Writing in the middle of the thirteenth century CE, the Castilian historian Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada concluded his history of Muslim Spain with a lengthy discussion of the Andalusi civil wars in the early eleventh century and the observation that after this point “there was no longer a king in Spain from the lineage of the Umayyads.” Rodrigo’s narrative is only one among several Christian Spanish chronicles that contain data on Umayyad affairs, and in many cases these medieval Latin texts provide a valuable supplement to the relatively scarce Arabic materials that survive to document the western branch of the dynasty. Although these Latin sources are often biased, they nonetheless reflect perceptions of the Umayyads in the eyes of medieval Christian chroniclers, both contemporary and later, and they indicate not only an active interest in Andalusi and eastern Islamic history but also a reasonable knowledge of Umayyad dynastic affairs. At the
same time, these chronicles testify to the ongoing diffusion of historical information from Arabic sources into Christian scholarship in the period from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries.

Christian Spanish chroniclers certainly consulted earlier Latin histories, but in several cases they must also have obtained data from Arabic sources, either written or oral. While it is unlikely that many of these Latin authors knew Arabic themselves, they undoubtedly had access to native speakers – whether Mozarabs, Muslims or Jews – who could work with them to translate Arabic texts and oral traditions. Although their specific Arabic sources are now impossible to identify, some of these materials evidently had a strongly pro-Umayyad perspective, since this often still finds reflection in the Christian Iberian narratives. Strikingly, this remains true even when a Latin chronicler himself demonstrates an aversion to Islam. Overall, it seems likely that some of the information transmitted through these Latin chronicles preserves data from earlier Arabic Andalusi histories, some of which no longer survive.

This paper will examine perceptions of the Umayyads in both Damascus and Córdoba in medieval Iberian Christian chronicles. The survey includes not only narratives contemporary with Umayyad rulership – i.e., written by Christian authors in the period from the eighth to the tenth centuries – but also three that were written later, during the thirteenth century, an era of prolific productivity among Spanish chroniclers. For all of the Iberian Christian writers of these chronicles, the Umayyad period held a double-edged heritage; it represented a past that was not only their own regional history but also the narrative of a profoundly alien culture.

All of the seven medieval Iberian chronicles used in this study were composed in Latin, and they fall into three basic chronological and regional categories. The earliest two are the so-called Arabic-Byzantine Chronicle of 741 and the Chronicle of 754. Both were apparently written by Christian authors living in al-Andalus in the first half of the eighth century, and both seem to have had access to the same eastern source(s) for their information on Umayyad affairs.4 These


4 Both texts are edited by Juan Gil, Corpus Scriptorum Muzarabicorum (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1973) I, 7–54. More recently, the Chronicle of 754 has also been edited and translated by José Eduardo López Pereira