CHAPTER ONE

THE JEWISH AND MUSLIM MINORITIES IN MEDIEVAL PORTUGAL

The kingdom of Portugal emerged in the twelfth century from the complex political struggles that unfolded following the death of King Alfonso VI of León-Castile (1065/72–1109). In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the *Territorium Portucalense* was only a county of the Christian kingdom of León-Castile, centred on the town of Porto and circumscribed by the Minho and Douro rivers. To its north was Galicia and to its south the county of Coimbra. Alfonso VI of León-Castile granted the counties of Portugal and Coimbra to his illegitimate daughter Teresa and her French husband Henry of Burgundy in 1095–7. The rulers of Portugal and Coimbra took advantage of the turbulent minority of Alfonso VII (1109–1157) to achieve a *de facto* political independence. Teresa’s son Afonso I (1139–1185) deposed his overbearing mother in 1128 and assumed total control of the lands granted to his parents. Afonso began to style himself *Portugalensium Rex* in 1139 and his title received papal recognition in 1179.¹

Afonso I and his successors not only preserved their political independence from Castile-León but also gradually expanded the new realm at the expense of the Muslim south. By the middle of the twelfth century, the conquests of Lisbon and Santarém in 1147 had firmly established the southern borders of the new realm on the banks of the Tejo River, and Afonso I even started to extend his dominion south of the river. In spite of strong Muslim counter-offensives in the 1190s that wiped out most Portuguese gains south of the Tejo, the Portuguese held on to these two towns. In the thirteenth century his successors, with the help of the military Orders, took advantage of the political divisions amongst the Muslims and gradually extended their dominions southwards between

1217 and 1249. Afonso III (1246–1279) completed this successful military advance with the conquest of Faro in 1249 and the treaty of Alcâñices in September 1297 officially settled the border between Portugal and Castile-León. Portugal's territorial expansion in the Iberian Peninsula thus came to an end nearly two and a half centuries earlier than that of the neighbouring realm of Castile but its impact on Portuguese society was just as long-lasting. It certainly did not create a uniformly Christian population in Portugal. Just as in the rest of the Iberian Peninsula the result was in fact quite the reverse. In the wake of the Portuguese conquest numerous communities of Jews (judeus) and free Muslims (mouros forros) came under Christian rule.

**Early History**

**Muslims**

The process of Muslim settlement in Portugal remains a major unknown in Portuguese history. Following the destruction of the post-Roman Visigothic kingdom by the invading Arab and Berber armies in 711, the cities of Faro, Lisbon, Beja, Santarém and Coimbra swiftly fell to the armies of the Arab general ‘Abd al-‘Aziz between 714 and 716. Muslim and Christian sources both record that the local Visigothic rulers negotiated peaceful submission treaties with ‘Abd al-‘Aziz. Arab clans settled in different parts of this region but it seems reasonable to assume that, as elsewhere in the Peninsula, indigenous converts to Islam, the muwalladūn (مؤلدون), probably constituted the primary component of the Muslim population during the following centuries. Ahmad b. al-Huṣayn ibn Qasī, a mystic who rose to become independent ruler of Silves for a brief period in the middle of the twelfth century, was himself the descendant of indigenous converts to Islam.3

The region north of the Mondego River formed part of an Islamic march facing the regions that remained under Christian rule in the

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