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Medieval Sourcebook: Ibn Abd-el-Hakem: The Islamic Conquest of Spain

The Muslim expansion continued throughout the sixth and into the seventh century. In 711 the Berber Tarik invaded and rapidly conquered Visigothic Spain. Famously by 733 the Muslims reached Poitiers in France. There a battle, more significant to westerners than Muslims, halted the Muslim advance. In truth by that stage Islam was at its limits of military expansion. Tarik gave his name to Jabal (mount of) Tarik'or, as we say, Gibraltar. In 712 Tarik's lord, Musa ibn-Mosseyr, joined the attack. Within seven years the conquest of the peninsula was complete. It became one of the centers of Moslem civilization, and the Umayyad caliphate of Cordova reached a peak of glory in the tenth century. Spain, called 'l-Andulus'by Muslims remained was at least partially under Muslim control until 1492 when Granada was conquered by Ferdinand and Isabella.

Musa Ibn Nosseyr sent his son Merwan to Tangiers, to wage a holy war upon her coast. Having, then, exerted himself together with his friends, he returned, leaving to Tarik Ibn Amru the command of his army which amounted to 1,700. Others say that 12,000 Berbers besides 16 Arabs were with Tarik: but that is false. It is also said that Musa Ibn Nosseyr marched out of Ifrikiya [Africa] upon an expedition into Tangiers, and that he was the first governor who entered Tangiers, where parts of the Berber tribes Botr and Beranes resided. These had not yet submitted themselves. When he approached Tangiers, he scattered his light troops. On the arrival of his cavalry in the nearest province of Sus, he subdued its inhabitants, and made them prisoners, they yielding him obedience. And he gave them a governor whose conduct was agreeable to them. He sent Ibn Beshr Ibn Abi Artah to a citadel, three days' journey from the town of Cairwan. Having taken the former, he made prisoners of the children, and plundered the treasury. The citadel was called Beshr, by which name it is known to this day. Afterwards Musa deposed the viceroy whom he had placed over Tangiers, and appointed Tarik Ibn Zeiyad governor. He, then, returned to Cairwan, Tarik with his female slave of the name Umm-Hakim setting out for Tangiers. Tarik remained some time in this district, waging a holy war. This was in the year 92. The governor of the straits between this district and Andalus was a foreigner called Ilyan, Lord of Septa. He was also the governor of a town called Alchadra, situated on the same side of the straits of Andalus as Tangiers. Ilyan was a subject of Roderic, the Lord of Andalus [i.e. king of Spain], who used to reside in Toledo. Tarik put himself in communication with Ilyan, and treated him kindly, until they made peace with each other. Ilyan had sent one of his daughters to Roderic, the Lord of Andalus, for her improvement and education; but she became pregnant by him. Ilyan having heard of this, said, I see for him no other punishment or recompense, than that I should bring the Arabs against him. He sent to Tarik, saying, I will bring thee to Andalus; Tarik being at that time in Tlemsen, and Musa Ibn Nosseyr in Cairwan. But Tarik said I cannot trust thee until thou send me a hostage. So he sent his two daughters, having no other children. Tarik allowed them to remain in Tlemsen, guarding them closely. After that Tarik went to Ilyan who - was in Septa on the straits. The latter rejoicing at his coming, said, I will bring thee to Andalus. But there was a mountain called the mountain of Tarik between the two landing places, that is, between Septa and Andalus. When the evening came, Ilyan brought him the vessels, in which he made him embark for that landing-place, where he concealed himself during the day, and in the evening sent back the vessels to bring over the rest of his companions. So they embarked for the landing-place, none of them being left behind: whereas the people of Andalus did not observe them, thinking that the vessels crossing and recrossing were similar to the trading vessels which for their benefit plied backwards and forwards. Tarik was in the last division which went across. He proceeded to his companions, Ilyan together with the merchants that were with him being left behind in Alchadra, in order that he might the better encourage his companions and countrymen. The news of Tarik and of those who were with him, as well as of the place where they were, reached the people of

Andalus. Tarik, going along with his companions, marched over a bridge of mountains to a town called Cartagena. He went in the direction of Cordova. Having passed by an island in the sea, he left behind his female slave of the name of Umm-Hakim, and with her a division of his troops. That island was then called Umm-Hakim. When the Moslems settled in the island, they found no other inhabitants there, than vinedressers. They made them prisoners. After that they took one of the vinedressers, slaughtered him, cut him in pieces, and boiled him, while the rest of his companions looked on. They had also boiled meat in other cauldrons. When the meat was cooked, they threw away the flesh of that man which they had boiled; no one knowing that it was thrown away: and they ate the meat which they had boiled, while the rest of the vinedressers were spectators. These did not doubt but that the Moslems ate the flesh of their companion; the rest being afterwards sent away informed the people of Andalus that the Moslems feed on human flesh, acquainting them with what had been done to the vinedresser.

As Abd-Errahman has related to us on the authority of his father Abd-Allah Ibn Abd-El-Hakem, and of Hisham Ibn Ishaak: There was a house in Andalus, the door of which was secured with padlocks, and on which every new king of the country placed a padlock of his own, until the accession to power of the king against whom the Moslems marched. They therefore begged him to place a padlock on it, as the kings before him were wont to do. But he refused saying, I will place nothing on it, until I shall have known what is inside; he then ordered it to be opened; but behold inside were portraits of the Arabs, and a letter in which it was written: "When this door shall be opened, these people will invade this country."

When Tarik landed, soldiers from Cordova came to meet him; and seeing the small number of his companions they despised him on that account. They then fought. The battle with Tarik was severe. They were routed, and he did not cease from the slaughter of them till they reached the town of Cordova. When Roderic heard of this, he came to their rescue from Toledo. They then fought in a place of the name of Shedunia, in a valley which is called this day the valley of Umm-Hakim [on July 11, 711, at the mouth of the Barbate river]. They fought a severe battle; but God, mighty and great, killed Roderic and his companions. Mugheyth Errumi, a slave of Welid, was then the commander of Tarik's cavalry. Mugheyth Errumi went in the direction of Cordova, Tarik passing over to Toledo. He, then, entered it, and asked for the table, having nothing else to occupy himself. This, as the men of the Bible relate, was the table of Suleyman Ibn Dawid, may the blessing of God be upon him.

As Abd Errahman has related to us on the authority of Yahva Ibn Bukeir, and the latter on the authority of Leyth Ibn Sad: Andalus having been conquered for Musa Ibn Nosseyr, he took from it the table of Suleyman Ibn Dawid, and the crown. Tarik was told that the table - was in a citadel called Faras, two days' journey from Toledo, and the governor of this citadel was a nephew of Roderic. Tarik, then, wrote to him, promising safety both for himself and family. The nephew descended from the citadel, and Tarik fulfilled his promise with reference to his safety. Tarik said to him, deliver the table, and he delivered it to him. On this table were gold and silver, the like of which one had not seen. Tarik, then, took off one of its legs together with the pearls and the gold it contained, and fixed to it a similar leg. The table was valued at two hundred thousand dinars, on account of the pearls that were on it. He took up the pearls, the armour, the gold, the silver, and the vases which he had with him, and found that quantity of spoils, the like of which one had not seen. He collected all that. Afterwards he returned to Cordova, and having stopped there, he wrote to Musa Ibn Nosseyr informing him of the conquest of Andalus, and of the spoils which he had found. Musa then wrote to Welid Abd Ed-Malik' informing him of that, and throwing himself upon his mercy. Musa wrote to Tarik ordering him not to leave Cordova until he should come to him. And he reprimanded him very severely. Afterwards Musa Ibn Nosseyr set out for Andalus, in Rajab of the year 93, taking with him the chiefs of the Arabs, the commanders, and the leaders of the Berbers to Andalus. He set out being angry with Tarik, and took with him Habib Ibn Abi Ubeida Elfihi, and left the government of Cairwan to his son Abd Allah who was his eldest son. He then passed through Alchadra, and afterwards went over to Cordova. Tarik then met him, and tried to satisfy him, saying: "I am merely thy slave, this conquest is thine." Musa collected of the money a sum, which

exceeded all description. Tarik delivered to him all that he had plundered.

note: The selection above is from the *History of the Conquest of Spain* by the Egyptian Ibn Abd-el-Hakem (d. 870 or 871), who also wrote a history of Egypt. He mixes myths and fact in his account, which was written a century and a half after the events it describes.

From Ibn Abd-el-Hakem, *History of the Conqziest of Spain*, trans. by John Harris Jones (Gottingen, W. Fr. Kaestner, 1858), pp. 18-22

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