CHAPTER 2

The Northeast Iberian Peninsula and its Muslim Rulers (Eighth–Twelfth Century)

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1 The Islamic Conquest and its Consolidation in the Iberian Peninsula

In 622 Arabia witnessed the birth of the Islamic faith and the beginning of a mighty empire that would quickly spread across the defeated Byzantine Empire until reaching North Africa in the late seventh century. The first contact between Islamic troops — comprised of Arabs, the ruling elite, and Berbers from North Africa used as shock troops — and the Iberian Peninsula was in 675 during naval attacks against Hispania Carthaginensis. In 707, these same troops — occupied the Balearic Islands, until then under Byzantine rule, after a surrender agreement was reached; and in 710, some Arab chroniclers recorded the first exploratory raids on Punta de Tarifa. The most important Islamic military raid occurred in 711 and was led by the Berber Tāriq ibn Ziyād. The following year, the Arab governor Mūsa ibn Nuṣayr, directly appointed by the Umayyad Caliph of Damascus, headed further expeditions of conquest. The initial raid of 711 was followed by the Battle of Guadalete, or Wadilakka, where the Visigoth King Roderick was defeated.

After their victory at Guadalete, the Muslims found a kingdom in decline, a territory fragmented by noblemen, deteriorated cities, a changing rural

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2 Thomas F. Glick, From Muslim fortress to Christian castle. Social and cultural change in medieval Spain (Manchester, 1995), p. 49.
world due to the new political situation\textsuperscript{4} and a society under tensions caused by the transition to a new order, that of Islam. Several rural settlements were abandoned around 711 as a result of a series of socio-economic processes that started at the end of the seventh century. The rural collapse could have derived from the Muslim conquest or, indeed, have been a consequence del desarrollo interno de las fuerzas sociales y económicas altomedievales, suficientemente maduras para esos mismos procesos en muchos territorios peninsulares y europeos a lo largo del siglo \textit{VIII}.\textsuperscript{5}

To date, the general consensus has been that the Visigoth site of Bovalar in Seros, in the west of current Catalonia, was abandoned due to the Islamic conquest, after having been razed to the ground, as shown by the archaeological strata in the first quarter of the eighth century.\textsuperscript{6} However, the site of Hernan Paez (Toledo) was abandoned at a similar time due to difficulties to cultivate the land and obtain enough food to guarantee the survival of its population.\textsuperscript{7}

This disruption aided the quick conquest of the various territories within the defeated Visigoth Kingdom located along the network of Roman roads connecting the Iberian Peninsula. Therefore, the conquest continued towards Cordoba, Toledo, Saragossa, Huesca, Valencia, Lleida and Tarragona, from where, following the Via Augusta, it reached Septimania. According to the information from the \textit{Mozarabic Chronicle of 754}, Tarraconensis was conquered between 713 and 714:

\begin{itemize}
\item Carlos Lalíena, "Acerca de la articulación social de los espacios rurales en el Ebro Medio (siglos V–IX)," \textit{Mainake} 31 (2009), 149–63.
\item "of the internal development of early medieval social and economic forces, mature enough to cause those same processes in many peninsular and European territories throughout the eighth century". Alfonso Vigil-Escalera, "Formas de poblamiento rural en torno al 711: documentación arqueológica del centro peninsular," \textit{Zona arqueológica} 15 (2011), 198.
\item Pere de Palol, \textit{El Bovalar (Seròs, Segrià). Conjunt d’època paleocristiana i visigòtica} (Lleida, 1989).
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