Response to: Jesús Lorenzo (Medieval Encounters 20 (2014), DOI: 10.1163/15700674-12342174)

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In a recent issue of Medieval Encounters (20.3 (2014), 273–275), Jesús Lorenzo published a review of my book, La conquista islámica de la península ibérica y la tergiversación del pasado: del catastrofismo al negacionismo (Madrid, Marcial Pons, 2013). In this text, he seems to have misunderstood the nature of what I have denominated the “negationist” thesis, whose proponents reject the existence of a connection between the origins of al-Andalus and the process of conquest led by Berber contingents and Arabs acting under the direction of the Umayyad Caliphate of Damascus after 92 AH/711 AD.

Lorenzo focuses his attention on my critiques of negationism and its principal representatives, two Spanish authors—non-professional historian Ignacio Olagüe (d. 1974) and Arabist Emilio González Ferrín, Professor of Islamic Thought at the University of Seville. Indeed, although this issue plays an important role in my book, I also concentrate on many other questions related to the Islamic conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, most of which are ignored in Lorenzo’s review. For example, his review does not mention the two other historiographical tendencies I cite as contributing directly to a distortion of the history of Islamic conquest, namely, the catastrophic vision of Spanish nationalism and the mythologizing discourse inherent to Arabic tradition.

Yet, surprisingly, despite the fact that Lorenzo emphasizes the importance of my refutation of negationism in the book, he nevertheless overlooks the principal focus of my argument, that is, what I believe to be the fraudulent nature of this phenomenon. Despite the fact that the theories propagated by
Olagüe and González Ferrín seem, in my view, prejudiced against commonly received historiographical knowledge, Lorenzo, a professional historian, omits any reference to this issue and instead, prefers to criticize what he calls my “verbal excesses.” As such, he dodges the nucleus of the problem and opts to concentrate on merely formal aspects. Lorenzo’s perspective seems very similar to the one that Kenneth B. Wolf adopts in his review of my book,1 to which I have previously responded.2 In the interest of brevity, I refer interested readers to the arguments I formulated in that response, as well as to those that Luis Molina added in his own contribution to the debate.3

Due to the nature of his analysis, which strikes me as superficial, Lorenzo misinterprets the persistent problem that negationism presents. This is revealed, for example, by his erroneous reading of Pierre Guichard’s article, published in Annales ESC in 1974, which by no means assumed an end to the debate over negationism. Guichard himself did not hesitate to confirm, almost thirty years later, that Olagüe’s ideas “deserve deeper analysis.”4 Furthermore, Maribel Fierro’s piece, published in 2009, which Lorenzo cites in his review, serves as another example of the ongoing debate.5 Lorenzo also maintains that negationism was “rekindled by the eleventh centenary of the conquest, celebrated in 2011.” In reality, the symptoms of this revitalization began to appear a decade earlier than that, first, in 2004, with the reprint of La revolución islámica en Occidente, the latest and most ample version of Olagüe’s ideas, and later, in 2006, when González Ferrín published Historia general de Al Andalus (Córdoba, Almuzara)—the first and, until now, only academic defense of the negationist thesis.

Beyond these points, Lorenzo makes other statements that I feel demonstrate a biased reading of my study. This is clear, for example, in his evaluation of my mention of Holocaust denial, which Lorenzo does not hesitate to qualify

4 De la expansión árabe a la Reconquista. Esplendor y fragilidad de al-Andalus (Granada: Legado Andalusí, 2002), 20.