths of Ibn Hafsun and his sons appeared to have been detrimental to their purported cause. The Muslims of Cordoba were united by hatred for Ibn Hafsun as Ibn Hayyan tells us, "Once his apostasy was out in the open, the people realized it was a religious obligation to fight against him."[38] In the long term, however, Ibn Hafsun set a precedence of recalcitrance that would be integral in the following century.

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[33] Melville and Ubaydli, *Christians and Moors in Spain*, 32.
[34] *Dhimmi* is a term used to describe a non-Muslim subject of a region controlled by followers of Islam.
[35] Melville and Ubaydli, *Christians and Moors in Spain*, 33.
[36] Al-Nasir li-Din Allah is another name for 'Abd al-Rahman III.
[37] Ibn Hayyan, "al-Muqtabis," ed. Melchor M Antuna (Paris, 1937), ed. P. Chalmeta (Madrid, 1979), in *Christians and Moors in Spain: Volume III Arabic Sources*, ed. Charles Melville and Ahmad Ubaydli (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1992), 35.
[38] Melville and Ubaydli, *Christians and Moors in Spain*, 33.

The death of 'Abd Allah gave rise to something of a golden age for the Umayyads in Spain. His grandson, Abd al-Rahman III was a great politician, bred to lead from an early age. However, by the end of the tenth century, the control of the land lay in the hands of a man with a relatively undistinguished, and certainly non-Umayyad, background. His name at birth was Muhammad Ibn Abi 'Amir, but he took the title of al-Mansur (the victorious), which had previously been held by a great 'Abbasid caliph, Abu Ja'far al-Mansur in the second half of the 8th century. His rule, as something of a regent, would last until his death in 1002. He was responsible for dismantling the *jund* system and incorporating a full-time army of professional soldiers in its place. He maintained this large hired army through the practice of granting *fiefs* to the soldiers, who worked the lands cooperatively with the peasants. However, the poet and historian Abu Bakr al-Turtushi wrote of this system's replacement by a tribute *(jibaya)* on the land that was collected to pay the soldiers monthly stipends. As he illustrated, "The troops ruined the people and devastated their agriculture. The population fled and agriculture became impoverished, the army was enfeebled, so that the enemy could conquer Muslim territory, taking most of it."[39]

The people, as spoken of, were largely the Syrian Arab *jundis*; while the new military force was predominantly that of Berbers brought from North Africa along with Slavic slaves from Eastern Europe and the areas around Leon (known as *saqaliba)*. As Kennedy tells us

> (T)he result was that Andalusi society was divided into a small military caste recruited from outsiders, and the bulk of demilitarised [sic] taxpayers. Perhaps more than any other factor,

[39] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 118.

> this accounts for the inability of the Andalusis to resist Christian advances more effectively.[40]

It should also be noted that when al-Mansur recruited Berber soldiers from North Africa, he did so in tribal groups and not as individuals. These groups were allowed to remain under the direction of their tribal chief, which provided them with a continued spirit of unity, while becoming something of an alien force in *al-Andalus*. Most of these Berbers came not from Morocco, but from Zirid controlled Tunisia. Kennedy refers to this practice as "the concentration of military power in the hands of non-native groups."[41]

It is true that al-Mansur was able to make solid military advances and was also able to secure his place in society's eyes as a devout Muslim. Despite his professed piety, in 983 he married the Christian daughter of King Sancho Abarca de Navarre. In addition, ten years later he liberated and married the daughter of King Vermundo II of Leon.[42] This is notable because his religious ardor was largely unquestioned. In the coming centuries Muslim rulers who maintained friendly relations with the Christians were often condemned by the more religiously pious members of society. This typically would result in the removal of the ruler, often with the use of violence.

The people of Cordoba, who clearly desired a return of the Umayyad family to the *Andalusian* caliphate, so detested the Berbers that they hoped to completely expel them from Iberia. Melville summarized the situation thusly:

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[40] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 119.
[41] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 121.
[42] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 120.

> The decade that followed al-Mansur's death saw the release of the tensions buried beneath the outward glory of the 'Amirid dictatorship. The competing elements were the Umayyad family, largely dispossessed by al-Mansur, the Berbers and the Slavs, and the people of Cordova [sic], who detested their alien masters, particularly the Berbers.[43]

They started by driving them out of Cordoba and forcing them into the wilderness of the north. When the era of the 'Amirids had come to a close, the two factions sought the help of Sancho of Castile to fight one another. Ibn 'Idhari, the pro-Berber author of the early fourteenth century, claimed, "Their (Berber) messengers went to Count Sancho, where they found messengers from Ibn 'Abd al-Jabbar (ruler in Cordoba)...who were asking him to make a treaty with them."[44]

In the end, Sancho chose the Berbers, and his assistance allowed them to prevail over the forces of Cordoba, which allowed their reentry and placement of their own Umayyad supporter, Sulaiman, on the crown in the capital. In this same chronicle Ibn 'Idhari provides a lengthy, and probably false, quote by Count Sancho. In his account he promotes the idea that the Muslims of Cordoba had no religious convictions, as evidenced by their willingness to murder one another and then purchase the stolen booty from Christian warriors. The words he gave to Sancho were, "There is neither intelligence, bravery or religion among these people."[45] That a Muslim chronicler would directly accuse his own people of such improprieties signals the degree to which the *Andalusians* were divided. Finally, according to Ibn 'Idhari, the surrender of fortresses to the Christians was significant enough to comment, "All this was done out of a stubborn insistence on not making peace with the

[43] Melville and Ubaydli, *Christians and Moors in Spain*, 60.
[44] Ibn 'Idhari, "al-Bayan," 61.
[45] Melville and Ubaydli, *Christians and Moors in Spain*, 63.

Berbers."[46] In addition to the Muslim chroniclers were the poets. Ibn al-'Assal, wrote a poem about the fall of Barbastro to the Christians in 1064. Its final lines contained the verses:

> Were it not for the sins of the Muslims – they have committed great sins, which cannot be hidden – No knight would ever be able to give the Christians victory over them, but these sins are the malady; The wicked ones among them do not keep out of sight to work their evil, while the virtue of those who profess virtue is hypocrisy.[47]

In 1008 al-Mansur's son 'Abd al-Rahman (grandson of the Christian King of Navarre) came to power. Even before his own death al-Mansur saw the situation as foreboding. When his end drew near he cried and told his *hajib*[48], the slave Kauthar, "now I am dying, and none of my sons can succeed me, for they are preoccupied with wine, women and song. The enemy will come."[49] While both al-Mansur and his son al-Muzaffar had been content to hold power as a regent or advisor to the powerless Caliph, the following son, al-Rahman, had the audacity to demand that Umayyad Caliph Hisham appoint him as his heir. To further worsen the situation, instead of including a variety of Muslim subsets in his court, al-Rahman relied heavily on the Berbers while alienating the other ethnic groups. Perhaps, the final straw was when al-Rahman decreed that dignitaries must appear before him in Berber-style turbans

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[46] Melville and Ubaydli, *Christians and Moors in Spain*, 65.
[47] Al-Himyari, "al-Masalik wa'l-mamalik," in *Christians and Moors in Spain: Volume III Arabic Sources (711-1501)*, ed. Charles Melville and Ahmad Ubaydli (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1992), 73.
[48] *Hajib*, not to be confused with *Hijab*, which is a Muslim head covering, was a man of great political importance on par with a *Wazir* or chieftain.
[49] Ibn Kardabus Kitab al-iktifa fi akhbar al-khulafa, "Revista del Instituto Egipcio de Estudios Islamicos," ed. A.M. al-'Abbadi, in *Christians and Moors in Spain: Volume III Arabic Sources (711-1501)*, ed. Charles Melville and Ahmad Ubaydli (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1992), 59.

as opposed to traditional Arab headgear.[50] The result was his overthrow by the Umayyads, who had clearly had enough of the 'Amirids' regency.

The new caliph, Muhammad al-Mahdi (previously Muhammad Ibn Hisham Ibn 'Abd al-Jabbar Ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Nasir) intended to restore a more unified and religiously acceptable government. By claiming lineage from the Prophet's tribe of Quraysh, this new caliph had gained a deal of legitimacy that had been missing in Cordoba since the seizure of power by al-Mansur. One of his first actions was to eliminate the stranglehold of Berbers in the militia by appointing Cordobans and Umayyads to positions of power. Again, we are faced with hostilities between the Berbers and the Arab Muslims, made significantly more apparent by the desertion of a large proportion of the Slavic *saqaliba.*[51*] The harsh treatment by al-Mahdi prompted the Berber forces to coalesce with Sancho Garcia of Castille, and in late 1009 al-Mahdi was forced to abandon his city following an attack by these enemies of his own creation. In his work, *The Ring of the Dove*, Ibn Hazm (d. 1064) gave a firsthand account of the tumultuous period. His father was an advisor to the *hajib* al-Mansur. He was forced to flee from Cordoba due to this civil war. This was Ibn Hazm's only work of elegant literature as most of his 400 writings were devoted to theology and law. He wrote

> Then my father the vizier (God rest his soul) moved from our new mansion in Rabad al-Zahira on the eastern side of Cordoba, to our old residence on the western side, in the quarter of Balat Mughith; this was on the third day of the accession of Muhammad al-Mahdi to the Caliphate (in 1009). Thereafter, when Hisham al-Mu'aiyad succeeded to the throne, we were

[50] Read, *The Moors in Spain and Portugal*, 93.

[51] Peter C. Scales, *The Fall of the Caliphate of Cordoba* (Leiden, The Netherlands: EJ Brill, 1994), 133. Scales defines the existence of the *Saqaliba* as follows: "This is the term which the Muslim state of the Middle Ages used for slaves of European origin: The *Qur'an* authorised [sic] slavery and slaves formed an important part of the booty taken."

> sufficiently preoccupied with the misfortunes which came upon us, thanks to the hostility of his ministers; we were sorely tried by imprisonment, surveillance and crushing fines, and were finally obliged to go into hiding. Civil war raged far and wide; all classes suffered from its dire effects, and ourselves in particular.[52]

Al-Mahdi was now forced to cooperate with the *saqaliba* who had abandoned Cordoba due to his anti-Slavic policies. In doing so, he raised an army and in turn defeated the Berbers at 'Aqabat al-Bagar on May 10, 1010.[53] To finalize the incredible tumult of this époque, the *saqaliba* had al-Mahdi arrested and executed, restoring the Umayyad al-Hisham II once again.[54] The Berbers would eventually abandon Cordoba to shadow Umayyad rule, but before leaving they devastated the city through murder and pillage. Once more, Ibn Hazm gives a stirring account in a poem he wrote while attending a funeral which read

> They weep for one now dead,
> High honoured [sic] in his tomb;
> Those tears were better shed
> For him who lives in gloom.
> O wonder, that they sigh
> For him who is at rest,
> Yet mourn not me, who die
> Most cruelly oppressed.[55]

The destruction of Cordoba's power was clearly marked by the infighting of Muslim factions; enhanced by the development of seeking and utilizing support from supposed Christian enemies in the north. Time

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[52] Ibn Hazm, "The Ring of the Dove," in *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, ed. Olivia Remie Constable (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 78-9.
[53] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 127.
[54] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 127.
[55] Ibn Hazm, "The Ring of the Dove," 79.

and again the Islamic leadership in *al-Andalus* sought to maintain their power by gaining favor with diverse factions of Muslims, only to be opposed and typically executed when their motives were understood to be contradictory to the aims of the groups they excluded. Not to be outdone, the Berbers continued their attack on Cordoba. Again, from Ibn Hazm, "Then destiny struck its heaviest blows, and we were banished from our loved abodes; the armies of the Berbers triumphed over us. I set forth from Cordoba on 13, July, 1013."[56] The Cordovans were finally persuaded that the Caliphate was "more trouble than it was worth," and in 1031 the "Umayyad caliphate of Andalus was definitely and finally abolished."[57]

The unity that Cordoba had provided was now fully eroded. The stage was set for an unconsolidated and uncloaked period of Muslim disunity. In Arabic it would be termed the *muluk al-tawa'if*, meaning "kings of factions." Today it is Anglicized as the period of the *Taifa* Kingdoms. As the name indicates, this was a period of rule by kings, not caliphs. These kings could not easily disguise themselves as legitimate rulers. That, however, did not stop them from trying. The rulers of the various Muslim states in Iberia attempted to authorize their claims to power by a variety of means. In Seville, the *hajibs* asserted that the former caliph, Hisham II (whose body had never been found after the final sack of Cordoba), had reappeared alive and well in their state. The pronouncement of Hisham II's presence in a kingdom was critical for asserting legitimacy as Hisham II was the last of the Umayyad caliphs. As late as 1083, Hisham II was still being included on coinage, though

[56] Ibn Hazm, "The Ring of the Dove," 79.
[57] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 129.

he would have been over 120 years old by this time.[58] Other *hajib* took the names and titles associated with the 'Abbasid caliphs, who were still largely recognized in the larger Muslim world as the true caliphate. Regardless of these attempts, the rulers of the various *Taifa*s were in reality nothing more than war-lords, who ruled by the dominance of force.

After the fall of the Umayyads in Cordoba in 1031, Ibn Hazm, the eleventh century historian, jurist, and theologian, wrote of the scandalous behavior of men who referred to themselves as caliph in the Friday *khutba.*[59] He declared, "We had in the area of al-Andalus four caliphs...This was a humiliation, the like of which had never been seen before, which showed [our] everlasting decline – four caliphs in an area three days journey square."[60] The chaotic situation in the peninsula is made clear by his words, and his description was supplemented by other writers of that time. 'Abd Allah Ibn Buluggin, the Party King of Granada (1073-1090) detailed the events at the beginning of the *Taifa* period:

> When the 'Amirid dynasty came to an end and the people were left without an *imam*,[61] every military commander rose up in his own town and entrenched himself behind the walls of his own fortress, having first secured his own position, created his own army and amassed his own resources. These persons vied with one another for worldly power, and each sought to subdue the other.[62]

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[58] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 131.
[59] The *khutba* is the Islamic Sermon delivered before Friday prayers. Moreover, it is an address to the entire Muslim community.
[60] Wasserstein, *Caliphate*, 192.
[61] Merriam-Webster defines an *Imam* as "a Muslim leader of the line of Ali held by Shiites to be the divinely appointed, sinless, infallible successors of Muhammad." http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/imam.
[62] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 134.

Missing from the list of *Taifa* rulers were the Umayyad clan, as well as native *muwallad* peoples. The Umayyads' fall from grace is likely attributable to the distaste for the clan's leaders felt by the *Andalusi* populous, whereas the lack of politically active *muwallads* is more of a mystery. Kennedy made the careful assumption that their disappearance stems from the practice of "adopting Arab or Berber genealogies to secure their place in the elite."[63] Some historians have argued that despite the varied ethnicities of the *Taifa* overlords, the disunity which existed amongst them was caused primarily by self-serving desire for more land and thus the availability of additional resources. This does not seem likely, given the abundance of evidence that conflicts arose stemming from ethnic animosities.

In all, the noted *Andalusian* historian David Wasserstein listed thirty-eight *Taifas* that existed at around this time in Iberia. Almost all of these were once cities under the authority of the Caliphate in Cordoba. Although many of the initial rulers were elites during the reign of the 'Amirids, the cultural and ethnic differences amongst the leadership is significant. Six *Taifa*s were led by men from Berber contingents of the old army, three were of the Berberized Arab Hammudid dynasty,[64] seven had leaders who were Slavic, and four were remnants of the 'Amirid family. Most of the remaining *Taifa*s were ruled by local military generals who were able to establish a central authority in the region or city.[65]

A very important aspect of these *Taifa* leaders was their willingness to abandon a central tenet of their faith. They often intermingled so closely with Christians and Jews that their subjects

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[63] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 143.
[64] It should be noted that Ceuta, in North Africa, is counted among this group.
[65] Wasserstein, *Rise and Fall*, 100.

became enraged. Samuel Ibn Naghrela (993-1056), a Jewish poet and *wazir* to the Zirid King of Granada, wrote *The Battle of Alfuente* in 1038. Included within his work is the story of Prince Zuhair of Alermia, and his failed attack on Granada in 1038. This attack was prompted because Samuel, a Jew, was placed in the powerful position of *wazir*. According to Samuel, "they felt resentment over my high rank, and resolved to see me overthrown at once; for how (they said) can aliens like these be privileged over Muslim."[66] Then, when the king had died and his son Badis ibn Haddus came to rule, these foes from Almeria came again to denounce the *wazir* saying to the new king

> Never will I let you be in peace as long as any breath is left inside this Jew. Get rid of him, and that will put an end to quarreling and strife; come, deal with me. But if you won't, just know that all the kings of Andalus have formed a league against you.' Badis sent in reply: 'If I should do what you demand, damnation fall on me! Before I yield my servant to his foes, I'd see myself a bondsman to my own![67]

After a very gory description of the battle and the death of the Almerians, Samuel wrote, "We took possession of their towns and lands, wreaked our vengeance on their castle walls, seized their settlements and villages, (and) took their fortifications by force of arms."[68]

The story of Samuel is not the only example of the degree to which cross-culturalization was occurring between different religious and ethnic sects. A collection of texts concerning Muslim jurists shows that the people of *al-Andalus* were becoming so homogeneous with one

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[66] Samuel Ibn Naghrela, "The Battle of Alfuente," in *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, ed. Olivia Remie Constable (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 85.
[67] Ibn Naghrela, "The Battle of Alfuente," 86.
[68] Ibn Naghrela, "The Battle of Alfuente," 89.

another that the conquering Muslims actually celebrated some of the religious festivals of the Christians. One such text comes from a Berber jurist and lawmaker, Yahya Ibn Yahya al-Laithi, who held positions of power during the reigns of the last Umayyad *Amir* al-Hakam I (796-822) and 'Abd al-Rahman (822-852). It appears that Muslims were exchanging gifts with one another, and with Christians, to celebrate Christmas. In his *hadith* Yahya b. Yahya related the Prophet Muhammad's words, "You will become settled amongst non-Arabs; whoever imitates them in their [celebration]...will be mustered with them."[69] A poem by Abu 'Abd-Allah Ibn Haddad, a native of Guadix, demonstrated another example of the comingling between the religions in regards to holy days. He wrote how

> I...celebrate on their Easter Day, among the lofty trees and the *artas*; They had come from there to a rendez-vous [sic], and congregated there at the appointed time, To stand before a bishop holding a lantern and a staff, And many priests displaying piety, with signs of ostentatious quietness and humility before God.[70]

Regardless of their religious intimacy, one thing is certainly clear – Muslim rulers of the *Taifa*s were willing to enlist the aid of the Christian kings of the north in order to subdue rival Muslims. As previously illustrated, this practice began in earnest in Cordoba at the beginning of the eleventh century when the Berber coalition struggled to regain footing in the early capital. Early in the fourteenth century, Ibn 'Idhari wrote about the Berber Dhu'l-Nunid tribe. These Berbers had

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[69] Al-Wansharishi, "Kitab al-mi'yar al-mu'rib," in *Christians and Moors in Spain: Volume III Arabic Sources (711-1501)*, ed. Charles Melville and Ahmad Ubaydli (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1992), 31.

[70] Al-Wansharishi, "Kitab al-mi'yar al-mu'rib," 75. According to Melville III, "An *arta* is a type of tree that grows in sandy soil, producing a bitter fruit."

become the rulers of Toledo and had allied with Christian King Garcia Sanchez of Navarre to fight against the Arab leader of the *Taifa* in Zaragosa. He stated that "The Christians...roamed unchallenged...in the lands of the Muslims."[71] Ibn 'Idhari went on to claim that the Zaragosan ruler Sulayman Ibn Hud and his sons took refuge in their own castles, then watched helplessly while the Christians settled on their land, harvested their crops, and took the food back to their own lands and people. In response to this betrayal of religious brotherhood, Ibn Hud hired Fernando I of Leon-Castile, another Christian king, to counterattack Toledo.[72] Not only did the Muslims ravage the lands and destroy the economies of one another, they greatly enhanced the wealth and capabilities of the Christians in the process.

This mid-eleventh century practice of employing religious outsiders to fight rival *Taifa*s had the undesired result of encouraging further raids by the Christian kings from the north. Apart from direct raids on one another, Muslim rulers made additional efforts to further stymie the prosperity of neighboring *Taifa*s. A good example occurred in 1034 when Isma'il Ibn Abbad of Seville attempted to lead a traditional raid on the Christians only to be sabotaged by the Muslim ruler of Badajoz as he passed through his territory.[73] The long term effect of such maneuvers was the massive weakening of the Muslim *Taifa*s to the extent that they were so debilitated that the Christian kings could subdue them with ease.

Admittedly, the debilitating practices of the Muslim rulers in the *Taifa* period were not the only cause of their downfall. They were aided by the actions of the Christians who worked to bleed the strength of the

[71] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 146.
[72] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 146.
[73] Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, 151.

Muslim communities. This they accomplished through consistent raiding and the enforcement of monetary tributes, or *parias*, from the subjugated Muslims. The Christian count Sisnando Davidiz, who was educated by Muslims in Cordoba, summarized the situation with the comment that

> (T)he Christians desire to recover what they have lost by force. This can only be achieved by weakness and encroachment. In the long run, when al-Andalus has neither men nor money, we'll be able to recover it without any difficulty.[74]

Ibn 'Idhari emphasized the economic instability that *parias* brought to the *Taifas.* He noted that "Ferdinand (I of Castile Leon) the enemy of God did not cease to become stronger and the Muslims to become weaker through the payment of tribute (*parias)* to the Christians, until the accursed one descended on Qulumriyya (Coimbra)."[75]

The Muslims were not unaware of the certain outcome of this situation. Ibn 'Idhari again lamented the situation in his work *al-Bayan.* Therein he wrote

> The borders of *al-Andalus* continued to weaken, while the enemy grew stronger as the discord between the rulers of *al-Andalus* blazed fiercely (may God revile them!), so that the enemy eyed them all greedily; he wearied of taking tribute and was only satisfied by the seizure of the country and wrestling it from the grasp of the Muslims.[76]

The borders of *al-Andalus*, about which 'Idhari wrote, had a relatively unclear frontier. Both sides of the conflict were consistent in their

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[74] Amin T. Tibi, trans., *The Tibyān: Memoirs of 'Abd Allāh B. Buluggīn last Zīrid Amīr of Granada* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1986), 90. Interestingly, upon the Christian conquest of Toledo, Sisnando was given the position of governor. In this position, he promoted harmony with the Muslims who remained in the city. Melville, *Christians and Moors,* 87.

[75] Ibn 'Idhari, "al-Bayan," 69.

[76] Melville and Ubaydli, *Christians and Moors in Spain*, 69.

attacks. Despite the lack of a strict physical boundary, one geographic location maintained enormous significance. This was the city of Toledo. It was the former capital of the Visigoths, and thus a city of extreme emotional importance for the Christian kings. Foremost amongst these kings was Alfonso VI of Leon and Castile. It was he who would conquer Toledo and hammer the final nail in the coffin of the *Taifas* and their Party Kings.

It is the common perception amongst historians that the fall of Toledo, along with the whole of the *Taifa* kingdoms, was prompted by the greed of the rulers and the lack of proper religious adherence amongst the Muslim community. This is no doubt true, but it could not have been accomplished without an enemy who was willing - as Alfonso clearly was - to partake in an excursion to reclaim the city. According to one historian, "Alfonso (VI of Leon-Castile) cannot really be said to have conquered Toledo, which fell to him by virtue of the incompetence of its ruler...Yahya al-Qadir"[77] To the people of Islamic Toledo, Alfonso was a dirty and disgusting man. His mere presence was an insult to the refined Muslims. Ibn Bassam Al-Shantarini, a poet who wrote extensively prior to the coming of the Almohads, detailed the interaction of Toledan dignitaries with Alfonso shortly before the fall of the city. He wrote that

> They found him rubbing the sleep from his eyes, with an angry [tousled] head and foul breath. They started to watch him while he ruffled his hoary white head, nor were they oblivious to the stench of his tatty garments and the filth of his fingernails. Then he advanced on them with an ugly face, and with a glance that left them in no doubt that there was evil in him...Then he clapped his hands and fell to the floor and examined between his

[77] Melville and Ubaydli, *Christians and Moors in Spain*, 86.

> legs...He said to them, 'How long have you been hovering around me and wanting to see me? When did you make your agreement with so and so, and where is what you have brought? To Hell with you and to Hell with him.[78]

This conclusion of Alfonso's brief speech was made in reference to the Christian king's disregard for the requests of the Muslims to maintain some level of negotiation. As the author stated, "He desired everything from them...He brought Toledo under his jurisdiction and planted the foot of oppression in its courtyards."[79] When Alfonso, king of Castile-Leon, rode triumphantly into Toledo on May 25th of 1085 the reality of the *Reconquista* could no longer be ignored. The remaining Muslim rulers had no choice but to once again call for help from the Berbers of North Africa. The response was positive, in that the Almoravid Berbers agreed to come to the aid of the *Taifas*. The outcome, however, was not as they had hoped.

In essence, the need for North African Berber intervention in Iberia had been clear since the fall of Barbostro in 1064, if not sooner. However, due directly to the nature of the *Taifa* leadership, such aid had not been sought. With no other option, the Iberian Muslim rulers sent a coalition to Marrakesh to appeal directly to the Almoravid caliph Yusuf Ibn Tashufin. Upon hearing of their dire situation, he is said to have proclaimed, "I am the first to be entrusted to come to the assistance of this faith, and none other than myself will take charge of the matter!"[80]

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[78] Ibn Bassam, "al-Dhakhira fi mahasin ahl al-jazira," in *Christians and Moors in Spain: Volume III Arabic Sources (711-1501)*, ed. Charles Melville and Ahmad Ubaydli (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1992), 88-9.

[79] Ibn Bassam, "al-Dhakhira fi mahasin ahl al-jazira," 89.

[80] 'Abd al-Wahid al-Marrakushi, "al-Mu'jib fi talkhis akhbar al-maghrib," ed. M.S. 'Iryan (Cairo, 1963), in *Christians and Moors in Spain: Volume III Arabic Sources (711-1501)*, ed. Charles Melville and Ahmad Ubaydli (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1992), 93. Melville notes that the author, although writing over 100 years after the

The Christian army under Alfonso had moved on to Zaragosa following the fall of Toledo. When Alfonso VI learned of the arrival of the Almoravids in Iberia, he recalled his troops to meet the Berbers in battle. The two sides fought each other in the Battle of Sagragas in late 1086.[81] The battle was also known as the Battle of Zallaqa; which is an Arabic word meaning "slippery ground", named due to the significant amount of blood spilled on the battlefield.

Unfortunately for Alfonso VI, a high proportion of that blood belonged to Christians. The King of Castile and Leon, despite being at the height of his success, could only muster 2,500 men, including 1,500 cavalry, 750 of which were knights. [82] Opposing Alfonso were the Berbers, and at long last, a united front of the *Taifa* Party Kings mustered around the Sevillian ruler al-Mu'tamid. This counterforce was provided when, "The kings of the Peninsula reinforced Yusuf and al-Mu'tamid with as many horses, men and arms as they could; the total strength of the Muslims, including volunteers and mercenaries, was about 20,000 men."[83] Possibly due to the overwhelming forces against him, Alfonso VI planned for a surprised attack. A Muslim source indicated that Alfonso VI had asked for battle to be delayed until Monday, owing to the fact that Friday, Saturday, and Sunday were holy days for the Muslims, Christians, and Jews (of whom many were involved in the battle). However, Alfonso led a cavalry charge that very Friday.[84] In spite of his

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fall of Toledo, probably gave a more accurate account of the situation due to his location in the East. Therefore, he was free from having to flatter the Almoravids as did contemporary writers.

[81] Wasserstein, *Rise and Fall*, 289.

[82] John France, *Western Warfare in the age of the Crusades: 1000-1300* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 161.

[83] 'Abd al-Wahid al-Marrakushi, "al-Mu'jib fi talkhis akhbar al-maghrib," 95-7.

[84]Melville and Ubaydli, *Christians and Moors in Spain*, 97.

ambitions, the Christian king was defeated, and the reign of the Almoravids' in *al-Andalus* had begun.

The battle was decisive for the Muslims, and the Party Kings felt that they had done a great thing for themselves. However, by inviting the Almoravids, they had sealed their own doom. As 'Abd al-Wahid al-Marrakushi stated in regards to the leader of the coalition that had pleaded for the intervention of Caliph Yusuf, "Al-Mu'tamid returned to al-Andalus happy;...he did not know that his destruction lay in this arrangement. He drew a sword that he thought was for him, and did not know that it was against him."[85]

It soon became clear to the Muslim rulers that the resolution of the Almoravids would be to cleanse the wicked ways in which the *Taifa* Party Kings had been ruling *al-Andalus*. It was not until the Muslim lords admitted that they were facing total annihilation by the Christians that they finally allowed themselves to be undone by the Almoravids. No doubt, they maintained a hope that North African intervention would be only temporary and that one day they would be allowed to return to autonomy. 'Abd Allah ibn Buluggin (1073-1090), in his work, *Tibyan,* noted the Almoravid refusal to continue helping defend Granada after recapturing it from Alfonso VI of Castile-Leon. He stated

> When it came for us to leave Aledo, we asked the Amir of the Muslims (Here he references Almoravid ruler Yusuf ibn Tashufin) to leave troops with us in *al-Andalus* lest the Christian should come down on us in strength and seek revenge for that and other campaigns. [For if he did] we would find ourselves with no troops to defend us. The Amir's reply was: 'Mend your ways and you'll be able to cope with your enemy.' Accordingly he gave us no troops.[86]

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[85] Melville and Ubaydli, *Christians and Moors in Spain*, 93.
[86] Tibi, *The Tibyān*, 130.

For the Muslim kings the party was now over. Had they been able to recapture Toledo, the Christians might have been demoralized enough to have lost control of their kingdoms. That was not to be the case. Despite the fact that the Almoravids had temporarily saved them from forced payment of the *parias*, they would be constrained by the will of the North Africans and the Christian kings from this time forward. The period of the *Taifa* in *al-Andalus*, marked by infighting and betrayal due to ethnic enmity, had come to an end.

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