



## « Córdoba 956 » notes by Conrad Taylor

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**The following pages of notes have been compiled over the course of three or four months, as a personal aide-memoire and as a way of making sense of data collected for an educational project for the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London.**

The Institute supports a worldwide Islamic religious education programme for children of school age, conducted by volunteer teachers. The curriculum is planned to include, as a case study of Islam in society, a look at the Islamic society of Andalusia in the middle ages. To support this, an illustrated textbook has already been prepared which imaginatively visits various 'people, places and times' between the Islamic conquest of Spain in 711 and the fall of Grenada to Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492 – and the expulsion of Muslims and Jews to North Africa which followed.

To supplement the understandably simplistic material presented for children in the textbook, the Institute is investigating the possibility of a CD-ROM of extra resource material in further depth, for the benefit of the volunteer teachers. I was asked to help to prototype that CD, but little content for that project had been systematically organised when I was engaged, so I turned some of my effort to researching content, despite previous unfamiliarity with this period of history.

**One suggestion for content was to make materials available for envisioning a 'virtual visit' to Andalusia's Caliphal capital city of Córdoba in the year 956. The year was chosen as a kind of peak of consolidation of Islamic Andalusian society and its civil achievements – paradoxically at a time which historians of the old school dubbed the 'Dark Ages'.**

This 'visit' should give an opportunity to explore the nature of Andalusian society at that time; the relationships within and between its communities; and its place in the wider world, including its diplomatic, cultural and economic links.

Since I did not have a sound knowledge of the world in 956, I consulted a number of histories and encyclopædias to compile this personal suite of notes, for my own benefit as a worker on the project. It does not reflect the opinion of the Institute of Ismaili Studies in any way.

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## Córdoba in the year 956 CE /346 AH

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We are going to imagine a virtual tour of Córdoba in Islamic Andalusia in the year 956 of the Christian era, 346 years after the emigration or *hijrah* of the Prophet Muhammed to the town of Medina.

For the purposes of such a mental exercise in time-travel, it may be useful for the virtual traveller to adopt the persona of an educated young man from a merchant family, travelling with one or two servants.\* As a young man of this standing and status, you will find that many doors in the Muslim world of the time open readily to you; pilgrims and scholars are widely respected and encouraged, yet you will still be able to talk to the man in the street.

### The domain of the Umayyad Caliph, 'Abd ar-Rahman III

If you were to visit Córdoba in the year 956, you would arrive in the 43rd or 44th year of the reign of '**Abd ar-Rahman III**, the self-proclaimed 'Caliph an-Nasir', descended from the Umayyad dynasty which had once ruled as Caliphs in Damascus prior to the Abassid coup of 750. 'Abd ar-Rahman III, short in stature and with blue eyes inherited from his Basque mother Muzna and grandmother Iniga (the daughter of King Fortun Garçes of Navarre), would be about sixty-five years old at this time, living chiefly in his newly-built palace/city of Madinat az-Zahra, five kilometres west of Córdoba.

In the first 14 years of his reign, 'Abd ar-Rahman conducted a lightning series of military campaigns, first crushing the southern rebellion of **Ibn Hafsun**, then defeating the Christian armies of León and Navarre. The northern border of Andalusia would be, for now, fairly stable; and Islamic Andalusia would contain the river valleys of the Ebro, Jucar, Tagus, Guadiana and Guadalquivir. Along the northern border were the kingdoms of Navarre (Pamplona) and Asturias-Léon, and the County of Barcelona.

Despite this relative security, the Caliph must still have had bad memories of his ambush and defeat at the Battle of Shant Manqus (Simancas) near the Duero River by the army of King **Ramiro II of León** (939), from which he barely escaped with his own life. From that time on, 'Abd ar-Rahman was not so personally adventurous in war.

Since adopting the title of Caliph, 'Abd ar-Rahman had actively opposed the Fatimid caliphate in North Africa, financing the Zanata clan of Berbers in rebellions against them, and sending naval raids against the North African coast. In 931 he invaded North Africa and seized Ceuta and Tangiers, and the following year was declared overlord of Fez and Mauritania.

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\* This advice is not meant to discriminate against women and girls. But it has to be admitted that in Islamic society or indeed almost any society in the period under review, opportunities for free movement in society were limited.

We would find Andalusia in the year 956 at its most powerful, stable, united and confident: a true golden age. Yet within fifty years, al-Andalus would start to break up into factions and petty kingdoms, and the Caliphate itself, which ‘Abd ar-Rahman III proclaimed in 929, would be abolished by a council meeting in Córdoba in 1031. Perhaps beneath the surface, a careful observer in 956 could discern the regional and ethnic tensions, especially the old-established rivalries between Arab and Berber clans which would later tear Andalusia apart into thirty *ta’ifa* ‘party kingdoms’.\*

### Exploring the city

Córdoba at this time was the capital of Andalusia and the largest and also the most sophisticated city in Europe, with Europe’s first system of street lighting. Estimates of the population at this time have varied from 100,000 to a million,† most of whom lived in the more than twenty suburban districts that lay outside the walled inner city itself, which was referred to as *al-Madina*. The city walls were of stone quarried from the local mountains, enclosing a tightly-packed area of no more than four square kilometres.

Córdoba stands on the northern bank of a bend in the River Guadalquivir (the *Wadi al-Kabir*, the Great River), spanned by an ancient Roman bridge. Though it can run quite swiftly when in spate, the Guadalquivir is navigable from just downstream of the city centre to Seville and so out to sea, and we would almost certainly see cargo boats moored along the northern bank and discharging their wares at the riverside port, though other trade goods moved overland on the backs of small caravans of asses and mules.‡ Córdoba stood at a meeting-point of a network of regional roads, and was an important centre for trade.

If you were to look downstream from the bridge on the northern bank, you might discern the movement and hear the groans of a waterwheel or *noria*. This invention, introduced from the Middle East, was a vertically-mounted wooden wheel using the power of the river itself to raise water in the compartments or pots along its rim – from which they drained into an elevated stone channel, and from there along a gently inclined miniature aqueduct into a storage tank to supply the Palace or Alcazar (*al-qasr*) and its gardens. This *noria* is one manifestation of a hybrid technology that marries the aqueduct-building traditions of Roman Iberia and water-raising traditions of Berber North Africa with hydraulic innovations from the Middle East.

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\* They were called dubbed ‘party kingdoms’ because they were based on sectional or ‘party’ interests e.g. Arab vs Berber, Qaysite vs Kalbite Arab, Sanhaja vs Zanata Berber, or Saqqaliba vs everyone else.

† The higher estimate in E. Lévi-Provençal, *Histoire de l’Espagne musulmane*, 1950–3 (3 vols), but the lower one is easier to believe.

‡ The use of wheeled transport was unknown throughout most of the Arab world, having been ousted by the superior load-carrying ability of the camel, especially over unmade roads. But camels would not be useful in Andalusia and it is likely that asses or mules would be used instead. Wheelwrights and cartmakers were however to be found within the Christian community; these vehicles may have been used in agriculture.

At the northern end of the bridge, the main road ran through a great gate in the city walls, the Gate of the Bridge (*Bab al-Kantar*). Just inside this gate to the left stood the former emiral palace, the aforementioned Alcazar. This palace was originally closely flanked by the south-western corner of the city wall, but for the convenience of the ruling family the original wall was breached and a large rectangular extension was added to accommodate the palace gardens.

Just north of the Alcazar was the area later known as the Juderia, the Jewish quarter, though at this time the extensive Jewish community could be found living throughout Córdoba. On the western side of the Juderia was another city gate, *Bab al-Attarin*, the Gate of the Perfumers, also known as *Bab ish-Biliya*, the Seville Gate.

On the eastern side of the main north-south road and directly opposite the Alcazar stood the grand Friday mosque. The mosque survives today because after the Christian conquest it was taken over as a Roman Catholic cathedral, with a Gothic chapel structure planted incongruously in the middle of it.

This impressive mosque was first built by ‘Abd ar-Rahman I between 785 and 786, at a cost of 80,000 dinars, in a style strongly influenced by Syrian architecture and the great mosque at Damascus. Strangely, it has almost the same orientation as the Damascus mosque, which means that the the *qibla*, or direction of prayer, is only slightly east of south – a true orientation towards Mecca would point it much more towards the east. Inside, the lofty roof of the mosque is suspended between a double tier of columns and arches reminiscent of the form of Roman aqueducts like the one at Merida.

After the original structure was built, ‘Abd ar-Rahman II (r. 822–52) and his son Muhammad (r. 852–86) extended the mosque further to the south and towards the river by adding ten rows of eight columns to the original ten rows of eleven columns, and moving the *qibla* wall to the new southern end of the structure. In 956, we would find that the *sahn* (open courtyard) had been enlarged, and on its northern side the present Caliph had had a new minaret built after demolishing the one built by Hisham I (r. 788–96). A sheltered colonnade was also in the process of being added around the courtyard at about this time. The mosque building itself was unwalled on its northern side, so that the ten deep arcades opened directly onto the courtyard.

Within the city walls there were numerous other mosques, synagogues, and also Christian churches such as the Church of St. Cyprian; but the main Christian places of worship were beyond the walls in suburban districts – for example the Basilica of St. Acisclus, which had been in existence since the sixth century and lay beside the road to Seville in the suburb known as *Rabad al-Rakkakin* to the west of the city walls.

## Markets and workshops

To the east of the Great Mosque, but still inside the main walled part of the city, we would find a very lively area of shops, stalls and craft workshops. Here was the covered market, the *Alcaiceria*, right next to the Great Mosque; textiles, including silk, would be the main commodity traded here.

East of the *Alcaiceria* was a maze of streets, with ground-floor shops and craft workshops, and the owners living above their shops. Many of the upper storeys protruded over the street, which provided a measure of pleasant relief from the sun in summer. The streets were narrow, thronged with people, and merchandise spilled out onto the street. We would have to push in places to get through – and it would be wise to keep your purse hidden. At night, however, many of the central streets of Córdoba would be empty, except for the patrols of foot-soldiers under the command of the *sahib al-Madina*, the officer responsible for city security.

There was a tendency for businesses of a single type to gather together in the same street or area, and in this south-eastern corner of the walled city we could find the Coppersmiths' Street, the Butchers' Street, the Lacemakers' Street and the Fishmarket.

Other similar centres of production and trade could be found in the *Ajerquia* (*al-Janib al-Sharqi*, 'the eastern wing'), which was the earliest extension of Córdoba just to the east of the city walls – a large area, bigger than the walled city itself, and divided into six named quarters.\* Many Mozarabs (that is, culturally and linguistically Arabized Christians) lived in this part of town. We would be able to enter the *Ajerquia* from the walled city by going through the New Gate, *al-Bab al-Djadid*.

Within the *Ajerquia* we would find some less prestigious commercial enterprises. Here was the Straw Market and the Mat Market, and streets lined with the workshops of the makers of vinegar, soap, chairs and shoes, the plasterworkers and the sheepskin-dressers. But here were also the establishments of copyists and booksellers. And there was a whole quarter known as *al-Tarrazin* ('of the weavers') – textile production was an important part of Córdoba's industry.

The artisanal and merchant communities of Córdoba also included potters, tanners, ropemakers and dyers; makers of the famous red-dyed, tooled Córdoba leather goods such as saddles and belts and harnesses; makers of parchment; goldsmiths, jewellers and silversmiths; makers of musical instruments and caskets, apothecaries etc. There was also a major armoury in Córdoba, and another at the new royal palace of *Madinat az-Zahra*.

Each trade was organised into a guild under the presidency of an *amin* (master); the guild regulated and enforced standards of trade, and the *amin*

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\* An extra enclosing wall was built in the 11th century to the east of the *Ajerquia*, to give it some measure of added protection against external attack.

was held responsible by the government's market inspector (the *sahib al-suq*) for the behaviour of his guild members in matters of fair trade and quality of goods.

Bakers and food-shops, of course, would be found in every neighbourhood in the city. Families sent their uncooked loaves and pastries to the bakery so that they could be cooked in the bakery's well-regulated ovens, together with small loaves which the baker would accept as payment in kind. These small loaves he would then sell to passers-by.

There was also a large market area, al-Qasaba, right in the heart of the walled city. This is where we would find the greatest concentration of sellers of agricultural products, spices and trade goods from distant lands.

The most common coin in use in 956 was the *dirham*, which was made of silver. Seventeen of these were equivalent in value to a *dinar*, which was struck in gold. Under the 'Abd ar-Rahman III, a gold mint – the *Dar al-sikka* – was founded for the first time in Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire; and in 947/8 the Mint was moved to Madinat az-Zahra.

### Other suburbs of Córdoba

Córdoba developed in a period when there was very little wheeled traffic, which meant there was no motivation to keep roads straight. Even the main thoroughfares twisted and turned. In residential areas, little lanes often ended in a cul-de-sac which could be sealed off at night for protection. Dwellings were very secluded, 'interior' spaces with few or no windows looking out onto the street. Instead they would have an internal courtyard, accessed from the outside by an angled passageway, onto which the living rooms opened.

Eventually if we were to walk through the city heading northwards along the main north–south road we would reach the northern gate, known as *al-Bab al-Yahud* ('the Jews' gate') or else as *al-Bab Liyun* ('the Léon gate'). Beyond this gate we would find yet more suburbs, and also the main cemeteries ('Amir, Mut'a, Umm Salama and al-Burdi). The cemeteries were leafy places which played the role of a kind of public park.

On the southern bank of the Guadalquivir we would find the region of Shaqunda (from the Latin, 'Secunda'). Formerly this was a bustling suburb, but in 956 it would be a wrecked area of levelled buildings, destroyed on the orders of al-Hakam I in 814 in reprisals for a notorious uprising which was centred there.\* By the year 956, Shaqunda had not yet been rebuilt.

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\* The so-called 'Suburb Affair' was fomented in part by the teachings of a zealous group of religious teachers and jurists, many of whom had studied in Medina; they were followers of the Malikite school of shari'a interpretation founded by the Berber Yahya ibn Yahya (d. 847), and later developed at Medina by Malik ibn Anas (715–95). Their Córdoba followers' campaigns of criticism of the emir Al-Hakam for impiety, which must have meshed with some real social grievances, culminated in the revolt in Shaqunda. It was put down by Al-Hakam with great brutality: hundreds of residents were executed, an estimated 20,000 were driven out (most of whom sought refuge in North Africa), and the whole quarter was razed to the ground.

## The countryside around Córdoba

The valley of the Guadalquivir where Córdoba is situated is a relatively broad one, with the mountains of the Sierra Morena to the north and more gradually sloping hills to the south. The river itself flows from east to west, turning gradually south and passing Seville on its way to the sea; at Córdoba it has lost much of its early energy and has begun to meander.

### Agriculture

Whereas most of Iberia supports dry agriculture, the sheltered valley of the Guadalquivir was one of those which the Muslim immigrants adapted to support new crops introduced from North Africa, Syria and even India. Citrus fruits such as lemons, oranges and grapefruit, and vegetables such as carrots and parsnips and aubergines were introduced and grown in orchards and vegetable gardens. Another important crop was olives, already established in Roman times but now assuming an even greater importance in the Andalusian diet, and in trade too.

The innovation in crops – which also extended in other areas to sugar-cane, mulberries and even wet rice – was only possible through irrigation, and the Arabs and Berbers improved upon existing spring-fed gravity-flow Roman aqueduct systems by adding new means of raising water from the rivers that had been developed in Persia – either vertically-mounted *noria* wheels pushed along by the water flow itself, or animal-driven wheels in which a couple of oxen would trudge round in a circle driving a horizontal wheel geared to a vertical one that lowered and raised a ‘potgarland’ rope with water-pots tied along it.

In some mountain slopes, *foggara* (or, *qanat*) chain-wells were also bored and linked to wells and aqueducts. The *foggara* system is a sloped series of wells, the bottoms of which are linked by a stone-lined tunnel to collect and concentrate the water and funnel it out of the mountainside. A system of this sort seems to have supplied Madinat az-Zahra, the palace city.

It is unclear\* what the landholding system was, precisely. The Berbers who had come over from North Africa were chiefly sedentary, agriculturally-oriented Zanatas, and turned once again to farming wherever they settled.

Many workers on the land would be tenant farmers or sharecroppers, most probably descended from Hispano-Roman families which had tilled the land under similar contracts from Visigothic landlords. But now their tenancies would be held from Arab soldiers who had been granted parcels of land with sitting tenants. As a reward for their assistance in putting down the Berber revolt in 741, the Syrian followers of Balj ibn Bishr were rewarded with fiefs of land along the Guadalquivir and elsewhere in southern Andalusia.

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\* to the writer at present, that is...

Whether the rents would be collected directly by landlords or their agents, or collected by agents of the state on their behalf, I do not know.

Also unclear to me at the moment is the mechanism whereby innovations in agriculture and irrigation were introduced to the Andalusian countryside. Poor tenant farmers themselves could not be aware of the opportunities; would not, for example, be in communication with the agronomists experimentally acclimatising plants in Palace gardens; nor would they have the capital to risk. Perhaps therefore there were some land-owners with a more pro-active attitude to agriculture, or family estates which were managed in a more hands-on fashion, perhaps even employing a rural proletariat (slaves were not used in farming in Islamic Andalusia).

On well-drained slope in Andalusia there were extensive grape vineyards. Regardless of Islamic prohibitions against alcohol, wine seems to have been widely consumed by all the communities at this time, and there is ample reference in Arabic literature of the period to drinking in upper-class circles.

Mutton features frequently in recipe books of the period. Although the poor probably ate little meat, this at least indicates that flocks of sheep would be common in upland areas, and those Berber immigrants from pastoral traditions may also have been involved in this branch of farming.

### **Mining and forestry**

The mountains around Córdoba were rich in various mineral resources. To the northwest was Europe's largest source of cinnabar, an ore of mercury. This was exported throughout and beyond the Islamic world for use in extracting gold from medium-grade ore through amalgamation and distillation.\* Iron was also mined near Córdoba, also lead and copper.

Andalusia at the time was much more heavily wooded than it is now, as was most of Europe. The mountain slopes would have abounded in forests – mostly pines in the south, great stands of oak further north – but the dry conditions and thin topsoil meant that these forests were inherently unstable and slow to regenerate, especially if timber-felled land were invaded by sheep which would eat the young shoots. It this time, however, the forests were still a notable resource. Wood was extensively used in building and other construction work, for stakes in vineyards, and probably also slow-burned to make charcoal for household cooking. Since many other parts of the Islamic world were in more arid areas devoid of forestry, much wood was also exported by ship from Andalusia to North Africa, though the Moroccan Rif and Sicily were also sources of timber for the Islamic world.

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\* Gold and silver dissolve in the liquid metal mercury to form an 'amalgam'. To extract gold from low-grade ores, mercury is mixed with the powdered ore to wash the small grains of gold out. The amalgam is then heated in an enclosed vessel to evaporate the mercury, which is condensed and recycled; metallic gold is left at the bottom of the evaporation container.

## A visit to Madinat az-Zahra

If we were to leave the city by the south-western gate, we would pass through a small suburban area, but soon would be in the Andalusian countryside. About five kilometres west of Córdoba is a place where the Sierra Morena projects south into the valley of the Guadalquivir, forming a huge natural spur flanked west and east by ravines. On top of this spur, which affords a commanding view of the surrounding countryside, stood the splendid palace-city of Madinat az-Zahra, which ‘Abd ar-Rahman started to have built some time in the late 930s, and named after one of his wives.

The road from Córdoba at first ran close to the river and passed by a number of grand country residences, then turned north and uphill. We would enter the palatial city through its southern gate, the *Bab al-Sura* or Gate of the Statue.\*

Madinat az-Zahra was not just a palace, but a genuine city laid out in roughly rectangular plan, some one and a half kilometres from east to west, and about three quarters of a kilometre north to south. The hilly landscape had been hacked out and graded to form three terraces; the largest of these was the southern one, where the ordinary people lived and worked, and the upper two were occupied by the palace and outlying buildings. The Alcazar itself stood prominently overlooking the town.

Unlike the crooked streets of Córdoba, which evolved over many centuries, this Madina had a more regular layout, though some accommodations had to be made to suit the hilly topography, and mosques also stood in their own alignment towards Mecca.

The city had its own market and commercial district, and an official centre for artisans to practice their trades, the *Dar al-sina‘a*. Many people moved into Madinat az-Zahra, encouraged by the Caliph’s grant of 400 dirhams to anyone who would build a dwelling in the new city. As well as freelance economic activities, there were workshops controlled by the State: the armouries making chain-mail, spears, arrows, and leather tack for the cavalry, for instance, and also the Mint, the *Dar al-sikka*. For both palatial and military use, the Alcazar possessed enormous stables.

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\* So complete was the destruction of Madinat az-Zahra during the civil conflicts of 1010–13, and the neglect thereafter, that archaeological excavations and restoration work that commenced in 1911 have still uncovered only 10% of the site: the palace area. Thus our impressions of the rest of the city have to be inferred largely from contemporary written accounts.

## Distinguished visitors to the palace

By 956 'Abd ar-Rahman had become not just a local head of state, but an important actor on the world stage, receiving delegations from far-distant courts. In 949, a Byzantine delegation came to see him, bringing as a gift a Greek copy of Dioscorides' treatise on botany, later to be known in Latin as the *Materia Medica*.

Depending on when we arrive in 956, we might run into the monk **Johann von Gorze**, sent as a representative of the German Emperor Otto (who was later to be crowned by the Pope as Holy Roman Emperor). Otto sent Johann von Gorze to seek help in suppressing attacks in the Mediterranean by pirates operating from Spain and North Africa. Following Arab tradition, the Caliph is said to have sent his diplomatic visitor a gift of a splendid ceremonial garment when he arrived, but von Gorze declined to wear it, explaining that it was against the principles of his order. Impressed by this, 'Abd ar-Rahman is said to have gone out of his way to meet the Emperor's representative in simple dress, without the normal pomp of the court.

## Individuals

Here are some of the people whom we might meet or hear of were we to visit Córdoba and Madinat az-Zahra in 956:

- **General Naja**, the Caliph's chief of staff – a freed slave probably of Slavic (*Saqqaliba*) origin.\*
- **Hasday ben Shaprut**, a prominent Jewish multilingual scholar, expert physician, and a close favourite of 'Abd ar-Rahman, who is in the habit of entrusting him with important diplomatic missions e.g. to Burgundy, León and Germany.
- **Bishop Rabi ibn Zayd**, a Christian bishop and scholar of natural philosophy who is welcome at court and also charged by the Caliph with ambassadorial duties e.g. to Constantinople and Jerusalem; also author of the *Calendar of Córdoba*, a combination of agricultural and liturgical calendars.
- **Munir bin Said al-Balluti**, the elderly learned chief *qadi* (judge) of Córdoba, who is of Berber descent.
- **Dunash ben Labrat**, a protégé of Hasday ben Shaprut, and a poet in both Arabic and Hebrew.
- **Asbagh ibn Nabil**, a Christian scholar from Córdoba, translator into Arabic from Latin of the *Histories* of Paulus Orosius.
- **Ahmad** and **Umar ibn Yunus al-Harrani**, brothers and distinguished physicians who have studied at Baghdad.

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\* ...if he was still alive and in charge at this point. He was in command in 939 at the Battle of Shant Mankus.

- **Arib ibn Said**, a native Córdoba physician and an expert on obstetrics and paediatrics; in 964 he will write a treatise on this subject, influenced by Aristotle's thought.
- **Muhammad ibn al-Harith al-Khushani**, author of *The History of the Judges of Córdoba*, a work of collective biography.
- **Nicolas**, a Greek Christian monk sent from Byzantium at the request of the Caliph to help translate Dioscorides' text.
- **Kitman**, the Caliph's female personal secretary, also his concubine. She will handle the Caliph's correspondence with his ministers.
- **Marjan**, one of the Caliph's favourite female slaves, and a person of some wealth and influence; we know that she founded a mosque in Western Córdoba and endowed it sufficiently to ensure its upkeep.
- **Al-Hakam**, who will become Caliph in a few years' time upon his father's death. Al-Hakam is an enthusiastic scholar and collector of books; eventually as caliph he will amass a huge library.
- **Subh**, a concubine to al-Hakam. She would become influential at al-Hakam's court, and is the mother of his son Hisham, who will become Caliph after al-Hakam's death.
- **Lubna**, a slave concubine of al-Hakam, also his personal secretary; she has quite a reputation as a grammarian, a poet and a calligrapher.
- **Durri al-Saghir**, supervisor of the ivory-carving workshop at Madinat az-Zahra, and **Khalaf**, one of his carvers.

One person we wouldn't meet is a *hajib* – grand chancellor/prime minister. That's because 'Abd ar-Rahman abolished the position in 932 and controlled his ministers personally until close to his death in 961.

## *Al-Andalus and Christian Spain in the year 956 CE*

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### **Background history: the conquest and division of the Iberian peninsula**

#### **A Visigothic 'Dark Ages'?**

Iberia had been a Roman province, with flourishing agriculture in the wide Ebro valley and along the Mediterranean coast, a lively town life, and a growing Christian community. But the Basque and Cantabrian communities who lived in the mountains along the north coast remained largely independent.

The Roman Empire ended because it was unable to withstand waves of Germanic invaders from the East. Iberia was affected first by an influx of Suevi who settled in the extreme north west of the peninsula (Galicia) by 412, and by Alans and Vandals who swept further south, in the case of the Vandals even into Roman North Africa. (In 455, a Vandal expedition from North Africa sacked Rome.)

But it was the Visigoths who had the greatest impact on Iberia. Formed out of an alliance of Radagaisus' Gothic army and Alaric's Huns, they seized control in Aquitaine and Iberia by 420. The Goths called themselves the *Thervings* or 'People of the Woods' in their Germanic tongue: they had been a warlike forest-dwelling society of herders, and settled primarily around the moister wooded mountains and plateaux of the peninsula, broadly centred on the Sierra de Guadarrama mountains and the high plain of Segovia, stretching north to Palencia, east to Catalayúd, and south to Toledo, where they established their capital.

From this heartland the Visigoths exerted control over Iberia, though parts of the Cantabrian mountains in the north remained relatively independent, and in 552 the Byzantines based in North Africa seized an enclave in the south of the peninsula which they held until 629.

By the end of the sixth century, some 200,000 Visigoths were still poorly integrated with their eight million or so Hispano-Iberian subjects, among whom they lived as a military-feudal élite. There were separate systems of justice for Goths and Romans – the former administered by Gothic dukes and counts, the latter by Roman governors. Marriage between Goths and the natives was forbidden. Religion also separated them: the Visigoths were Arians, a tradition which did not recognise the divinity of Jesus, while the Iberians followed the teachings of Rome.

Formal divisions between Goth and Hispano-Roman were swept away in the seventh century, firstly by Gothic conversion to Catholic Christianity on the initiative of King Reccared, who himself converted in about 589,

secondly by the legal reforms of 652 of King Recceswinth which abolished the separate Roman administration and justice system, and thirdly by an increased fluency of Visigoths in the Latin language. However, if anything the social stratification intensified, together with an increasing tendency for Visigothic dukes to build up their provinces independently from the central monarchy, granting land to their vassals in return for loyalty and military service: the beginnings of a feudal system.

Economically, Iberia under Visigothic rule was on a spiral of decline. Since the third century there had been a climatic trend towards less predictable weather, hotter average temperatures and a lessening of rainfall. This made the Hispano-Roman systems of irrigation even more important for the continuation of wheat, barley, grape and vegetable harvests, but the Gothic rulers lacked the interest and talent to undertake the maintenance of these systems, and the infrastructure fell into disrepair: roads and bridges, canals and aqueducts – and cities too, which shrank in this period until Córdoba was little more than a big village. Famine and plague struck during the reign of **Erwig** (r. 680–686), and half the population is said to have died.

The revival of the fortunes of the Catholic Church in the 7<sup>TH</sup>–9<sup>TH</sup> centuries did bring some benefits, in that learning and literacy were partially revived and contacts established with the culture of the Byzantine East. Notable in this trend was the compilation by Archbishop **Isidore of Seville** of his six-volume encyclopaedia, the *Etymologies*. However, the Church was co-opted by the Visigothic rulers as an instrument of state policy and control, and was especially implicated in the increasing persecution of Iberia's substantial Jewish population.\*

### Conquest, over-extension, consolidation

The stories surrounding the Islamic conquest of most of the Iberia need not be told here in too much detail. In brief, it is said that the Muslim governor of Ifriqiya, **Musa ibn Nasayr**, following a reconnaissance in force in 710, sent 7,000 Berber cavalymen under **Tariq ibn Ziyad ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Walghu** across the Straits of Gibraltar in April 711.† Tariq secured Algeciras and sent a request for 5,000 reinforcements. In July the combined army marched a little north towards Seville, where along the banks of a river they met and defeated the army of **King Roderic II**, who had hurried south from dealing with a rebellion of the Basques. Roderic himself was killed in the battle. Tariq then captured and largely destroyed Córdoba, and seized Toledo.

An intriguing mystery surrounds the rôle played in the invasion by Musa's Christian allies at the port of Ceuta. The story is told that a 'Count Julian', governor of Ceuta, sought revenge on Roderic for the rape of his daughter.

\* For example, the anti-Jewish edicts of the Third Council of Toledo in 589, the total separation of Jews and Christians ordered by the Fourth Council of Toledo in 633, and the persecution of Jews in 694 by King Egica who accused them of conspiring with the Muslims of Morocco.

† The name of Gibraltar derives from 'Jabr al-Tariq' – Tariq's Mountain.

Whatever the true story, it seems clear that in 711 the Arabs did not have naval power of their own, and would have needed to rely on the North African Christians for help in transporting so many horses and men.

The following year, it is said that Musa himself crossed into Iberia with a force of 18,000 Arab troops; he sent Tariq and his Berbers to conquer the northwest and they succeeded in reaching the River Ebro and the Pyrenées, while Musa consolidated control elsewhere. When Tariq and Musa were recalled to Damascus, Musa's son '**Abd al-Aziz** continued the conquest: Valencia fell in 714 and Tarragona, the traditional birthplace of Iberian Christianity in Roman times, was razed to the ground in that same year.

In some places, Arab or Berber garrisons were left in charge of key towns; in others, Jewish garrisons were recruited. In a few places, Visigothic lords surrendered and were left in charge under strict treaty terms, for example in Murcia where 'Abd al-Aziz accepted the submission of **Theodemir**.

The rapid success of the Islamic conquest in the peninsula was helped by the indifference of the Hispano-Roman majority to their Visigothic rulers, and also perhaps the active collaboration of the Jewish population they had antagonized. The Islamic armies, who from 715 were under the control of a Damascus-appointed *wali* (governor), captured Barcelona in 719, pushed north across the Eastern Pyrenées, seized the Visigothic northern capital of Narbonne in 720 and skirmished in the direction of Toulouse. Here, however, they met concerted opposition from the Franks, whose leader Charles Martel defeated the army of the *wali* 'Abd ar-Rahman al-Ghafiqi at the Battle of Poitiers in 732.

On this Eastern flank, then, the Islamic zone of control was consolidated on both sides of the Eastern Pyrenées, and continued to include Narbonne until 751 when it was recaptured by the Franks under Pepin the Short. The Franks gradually pushed forward; by 785 they had established a loosely defined border region within the province of Barcelona known as the 'Spanish March' and they took Barcelona itself in 801.

## Al-Andalus

In the early years of Arab-Berber occupation, Andalusia was ruled by a series of governors or emirs (commanders) appointed by the Caliph in Damascus. But when 'Abd ar-Rahman I established himself as emir, a novel situation was created for the first time in the Islamic world: a governor nominally recognising the religious leadership of the Abbasid Caliph, but politically independent of him, even hostile. When 'Abd ar-Rahman III proclaimed himself as Caliph, the separation was complete.

Andalusia was divided administratively into 21 provinces (*kuwar*, singular *kura*), each under the command of a provincial governor or *wali*. This has been described as a 'neo-Roman' system, and the *wali* can be seen as the equivalent of the Visigothic *dux* whom he replaced. Almost every *kura* in

Andalusia was composed of a city which was the local centre of government and the garrison, plus that city's hinterland; there were few truly rural *kuras*.

In the early days of settlement, all government functions were substantially decentralised to provincial level including the army, the treasury and the justice system. This tended to lead to factionalism and rebelliousness, depending on which Arab or Berber faction comprised the local garrison. 'Abd ar-Rahman II remodelled military and financial control along more centralised lines, though ultimately the centrifugal tendencies were to express themselves anew in the *taifa* period.

Apart from the provinces, there were three Marches or frontier areas (*thugur*, singular *thagr*) where control was of a more directly military nature.

- The Upper March (*thagr al-aqsa*) was centred on Saragossa (Zaragoza) and controlled the region from Huesca and Tudela in the west to Lérida and Balaguer in the east. Later in the tenth century the eastern flank effectively became a separate Eastern March (*thagr al-sharqi*) to counterpose the developing Catalan power of Barcelona.
- The Middle March (*thagr al-awsat*) was based along a line of castles on the Tajo river; it was politically dependent on Toledo but was organised militarily from Medinaceli.
- The Lower March, which became less significant during the Caliphate when the Christian states were held well at bay, was centred on Mérida.

The Arabs and Berbers who had come as conquerors functioned initially as a warrior caste organised on tribal lines. All were required to give military service, and all were paid from State resources raised from taxation of the non-Muslim native inhabitants and from the booty pillaged and tribute exacted from conquered lands. But as the borders firmed up and the emirs required more central control, most Arabs and Berbers were demobilized into civil society or agricultural occupations.

The year 956 is right in the middle of the period when the rate of conversion of Christian Iberians to Islam was at its height. This 'muwallad' community came eventually to outnumber the Muslims of Arab or Berber origin. It has been speculated that in part this was to avoid the poll-tax paid by non-Muslims, or perhaps to seek greater social mobility – but we should also remember that the previous lack of social solidarity under Visigothic rule and the role of the bishops in supporting the Visigothic aristocracy may have meant that there was little popular sense of a 'loyalty to Spain'. It has even been suggested that the long period in which the Visigoths remained attached to Arianism – a doctrine which regards Jesus as only a man sent by God – mentally prepared the society for Islam, for which Jesus was a prophet but certainly not divine.

Thus the Muslim society of Andalusia in the tenth century was less Arab than it had been in the preceding two centuries. Also, although an Arab aristocracy held the reins of power right at the top, paradoxically the Caliph undermined the position of the ordinary Arabs in Andalusia by encouraging Berber immigration from North Africa, and by relying on a bodyguard largely of *saqqaliba* (Slavic slave-warrior) origin.

## The northern Spanish states in 956

North of Andalusia in 956 was a series of small Christian states. From west to east they were the Kingdom of Asturias-León (including Galicia and the County of Castile); the Kingdom of Pamplona with its hinterland of Navarre and the County of Aragon; and the County of Barcelona.

### The origins of Asturias and Pamplona

A combination of geographical, cultural and climatic factors conspired to prevent the Islamic conquerors from incorporating into their realm the mountainous terrain of the West Pyrenées, the Cordillera Cantabrica and the Galician extreme northwest. Much of this terrain is rugged, the military advantage lay with the locals who knew the forests and ravines intimately, and the poor hardscrabble small-farm and herding economy never favoured respect for central authority.

**Asturias:** The Battle of Covadonga (ca. 718), embroidered with legend, was a symbolically significant moment in the resistance of the northern Christians to Muslim armies. The victorious leader, Count Pelayo, is described as a Visigothic lord; he and his descendants established a tiny independent kingdom in the West Cantabrian region of Asturias. Alfonso I (r. 739–757) expanded the Asturian kingdom by occupying Galicia after the Berber withdrawal, and Alfonso II (r. 791–842) established the Asturian capital at Oviedo and proceeded to restore Visigothic institutions. After the Asturians captured the small town of León from the Muslims in 850, the capital was moved there and the kingdom came to be known as León..

**Pamplona:** Where the eastern end of the Cantabrian Mountains meets the Eastern Pyrenées was a mixed community of mountaineers and coastal people including many Basques. The largest town was Pamplona, at the foot of a mountain pass. In 778, the Frankish emperor Charlemagne's armies sacked Pamplona as they withdrew from their unsuccessful siege of the Muslims in Saragossa; but 30km higher up the pass at Roncesvalles, the vengeful Basques fell upon Charlemagne's rearguard and destroyed it.\* As the Kingdom of Pamplona matured, it would grow into Navarre.

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\* The legend of the *Chanson de Roland* credits the Muslims with this attack, but it was the Basques. Note: at the time of this battle few Basques were Christian; they remained animist until about the 10th century.

## Galicia

In the extreme north west of the peninsula was Galicia, which had maintained elements of Roman social organisation and a degree of independence from Visigothic influence. Here the Muslims first gained a foothold, then lost it.

Berber armies sent to conquer the northwest had initial success. Indeed, the Berbers began to settle in dispersed communities in the Galician mountains – and on the southern slopes of the Cantabrian mountains too. These Berbers adopted a pastoral lifestyle, a continuation of their North African heritage. But they faced increasing problems of drought, and agriculture was difficult. Between 740 and 746 they joined a revolt against the central authority in Córdoba, inspired by Kharidjite egalitarian ideology, though the main issue was probably the Berbers' poverty and secondary status in the Arab-dominated state. Inspiration probably came also from the situation in North Africa, where in 741 a rebel Berber army under Khalid bin Huyayd al-Zanati destroyed Arab forces loyal to the caliph at the 'Battle of the Nobles'.

Trapped in Ceuta by al-Zanati's Berbers in 741, a body of Syrian Qaysite cavalry under **Balj ibn Bishr** made a deal with the governor in Córdoba: they would fight the Berber rebels in Andalusia if he would provide the transport and some other benefits. Balj's troops defeated three columns of Berbers in rapid succession. (Balj's incursion had other consequences, but they need not concern us here.\*)

The rebellious Berbers of Galicia and Cantabria were reeling from this setback when a disastrous five-year period of drought set in between 748 and 753. The whole peninsula was hit with famine and starvation, and the unirrigated north, where rainfall was usually reliable, was probably struck worse than most areas. Disheartened, the Berbers abandoned Galicia, and most apparently returned to North Africa. As noted above, Alfonso I of Asturias took advantage of the situation by annexing Galicia, and he devastated the countryside between Galicia and the Douro river to the south, which remained very sparsely populated for many years to come: a kind of no-man's-land.

On the Western coast of Galicia was an important Christian shrine, the supposed burial-place of St. James the Apostle (*San Diego* or *Sant'Iago* in Romance pronunciation). Santiago de Compostella later became a major pilgrimage destination, attracting visitors from France and other parts of Europe, and acting as a spiritual rallying-point for Christian opposition to Islamic Andalusia.†

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\* The governor (of Yemeni descent) reneged on his promise, so Balj's forces marched on Córdoba and expelled him, installing Balj in his place. This initiated a fresh round of Yemeni-Qaysite rivalry and an intra-Arab battle in which Balj's forces won but Balj himself was killed. A new governor, sent from Qairouan, placated the Syrians by settling them as fief-holders on prime land along the Guadalquivir.

† So much so, that the *hajib* Al-Mansur attacked Santiago de Compostella in 997, destroyed the church there and carried its bells back to Córdoba as booty.

### Asturias-León in 956

The largest and most vigorous of the northern Christian states in the 10<sup>TH</sup> century had its origins in the tiny Asturian kingdom founded by Count Pelayo, as narrated above. In 850 León had been recaptured, and King García I (r. 910–914) transferred the seat of the kingdom to this small city. Galicia had already been incorporated in the mid 8<sup>TH</sup> century, Alfonso III (r. 866–910) had promoted the resettlement of the lands between Galicia and the Duero River that had been laid waste a century before, and there was a growing secondary focus of power around the town of Burgos in Castile, founded in 884.

Although Abd ar-Rahman III had initial success in expeditions against León in 920 and 924, things changed in the eighteen years after Ramiro II came to power in 932. Indeed, in 939 Ramiro inflicted the military disaster of Simancas on Abd ar-Rahman, and then took advantage of his success to settle Christians in the area of Salamanca. If it had not been for the internal struggle caused by the growing secessionist tendencies in Castile, León might have expanded further.

But Ramiro II died in 950, and internal disputes weakened León, so that the successor kings were forced to accept the suzerainty of Abd ar-Rahman and send yearly payments of tribute to Córdoba.

In 956, the current king was a son of Ramiro, **Sancho I Garcés**, also known as ‘Sancho el Craso’ (Sancho the Fat). Sancho gained the throne in 955 on the death of his brother Ordoño III.

The south-eastern corner of the kingdom was the land known as Castile, the land of castles – many of them established by Alfonso III. Formerly this was a fragmented region of small frontier counties, whose rulers were appointed by the kings of León and Asturias, but in this time they had been united under the forceful and ambitious rule of Count **Fernán González** who was pushing south into Andalusian territory and harrassing Navarre. Fernán González established his family line as the hereditary rulers of Castile, with its capital in Burgos.\*

### Navarre and Aragon in 956

In 956 this small kingdom, largely Basque by ethnic composition, was centred on its capital, Pamplona. The elderly but powerful queen mother was **Queen Toda Aznar** of Larraun, at this date over 90 years old; the ruler was her son **King Garcia II Sanchez**. Although Pamplona was sacked by Abd ar-Rahman in 924, Garcia II maintained good relations with the Caliph – who was in fact his cousin, since King Fortun Garçes of Navarre was the Caliph’s great-grandfather on his maternal side. Garcia II was also the uncle of Sancho I of León – his sister the princess Teresa Florentina had married

\* In 958, Fernán González played a prominent role in the conspiracy of nobles who deposed Sancho I and replaced him as king of León with his cousin, Ordoño IV.

King Ramiro II of León. These family ties may have contributed to relative stability in the Iberian peninsula at this time.

However, in recent years the increasingly autonomous County of Castile under Fernán Gonzáles had been raiding into Navarre, and there were many clashes between the Navarrese and the Castilians.

Following the coup of 958, King Sancho of León, suffering from ill-health, sought refuge in Navarre with his uncle King Garcia II Sanchez and his grandmother the queen mother Queen Toda Aznar, who petitioned Abd ar-Rahman III to help her grandson regain his throne. The Caliph dispatched Hasdai ben Shaprut to discuss the situation. The story goes that Hasdai persuaded the Queen to visit Córdoba with her grandson Sancho, where Hasdai would be better able to cure him of his sickness. As the result of the alliance which was forged during this visit, an assault on two fronts was launched against León in 960. With the assistance of troops supplied by Abd ar-Rahman, Sancho was able to regain the Leónese throne – while King Garcia II of Navarre succeeded in capturing the Castilian leader Fernán Gonzáles and held him prisoner for a number of years.

The Basque counties of Alava, Biscay, and Guipuzcoa were an integral part of Navarre. The Basques of the coast practised not only fishing, but also whaling, spearing the slow-moving bowhead whale (*Balaena mysticetus*) as it came into the shallows of the Bay of Biscay to breed.

**Aragon** at this time was not yet an independent kingdom, but only a small vassal county of Navarre, based around the upper river valley of the Ebro. Aragon would only start its existence as a kingdom in 1035, when it was left by Sancho II the Great of Navarre to his third son Ramiro.

### The County of Barcelona in 956

The area around Barcelona and the lower Ebro river valley had its own distinct identity, its own version of the Romance languages: Catalán. After Charlemagne had extended Frankish control over Barcelona, Catalán culture initially looked northwards to the south of France, which spoke the similar Occitan tongue. Then Count Wifred of Barcelona (873–898), beginning to assert his independence from the Franks, and extended his rule over several small Catalán counties His descendants were to rule Catalonia as a relatively independent political entity until the 15<sup>TH</sup> century.

In the year 956, Count Borrell II (r. ca. 940–992) was the ruler of Barcelona. Borrell was the first Count of Barcelona to definitively reject the increasingly nominal suzerainty of the Franks over his County. On the other hand, he maintained good relations with the Caliph in Córdoba by pledging loyalty and homage to him and sending tribute.

We know that Count Borrell was an educated man who liked to recognise and promote intellectual talent; for example, he sponsored the career of Gerbert of Aurillac, the French monk of humble origins to become a noteworthy logician, the head of the Church in France, a close associate of Emperor Otto II and eventually (as Sylvester II), the first Frenchman to become Pope.

## Africa in the year 956 CE

### The Umayyad zone in the Maghrib

Although as already noted Abd ar-Rahman III had had some military success in North Africa, and in 932 was declared as overlord of Mauritania and Fez, his North Africa policy was later thrown into disarray by the need to combat attacks from León. Thus when the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu‘izz sent an expedition against the Umayyads in 959 under General Jaw‘har, ar-Rahman’s sphere of control was rolled back to Ceuta and Tangier.

This remained the situation until after the Fatimids had moved to Egypt in 972 and al-Hakam’s forces under General Ghalib was able to expand Umayyad control in Africa once again during 973 and 974.

Despite this tenuous foothold in Africa, the borders were sufficiently porous that no real obstacle was placed in the way of Andalusian trade across the Sahara (see page 25 and following). Large quantities of African gold flowed north through Sidjilmasa and found its way to the Mint at Córdoba.

Moroccan politics at this time were a messy business. Following the political unification and expansion of Idris I and II, the Idrisid state had been divided in 828 between seven of Idris II’s ten sons, with the eldest son Muhammed (r. 828–36) supposedly their overlord. In fact what happened was factional infighting and disintegration, and by 956 the descendents of the Banu ‘Umar were squabbling over the state. But civil life continued regardless, and Fez was notable for its University, founded by a woman from Qayrouan.

### The Fatimid Caliphate in North Africa

At this time there were three men each of whom claimed to be Caliph, *khalifat rasul Allah*, the rightful successor to the Messenger of God. We have met the Ummayyad Caliph of Córdoba already, and soon will consider the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad. In North Africa (Ifriqiya), the claimant was the Fatimid Caliph **al-Mu‘izz**, the fourth of a dynasty of Isma‘ili Shi‘ite caliphs, now in the third year of his reign (r. 953–975).

The Caliph al-Mu‘izz was a fairly impressive figure. He was more than just a man of action, and was a keen student and commentator on religious affairs and the law. His mentor in this was the elderly and respected **al-Qadi al-Nu‘man**, whom al-Mu‘izz commissioned to compile legal compendia, in which the Caliph himself took an active interest as a commentator. The final fruits of this labour would be Nu‘man’s compendium *Da‘a’im al-Islam*, the ‘Pillars of Islam’. Al-Mu‘izz confirmed al-Nu‘man in the post of chief judge (*qadi*) and authorised him since 954 to hold teaching sessions known as ‘sessions of wisdom’ every Friday after noon prayers.

The Caliphal court in 956 was based in the city of al-Mansuriyya, situated not far south west of Qayrawan. Al-Mansuriyya was built by al-Mu‘izz’s father, Abu Tahir Isma‘il, who adopted the title of **al-Mansur** (‘the Victorious’), and moved the seat of power to the city named after him in 973. With its Al-Azhar Mosque and its palaces, al-Mansuriyya would later serve as the model on which al-Mu‘izz would fashion his future capital of Cairo in Egypt.

The Fatimid Caliph lived in relative seclusion from his people; for example, unlike his rival in Córdoba, he did not sit in open view to all in his court, but remained secluded behind a veil.

### Centres and bases of power

A centre of power in the Fatimid state was the large port city of al-Mahdiyya which was built by the first Fatimid caliph, **‘Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi**, and to which he moved his capital in 920 from Raqqada. Built on a peninsula sticking out from the Tunisian coast, it was almost entirely surrounded by water, and became the centre of shipbuilding and naval power for the Fatimid fleet, built up especially by al-Mu‘izz’s grandfather, Abu’l-Qasim Muhammad bin ‘Abd Allah, known as **al-Qa‘im** (r. 946–53). Here, skilled shipwrights fashioned Sicilian timber into war-vessels to challenge the galleys of Byzantium, and during 955 and 956 these Fatimid ships harrassed the coastline of Umayyad Andalusia.

The Fatimid régime’s hold on power was not always secure. The founder al-Mahdi himself had to crush a conspiracy against him within the Kutama branch of the Sanhaja Berbers, but by 956 the Kutama were integrated as the backbone of al-Mu‘izz’s army. In 943–4, a force led by the Kharidjite southern revolutionary leader **Abu Yazid Makhlad ibn Kaydad** seriously threatened the Fatimid régime, and kept them under seige in al-Mahdiyya for ten months, until the resolve of the beseigers weakened, and the newly ascendent Caliph al-Mansur crushed the rebellion with reinforcements from Fatimid Sicily.

It is evident that in addition to relying on the now-firm support of the Kutama Berbers, the Caliph’s praetorian guard was his slave-army of Slavic warriors, the *Saqqaliba*, whom the Fatimids took over from their Aghlabid predecessors. These Dalmatians, Serbians and Bulgarians were bought from Venetian slave-traders or captured in raids, and trained from childhood as a military élite – a system also practiced by ‘Abd ar-Rahman III in Córdoba.\*

Several Saqqaliba freedmen had risen to high rank in the Fatimid court, for their loyalty was greatly trusted. **Kaysar**, at this time the governor of the province of West Ifriqiya, and his colleague **Muzaffar**, governor of West Ifriqiya, were both from the ranks of the Saqqaliba. Another Slav freedman

\* Though not as highly regarded by the Caliph as his Saqqaliba, there are also Black soldiers in the Fatimid army, called the Zawili. Probably they have come from Chad.

warrior, the General **Jaw'har**, was responsible for pushing the Umayyads back to Tangier and Ceuta, and would later spearhead al-Mu'izz's invasion of Egypt and rule there as governor.

Another trusted lieutenant of the Fatimids at this time was **Buluqqin**, whose father **Ziri ibn Manad** from the Talkata branch of the Sanhaja Berbers played a key rôle in the defeat of Abu Yazid's rebellion, and was rewarded by al-Mansur with the command of the entire Sanhaja and their territories. (It was Buluqqin whom al-Mu'izz would later choose to look after Fatimid interests in Ifriqiya when their seat of power will be moved to Cairo.) In 956 these Zirids were in charge of the central Maghrib, including the towns of Tahert, Baghaya, Msila and Mzab.

However, south of that zone, all along the edge of the Sahara, Fatimid power was weaker. These were the lands of a rival Berber clan, the Zanata – the people from whose ranks the rebel Abu Yazid had arisen. During the tenth century, the Zanata were in control of this important zone, which included the termini of important trade routes across the Sahara to Gao and Lake Chad, as will be later described. What is more, the Zanata were allied to the Umayyads of Andalusia, and they got active support from Córdoba, which was always keen to help stick thorns in the side of their North African rivals!

### **Fatimid Sicily in 956**

At this time firmly a part of the Fatimid empire, Sicily was under the control of the governor **al-Hasan ibn 'Ali al-Kalbi**, a man of South Yemeni (Kalbite) extraction who was ordered to take up this position in 948, and so had been in post for six years. He had to exercise a fair degree of skill and firmness in governing this island, as the autochthonous population and remnant Byzantine settlers had been rebellious in the past, and the immigrant Muslim population was a heady and sometimes fractious brew of Northern Arabs, Yemenis and Berbers.

Commercially, Sicily was doing extremely well. Its mountain slopes were the main source of timber for the shipyards of al-Mahdiyya in North Africa, and sal-ammoniac (ammonium chloride) was also mined here for export.\* Grain was exported to Ifriqiya by the shipload. Agriculture was flourishing, with novel introduced irrigated Asian crops such as citrus fruits, sugar-cane, palms and mulberries, and there was a thriving market gardening sector with such crops as onions, spinach and melons.

Sicily has a long tradition of seafaring, and seasoned Sicilian sailors could be found in senior and responsible positions in many Mediterranean ships.

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\* ...must find out what it was used for. Dye fixing?

## The Sahara, and the Sudan

To the ‘classical’ North African coastal civilizations of Ptolemaic Egypt, Phoenician Carthage and Roman Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, the deserts of the Sahara were a frontier of no economic importance. In the course of the Arab conquest of the Maghrib, however, a large proportion of the indigenous Berber peoples became integrated in the *Dar al-Islam*, and by the tenth century there were important trade routes through and across the Sahara to the *Bilad as-Sudan*, the ‘Lands of the Blacks’.

Overlaying the Pre-Cambrian rocks of the North African Shield, the Saharan landscape is formed of Mesozoic limestones and sandstones in its northern part (sandstones being more prominent in the south of Libya), with even more recent Cenozoic deposits that have accumulated in depressions in the southern Sahara. Thus, although the Sahara region has been a desert zone for about five million years, there is an underlying permeable structure of aquiferous rock which transports water underground and brings it to the surface in oases.

### Proto-Berbers into Berbers

The Sahara was not always as dry as it is today. Indeed, between 9,000 and 4,000 BCE it was humid, contained large river systems and lakes, and teemed with wildlife – even hippopotamus. In this region there settled first of all a tall, narrow-skulled people who are thought to have come from the south of modern Sudan, and later a more Mediterranean type from the east. We can regard these as the ‘proto-Berbers’. They hunted and fished, left middens of shells on the banks of now-vanished lakes, domesticated oxen and sheep and cattle, and learned to grow sorghum, millet and chickpeas. They also conducted some trade into the Iberian peninsula (e.g. containers made of ostrich eggs), and rode lightweight chariots pulled by a pair of small Barbary horses, as attested by numerous Saharan rock-carvings.

This humid period ended quite sharply about 2,800 BCE and these North Africans were increasingly isolated by the growing desert, primarily around the Atlas mountain range but also other better-watered areas such as around the elevated central plateaux of Hoggar, Air and Tibesti, and around oases. This is where we start to see differentiation between the sedentary Berbers, practicing garden-style agriculture based on increasingly sophisticated well-boring and water management techniques, and the nomadic Berbers who concentrated on pastoralism.

The name ‘Berber’, incidentally, comes from the Greek *barbaros* for an uncouth foreigner – the same root as both ‘Barbary’ and ‘barbaric’. They would not have called themselves that, but considered themselves to be divided into a number of peoples, speaking related Afro-Asiatic languages such as Tamashek, Shawia, Kabyle, Rif, Tamazight and Zenaga.

At the time of the Arab conquest, the Berber peoples were organised loosely into *kabilas* or ‘clans’ – which were themselves confederations of tribes. Ibn Khaldun, who wrote a history of the Berbers, refers to them as being organised into two great mutually antagonistic and frequently warring blocs – the Butr and the Baranis. The conflict was particularly fierce between the leading Butr *kabila* of the Zanata and the powerful and wide-spread Baranis *kabila* of the Sanhadja.

The main **Butr** *kabilas* were:

- the **Zanata**, who enjoyed supremacy over the other Butr *kabilas*;
- the **Matghara**; and
- the **Nafzawa**.

The main **Baranis** *kabilas* were:

- The **Sanhadja**, a large grouping or super-*kabila* whom ibn Khaldun divides into two ‘generations’. One lived in central Morocco (Tahert, Tlemçen) and the High Atlas. There was also a second wide-spread area of camel-breeding nomadic Sanhadja control down the Atlantic coast as far as the Senegal river, the *kabilas* of the Lamtuna, Massufa, Djuddala, Gazula, the Banu Warith, Lamta and Tarka (Touareg). They increasingly spread far through the Sahara.
- The **Kutama**, also living around the Atlas, who played an important role in supporting the foundation of the Famitid caliphate in Ifriqiya.
- The **Awraba**, who helped to found the Idrissid state in Morocco.
- The **Talkata**, under whose leaders the Zirid successor-state to Fatimid power in Ifriqiya came into being.
- The **Masmuda**, however, was the largest Baranis grouping, controlling most of the western Maghrib. Their *kabilas* included the Ghumara near Tangier and throughout the Moroccan Rif, and the Barghwata who shared the Atlantic-facing Sebu valley with the Awraba. Other Masmuda lived in mountainous regions of the High Atlas and Anti-Atlas ranges.

### The coming of camels and their role in trade

The camel seems such an established part of our image of the nomadic Berber lifestyle that it is a surprise to realise that camels became extinct in Africa in ancient times and did not re-appear until the fifth century BCE as carriers of baggage on the trade-routes from Egypt to the Red Sea. However, by the second century CE their use had diffused across North Africa, the Roman agricultural settlers employing them to pull carts and ploughs, and the Berbers adopting them as riding animals.

The camel’s suitability for Saharan travel, especially when managed by tough Berber pastoralists, made it possible in Islamic times to conduct

long-distance trading expeditions across the Sahara to the richer lands to the South, especially the societies of the Senegal river basin and the Niger Bend and around Lake Chad. One man could manage a whole string of camels, and each beast would typically carry about 160–180 kg. Travellers would set off in caravans for mutual protection, and as recently as 1908 salt-bearing caravans of 20,000 camels were recorded in the Sahara.

Of course this trans-Saharan trade was not the ‘achievement’ of the camel-caravan alone: three other preconditions required were (a) the existence of artisanal production in North Africa and Andalusia, producing goods such as pottery, glassware, jewelery, weapons and clothing which could be traded south; (b) a growing demand in the north for luxury raw materials such as ivory, precious hardwoods and gemstones; and (c) the increasing circulation of gold and silver as portable instruments of exchange, partly through the pillaging of ancient hoards, but increasingly through circulation of gold obtained from sub-Saharan Africa itself. Indeed, the contribution of African gold to the ‘lubrication’ of the merchant circuit cannot be ignored.

### **The importance of Sidjilmasa, and the road south**

In the south east of Morocco, nestled below the High Atlas, is the large oasis of Tafilalt, with the fortified villages of Erfoud, Arab Sebbah du Ziz, Rissani, Seffalat, Aoufous and Jorf, and groves of date palms stretching 50 km along the Wadi Ziz. There in 757 near present-day Rissani the Berber city of Sidjilmasa was founded – now destroyed. It was one of the most important terminus cities for the trans-Saharan trade, especially for that portion of it heading for Morocco and Andalusia.

The western route to the south ran along relatively high land a few hundred kilometres parallel to the Atlantic coast, and took advantage of reasonable rainfall and grazing. These were the lands of the Sanhadja Berbers of the Massufa in the north and east, the Lamtuna in the centre and south, and the Djuddala in the west. At the end of the ninth century these three *kabilas* seem to have been allied in control of a territory known as ‘Anbiya’ stretching from Sidjilmasa all the way south to Awdaghust.

About a month’s journey from Sidjilmasa would bring the travellers to the town of Azuki (or, Akjoujt), where copper deposits were mined. From here the journey headed for the coast at Awlil, the main centre of salt production. This trade centre also gave contact with traders in gold panned from the headwaters of the River Senegal, in the region of Bambuk.

### **Awdaghust and Kumbi Saleh**

The other great source of alluvial gold was the headwaters of the Niger, in the Buré region around the city of Niani. This was locally traded along the Niger to the great city of Kumbi Saleh, the heart of the Soninke empire of Wagadu, known from the title of its rulers as Ghana.\* The ruler of Ghana exerted control over and taxation of the trade in gold from the headwater

regions and other sources of gold in the forest zone, which was brought to Kumbi Saleh where Muslim traders lived in their own enclave city next to the royal one. What Ghana chiefly lacked, and traded gold for, was salt.

To reach Kumbi Saleh from Morocco, travellers could branch off from the Western route at Idjil, which also developed importance as a source of salt from inland pans, and strike south and east to Awdaghust, and so on to Kumbi Saleh.

Awdaghust (probably at Tegdaoust in modern Mauretania) was also in the tenth century at the height of its importance as an *entrepot* town and trade terminus, where gold dust could be bought. It seems to have been an Islamic city under a Sanhadja chief, but the surrounding hinterland of Ghast – dry country, but with access to artesian water – was settled by pagan Berbers of the Nafusa, Lawata, Zanata, Nafzawa and Berhadjana *kabilas*, both agriculturalists and nomads.

We know something of the scale of trading at Awdaghust from Ibn Hawkal, who passed through in 951 and reports with amazement seeing a promissory note for 42,000 dinars made out to a merchant of the city by a fellow traveller from Sidjilmasa.

Around 956 and after, the Sanhadja rulers of Awdaghust were increasingly falling within the political sway of the Ghana empire – which they resented. Indeed, in the eleventh century this led to a reaction as the Sanhadja, identifying themselves with the militant Almoravid movement, in turn conquered Awdaghust in 1054 and Kumbi Saleh in 1076, under the leadership of Abu Bakr. Although Almoravid control of Ghana was brief, it disrupted the trade on which the empire depended and caused it to fall into oblivion, making way in the thirteenth century for the rise of the Keita leader Sundiata and the Mali empire which he founded. Kumbi Saleh was destroyed by Sundiata in 1240.

### **The Taghaza salt-pan route**

Another route from Sidjilmasa to Awdaghust and Kumbi Saleh struck almost due south from the Moroccan terminus to Taghaza, a settlement in a depression which formerly held a Saharan lake and had become a dried-up salt-pan. Large slabs of salt were hacked from the ground and loaded onto the backs of camels, one great slab on each side. This trade was under Berber control.

### **The Niger Bend, and Gao**

The Niger Bend was a flourishing region, well-watered flat land where the Niger spread out into inland deltas, supporting a rich agriculture and a big fishing industry which dried part of its catch for export. In the upper reaches of the Niger the city of Jenne-Jeno had grown up from as early as the fifth century, and in the tenth century it grew in importance, but does not seem to have participated directly in trans-Saharan trade. The major riverine

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\* Not to be confused with the modern state of Ghana on the West African Gold Coast, which took its name at independence from the old empire.

trading city of the day was Kawkaw or Gao, founded by fishermen in the 7<sup>TH</sup> C CE. By the tenth century it was a major trade centre for gold, copper, slaves and salt, and would in the eleventh century also become the capital of the Songhay empire.

### The high central Sahara route

Another important trans-Saharan trade route took the high road across the plateaux of the Hoggar (or, Ahaggar) and the Air Massif. This route could also be accessed from Morocco but also from the Fatimid centre of power in Ifriqiya. A popular starting-point for 10<sup>TH</sup>-century Ifriqiyian and Egyptian merchants was the oasis of Wargla (Ouargla) – which had well-travelled roads west to Sidjilmasa, north-east to Tahert, or north-west to Gabès and Qayrouan. Another entry-point to the central route could be the Libyan waystation of Ghadames (Roman Cydamus), an oasis lying in the bed of a seasonal river or wadi with two artesian wells and a spring supplying local gardens and fields within the city walls.

On the southbound trip on this route, the most common trade goods were finished clothing.

The route crossed the arid Tadmait Plateau to reach the oasis of I-n-Salah (literally, the ‘good well’), with date groves and fruit and vegetable gardens, protected by hedges from the encroaching sands. (To this day, one of the walled villages around this oasis has an entirely Black population, illustrative of how Berber and Black populations have lived for centuries side by side in North Africa.)

From I-n-Salah the way climbs into the Hoggar plateau, a rocky pink granite massif strewn with black volcanic flows of basalt. The Hoggar has an average altitude of about 1000 metres and peaks at Mount Tahat (2,918 m), on which snow sometimes falls. There is evidence of Tuareg settlement around the fifth century, impressively shown through the excavation of the tomb of Queen Tin Hinan. As for the name ‘Ahaggar’ or ‘Hoggar’, it seems to derive from the Hawwara Berbers, who were defeated in battle by the Fatimid caliph al-Mu‘izz in 953 and fled south, settling alongside Lamta Berbers.\*

### Maranda and Tadmekka

The Hoggar at this time was without great settlements, but further south in the Air Massif there is ninth-century mention of several kingdoms under the sway of the Gao state, in the vicinity of modern Agadès.† One of these, the oasis town of Maranda (or, Marandet) was highly populated in the latter half of the tenth century; as well as a trader’s waystation, it smelted copper.

Perhaps even more important was Tadmekka (near the current settlement of Es-Souk), a robustly constructed Zanata town on the road from Air to Gao, governed by kings of the Banu Tadmak *kabila*. There were storage

\* This according to ibn Khaldun, who notes the change of the ‘ww’ phoneme to ‘gg’ from Hawwara to Hoggar.

† According to Al-Ya’kubi.

facilities here for Maghribi clothing brought south for trade, and gold was available for purchase for the northern trip. Copper and lead were also mined near Tadmekka, and traded as far south as Igbo Ukwu near the coast of modern Nigeria, where it was used in casting bronze statues.

### **The Fezzan road from Zawila**

The longest-established trade route across the Sahara may be that connected with the name of the Garamantes, an ancient civilization established in the Fezzan which had trading relationships with Carthage and which clashed with the Roman Empire, which conquered it and dubbed it Phazania. The region was conquered by the Arabs in 666 and subjected to Islam, and later suffered a blow when the Arab general Ibn al-Ash'ath conquered the kingdom of Zawila in 762–3 and massacred the Ibadite inhabitants of the capital. However, the city survived, though it was briefly abandoned at the beginning of the tenth century before being resettled in 918.

In the latter half of the tenth century Zawila grew millet and barley and date palms, using foggaras and wells operated by camels. It was an important step along a trade route from Tripolitania and Egypt to the empire of Kanem-Borno around the shores of Lake Chad. Traders from the north would typically arrive in Zawila from Tripoli (via Djadu), from Adjadabiya, or from Fustat which was then the capital of Egypt.

South of Zawila was a string of oases, some of which have now dried up but were then quite productive. These included Ghat near the Wadi Tanezzuft, al-Kasaba, Kawar, Ankalas (present-day Dirki), and Tamalma (today called Bilma').

The settlement of Kawar was famed for dates, for salted fish caught in the lake near Abzar, and for the purity of the product of its alum mines – alum then being important as a mordant for fixing dyes to cotton, and perhaps for sizing paper. Alongside the Berbers of Kawar there seem to have been Sudanic inhabitants such as the Tubu.

Eventually this trade route gave access, via the Ténéré deserts inhabited by Zaghawa and Tubu nomads, to the lands around Lake Chad.

### **Kanem-Bornu and 'the kingdom of Zaghawa'**

Lake Chad is a remnant of a once much larger inland sea, fed chiefly by the Chari-Logone river system from the south, which deposits alluvial clay on the southern banks, and bounded to the north by the inhospitable dunes of Kanem. It comprises two basins, at times partially separated by a ridge that impedes circulation, and fluctuates greatly in volume and area from year to year. At present it is very shrunken indeed and the two basins are quite separate.

Unravelling the history of this society is problematic. A Neolithic settled farming and herding culture around 600 BCE seems to have been related to the Sao culture of the Chari river basin, as evidenced by its pottery and

ceramic art, and there are signs of an early iron-working ('Haddad') culture north of the lake. But it appears to have been the arrival of the camel and the possibilities for participating in long-distance trade than gave rise to the development of the Kanem-Borno state, founded around the middle of the 9<sup>TH</sup> century with its first capital at Nijmi, north-east of Lake Chad.

The earliest references to this state are by Al-Ya'kubi, who describes it as the 'kingdom of the Zaghawa' but makes clear that a number of different peoples made up the population. One thesis is that the nomadic Zaghawa, armed with iron weapons and having acquired camels and horses, became a ruling aristocracy imposing itself on the farmers south of the lake. By the end of the tenth century the state had imposed its power on surrounding regions, and was cultivating diplomatic relationships with Islamic societies to the north.

As for the 'product' which Kanem-Borno offered for trade with the north, a high proportion of the trade appears to have been in Black slaves. The Zaghawa king, Al-Ya'kubi tells us, 'reduced to slavery those among his subjects whom he wished' and would also have captives of war to sell.

Towards the end of the eleventh century, there appears to have been a 'revolution' which ended Zaghawa hegemony over Kanem-Borno and pushed them away to the east, where they live today.

### **What of a Nile-to-Chad route?**

It may be wondered why no mention has been made of a route from Egypt to sub-Saharan Africa via the River Nile, perhaps via the Kordofan plain and the Darfur mountains, or the Bahr el-Ghazal river. The answer is that Muslim traders could make no progress by this route which was blocked by the Nubian state under the Christian Tungur dynasty which ruled 900–1200.

The closest approximation to a route via the Nile is described in the ninth century by Al-Ya'kubi as leaving the Nile near Asyut and cutting across the Libyan Desert via the oases of Siwa (560 km west-southwest of Cairo) and Al-Kufrah (in an elliptical trough near the centre of the Libyan Desert) and so via Kawar and al-Kasaba and Maranda to Gao. But a century later, Ibn Hawkal described the route as having been abandoned as too dangerous.

## **Christian north east Africa**

### **Christian Nubia**

The Kushite period of Nubian history ended in 350 when the armies of Axum descended from the Ethiopian highlands and sacked the capital of Meroë and the surrounding towns. The Nubians were known to the late Roman empire as the Nobatae who, in alliance with the nomadic Bedja or Blemmyes, attacked Roman outposts in Upper Egypt. But there is little other documentary evidence of Nubian civilization until the 6<sup>TH</sup> century, when the Christian missionaries Julian and Longinus succeeded in

converting the three Nubian kingdoms: Nobadia in the north (capital, Faras), Makuria in the centre (capital, Old Dongola) – and Alodia in the south (capital, Soba near modern Khartoum), about which far less is known.

By the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Nobadia and Makuria were united under King Qalidurut, ruling in Dongola. An Arab invasion from Egypt in 651–2 led by ‘Abdallah ibn Abi Sarh destroyed Dongola Cathedral but achieved no decisive victory. The hostilities were ended with an unprecedented agreement or *bakt*, effectively a non-aggression pact which also stipulated that the Nubians pay a tribute of 360 slaves, for which the Arabs would return 1300 *ardeb* of wheat, 1300 *kanir* of wine and measures of linen and cloth. Each state would guarantee freedom of movement for each other’s citizens as travellers, but neither would be allowed to settle in the other’s country.

Relations between Islamic Egypt and Christian Nubia were ‘correct’ rather than cordial, and were occasionally marred by friction. The Monophysite church in Nubia had sympathy for the Copts of Egypt who were persecuted by the Abbasids, and Nubia’s old allies the Bedja had their lands invaded by Arab gold-prospectors, one of whom also invaded Nubia.\* Around 830 the Nubians stopped paying the annual *bakt* and the Caliph al-Mu‘tasim demanded its payment with all arrears – though the embassy of crown prince Georgios to Baghdad in 835 resulted in a renegotiation and a fresh treaty. But Nubia continued to resist Arab exploration and trading.

Whatever the reasons, in 956 Nubia took an aggressive attitude towards Abassid Egypt under the local Ilkshidid régime. In that year they raided and plundered Aswan with seeming impunity – an Egyptian punitive expedition was not successful. The Nubian armies also occupied a large part of upper Egypt in 962. One theory is that they intended to form a ‘southern flank’ in support of the Fatimid conquest of Egypt. Certainly, once the Fatimids were established in Egypt, the Nubians retained cordial relations with them.

### **How Axum became Christian**

The other great African Christian power was that of Axum, in the highlands and northern coastline of Ethiopia. There are ample signs that this culture was influenced in pre-Christian times by the religious and political ideas of south Arabia – the fertility goddess Ashtar was worshipped, along with other deities such as the war god Ares-Mahrem. By the early fourth century CE the city of Axum and its Red Sea port of Adulis were well established, and in this period the Sabean script was modified and was regularised into the Ge‘ez syllabary still used today. At the same time, there were developing relations with the Greek-speaking Eastern Roman Empire of Byzantium.

Some time in the middle of the fourth century CE, the Axumite King Ezana converted to Christianity and took the name Abraha. With his help of his

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\* Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Umari, who took over some Nubian gold mines with a private army.

brother-king Atsbaha he both built up the country and promoted Christian faith, and a large proportion of the population converted. In the following century the rate of conversion was also increased as the result of internal doctrinal conflicts within the Christian church, as a number of priests who adopted the Monophysite doctrine (that Christ had but one nature which was both human and divine, rather than having two separate natures) were persecuted and sought refuge in the area which owed allegiance to the Alexandrian patriarchate – Coptic Egypt, Nubia and Axum. Nine of these, the ‘Nine Saints’,\* settled in Axum and conducted vigorous missionary activity.

Axum tended to involve itself in South Arabian affairs, and in the 6<sup>TH</sup> century came into conflict with the large Jewish refugee population there.† The Axumite Christian community in Saba and Himyar was massacred by their Jewish rivals in alliance with the Himyarites some time around 523, provoking a Byzantine-supported Axumite punitive invasion of South Arabia, and a garrison settlement.

### Axum in decline

In the seventh and eighth century Axum faced pressure from the Muslims, who occupied the Dahlak Islands and destroyed the port of Adulis. At the same time, the northern part of the kingdom (today Eritrea) was invaded by the Bedja nomads, and the Axumite court withdrew to safer land in the south. Written records from this period are scant.

In the second half of the tenth century, a legend tells how the Queen of the Banu al-Hamwiya attacked Axum and sacked the area, destroying its churches. Some traditional accounts name her as Gudit, daughter of Gideon the chief of the Falashas (Black Jews).‡ However, the attack may have come from Agew or other southerners on whose lands the Axumite kings had been encroaching. In 977 Ibn Hawkal relates:

Regarding the land of the Abyssinians, it has been governed for many years now by a woman. She killed the king of the Abyssinians, who was known by the title of *Hadani*. She has hitherto ruled in complete independence over her own country and the areas surrounding the land of the *Hadani* in the south of Abyssinia.

Christian Axum was also under pressure due to Muslim expansion in the south of Ethiopia, inwards from the coast at Djibouti. The Sultanate of Shoa under the Makhzumi dynasty was established there from about 830. The Christians of Ethiopia would remain relatively powerless until the Zagwe dynasty arose among Agew people in the 12<sup>TH</sup> century.

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\* Abba Aregawi, Abba Guerimo, Abba Aftse, Penteleon, Likanos, Alef, Tshima, Ym'ata and Gouba.

† After the third destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman Emperor Titus in 70 CE, persecuted Jews were encouraged to settle in South Arabia by their compatriots already established there.

‡ The falasha claim descent from Menelik, son of Solomon and Bilqis Queen of Sheba. They are probably Agew people who converted to Judaism under the influence of the considerable Jewish refugee population in south Arabia. The falashas remained faithful to Judaism after Axum converted to Christianity and survived Axumite persecution.

## *The late Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad*

There was also a Caliph in Baghdad, the **Caliph al-Muti**, a descendant of the Abbasids who had seized power in Damascus from the Umayyads in 750; in the years 762–768, the **Caliph al-Mansur** had founded the city of Baghdad and the capital moved there (except for a period 836–892 when the Caliphs ruled from Samarra, thirty miles further up the River Tigris).

Baghdad became a city of great wealth and splendour, and a centre of learning; among the Abbasid Caliphs who ruled from there, probably the best known is **Harun al-Rashid** (r. 786–809), who features in idealised and romanticised form in the collection of tales known as *The Thousand and One Nights* (or, *The Arabian Nights*). Also well regarded for his interest in art and science, if not for his political skills, was Harun's son the Caliph **Al-Mamun** (r. 813–33), who came to power after defeating and killing his own brother in a civil war, and in 830 established the famous *Bayt al-Hikma* (House of Wisdom), a richly-endowed library and translation centre which also maintained several astronomical observatories.

### **The Buwayhids, the real rulers in 956**

However, by the year 956 the Abbasid Caliph was by no means as powerful or impressive. During the preceding century, a succession of strong Emirs had undermined the temporal power of the Caliphs. The most severe blow to Caliphal autonomy in Baghdad was struck by the Buwayhids, a family of military strongmen from Daylam near the Caspian Sea. Ali, Hasan and Ahmad, the three sons of the Daylamite leader Abu Shuja Buwayh, started to expand their control in northern Persia from around 930. In December 945 Ahmad marched into Baghdad, meeting no resistance; the Caliph al-Mustakfi (r. 944–6) surrendered to him.

On seizing control, Ahmad (r. 945–67) promptly declared himself Chief Emir, taking the title **Mui'zz al-Dawla** ('strengtheners of the state'); he also gave titles to his two brothers, and established the Emirate as hereditary within the Buwayhid family. Some weeks later, in January 946, the new Emir had the captive Caliph blinded, and replaced by a powerless puppet, the aforementioned **Caliph al-Muti** (r. 946–74) – a son of a previous Abbasid Caliph, al-Muqtadir (r. 908–32).

The Buwayhids retained control in Baghdad until 1055. They found it convenient to leave the Abbasid Caliphs as powerless figureheads, while they controlled the temporal power, referring to themselves as 'kings', even adopting the ancient Iranian title of *Shahanshah* (king of kings). It was their names that were written on the coins minted at Baghdad, and the Emir's name was mentioned alongside the Caliph's in the Friday sermons at Baghdad.

The weakness of the later Abbasid Caliphs and the coming to power of regional strongmen led in this period to struggles between regional centres of power within what had once been a unified domain. This was a situation which both the Byzantines and the Fatimids were keen to exploit; not long after 956, the Fatimids would seize Egypt and the Byzantines would regain control over much of the Mediterranean.

### Egypt

**Egypt** at this time was under the rule of representatives of the Buwayhids, but facing the threat of Fatimid power to the west – which in 969 would result in the Fatimids' conquest of Egypt and the transfer of their power-base to Cairo. But in 956, the more immediate threat to Egypt was from the Christian kingdom of Nubia to the south, which in that year raided and plundered Aswan on the Nile. An Egyptian attempt at a punitive counter-expedition was a failure.

### Syria

Another regional centre, and a relatively independent one, was the Hamdanid kingdom ruled by **Sayf al-Dawla** (r. 945–67). This principality, founded in 905 by leaders of the Arab Taghlib tribe, had its initial capital at Mosul but moved north to Aleppo in 945 after taking Syria from Egyptian control. This placed the Hamdanid kingdom on the contested frontier with the Byzantine Empire, and al-Dawla is notable for his lone and spirited resistance against the raids conducted against Syria throughout this period by Byzantine forces.

The court of Sayf al-Dawla was another brilliant centre of learning and the arts, and had been the adopted home of the Neoplatonist philosopher-theologian Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Tarkhan ibn Uzalagh **al-Farabi** until his recent death in 950. Al-Farabi was the author of *The Perfect City*, which sets forward the principles of an ethical urbanism. He had also been an accomplished musician, and the foremost Arab writer on musical theory. Other prominent figures at the Aleppo court were the poet **al-Mutanabbi** (d. 965) and the literary historian **al-Isfahani** (d. 967).

### Crete

The island of Crete at this time was within the Abbasid sphere of influence, having been captured in 827, and held despite several unsuccessful attempts by the Byzantines to recapture it. They would eventually do so in 961, when general Nicephorus Phocus sent the entire Byzantine fleet and 24,000 men to invade the island and massacre the Muslim inhabitants. (Crete then stayed in Christian hands until 1699, when it fell to the Ottoman Turks.)

### Cyprus

Cyprus also fell within the Abbasid world following Harun al-Rashid's conquest of 806. It would revert to Byzantine control in 965 as part of Nicephorus Phocus's sweep through the Mediterranean.

## *The Byzantine Empire and Eastern Europe*

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The Eastern half of the Roman Empire, which scholars refer to as the Byzantine Empire, was at this time under the control of a Greek-speaking Macedonian dynasty that had been founded when Nicephorus (r. 802–11), the finance minister of Empress Irene, took power into his own hands. Whereas Empress Irene had been paying substantial tribute to Baghdad in return for peace, Nicephorus wrote to Harun al-Rashid repudiating the arrangement, and demanding the return of previously-paid tribute.

This proved to be a grave miscalculation: Harun al-Rashid's forces ravaged Asia Minor all the way up to the Black Sea coast. Nicephorus sued for peace, accepting that the tribute should continue to be paid; but he immediately reneged, which led to a second Muslim campaign of destruction which reached as far as Heraclea in 806, as well as the naval campaign which took Cyprus from Byzantine control.

By the year 956, however, the Byzantines were feeling a renewed confidence, and were able to exploit the internal divisions of the Buwayhid-dominated Abbasid state. The current Emperor at Constantinople in 956 would be **Constantine VII** (r. 912–59). Under him, the Byzantines strengthened their army and navy, and fortified the strategically vital Taurus passes in Anatolia. There were frequent clashes with Muslim forces along the borders of the Empire and on the plains of northern Syria and Iraq.

The area securely under the control of the Byzantine Emperor included the whole of Anatolia, Greece and Macedonia and the islands of the Aegean, with a zone of contested influence in the Balkans which for centuries had been increasingly infiltrated and settled by Slavic and Turkic peoples. The Byzantine rulers felt that one way to draw these people within the sphere of their control and influence was to promote their conversion from paganism to Orthodox Christianity, a policy which was accelerated by the missionary initiatives of Saints Cyril and Methodius who adapted the Greek alphabet for use in Slavic-language religious texts and liturgies (the 'Cyrillic' script).

### **Croatia**

In the 6th and 7th centuries, Slavs were arriving from the north along the Adriatic coast, which at the time was part of the Byzantine Empire. They merged with the Latinized population and adopted the Roman Catholic church rather than the Orthodox one, though with a Slavonic liturgy. In the 9th century an independent Croatian state developed, centred on northern Dalmatia. Under King Tomislav (r. 910–928), Croatia became a powerful military force in the area; but after Tomislav's death, Croatia became subject to a Serbian principality which recognised the suzerainty of the Byzantine Emperor.

## Serbia

The Serbs were a Slavic people organised along tribal lines, each tribe led by a *zupan* (chieftain). The first state to which Serbs trace a political identity was created by Vlastimir about 850 in an area in eastern Montenegro and southern Serbia known as Raska (roughly, modern Kosovo), extending over the valleys of the rivers Piva, Tara, Lim, and Ibar (between the Durmitor and Kopaonik mountain ranges).

Initially accepting the supremacy of Constantinople, the kingdom was subsequently torn apart between Simeon I, ruler of the first Bulgarian empire, and the *veliki zupan* Ceslav (r. 931–960) who ruled a Serb kingdom or *zupanija* known as Zeta, in the hinterland of the Gulf of Kotor and extended his control north to the Sava river and east to the Ibar. After Ceslav's death, Byzantium again asserted control over the ensuing succession of Serbia states; but in 956, Zeta was independent.

## The Varangian Russian states

The East Slavic people who had settled along the Volga and Dnieper river basins seem initially to have been thinly spread and without large-scale settlements or political institutions, but a series of small states began to coalesce in the 8<sup>TH</sup> and 9<sup>TH</sup> centuries around the settlements of Swedish trader-explorers known as the Varangians, exploiting the amber, furs, honey, wax, and timber products of the region.

The first such state to be mentioned by Western and Islamic sources was that of the **Volga Rus**, whose ruler was called the *khagan* (a term borrowed from the Khazars). The Varangians raided and traded along the river systems and across the Black Sea towards Constantinople, which they reached in 860. Later, the centre of gravity shifted towards other Varangian Rus centres, such as Novgorod which dominated the region from 930 to about 1000.

The principality of Kiev was one of the most prominent Rus states. In the year 956, the ruler of Kiev was **Olga** (r. 945–64), the widow of Igor I, prince of Kiev (r. 912–945), who had been assassinated by his subjects while attempting to extort excessive tribute. Because Igor's son Svyatoslav was still a minor on his father's death, Olga became regent. She had Igor's murderers scalded to death and hundreds of their followers killed. Olga became the first of the princely Kievans to adopt Orthodox Christianity and was probably baptized (*ca.* 957), at Constantinople.

While Olga ruled at Kiev, Svyatoslav went forth in a series of attacks on neighbouring states, destroying the Khazar empire and defeating the Ossetes and Circassians (963–965). He also defeated the Bulgars of the Balkans in 967 at the behest of the Byzantines, but refused to hand over the conquered lands to Constantinople, raising the idea of founding a Russian-Bulgarian state with its capital at Pereyaslavets on the Danube. However, the Byzantine Emperor John I Tzimiskes led an army against him and compelled him to withdraw. Svyatoslav was ambushed and killed by Pechenegs near the cataracts of the Dnieper River in the Spring of 972 while returning to Kiev.

Olga's efforts to bring Christianity to Russia were resisted by Svyatoslav, but continued by her grandson, the grand prince St. Vladimir (r. 980–1015); together they mark the transition between pagan and Christian Russia.

### **Jewish Khazaria on the brink of extinction**

The region just north of the Caucasus mountains and between the Black and Caspian Seas was at this time the domain of the Khazars, a people of Turkic descent who had established a powerful state and commercial empire in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The Khazars had previously dwelt on both sides of the Caucasus but had withdrawn to the north after over a hundred years of clashes with the expanding Arab armies, establishing their new capital at Itil near the mouth of the Volga river.

The main source of revenue for the empire stemmed from commerce and particularly from Khazar control of the east-west trade route that linked the Far East with Byzantium and the north-south route linking the Arab empire with northern Slavic lands. Income was derived from duties on goods passing through Khazar territory, and in addition the Khazars exacted tribute from subordinate tribes.

The Khazar state was organised along very different lines from the other Turkic empires of central Eurasia. It was headed by a secluded supreme ruler of a semireligious nature called a *khagan*, while day to day power was in the hands of tribal chieftains, each known as a *beg*. The most remarkable aspect of the Khazar culture was that in about 740 the khagan and much of the ruling class converted to Judaism.

Tales of a powerful Jewish empire in the East powerfully excited the curiosity of the Córdoba courtier Hasdai bin Shaprut, who wrote to the current Khagan, Joseph, and obtained a reply.

In 956, however, the Khazar empire was already starting a period of decline, threatened by raiding Pechenegs to their north and west and the growing power of the Russians around Kiev. Indeed, in 965 the Khazar Empire was to be destroyed in an attack launched from Kiev by Prince Svyatoslav.

### **The Volga Bulgars**

Not so much a state as a loose confederation of Turkic settlers around the confluence of the Volga and Kama rivers, these Bulgars were descendants of one of the five hordes into which Greater Bulgaria split after the death of the Bulgar Khan Kubrat (r. ca 605–642). They had two cities, Bulgar and Suvar, which profited from a role as trans-shipment points for furs from Russian and Ugrian traders. These Bulgars converted to Islam in about 922.

### **The Bulgarian Empire**

After Khan Kubrat's death in 642 the Bulgars were attacked by the Khazars and dispersed. One of the resulting Bulgar hordes, led by Kubrat's son Asparukh, moved into Bessarabia (between the Dniester and Prut rivers) and then crossed to the south of the Danube, where they conquered the

Slavic tribes living north of the Balkan Mountains. The Byzantine emperor Constantine IV led an army against the Bulgars but was defeated, and in 681 Byzantium recognized by treaty Bulgar control of the region between the Balkans and the Danube, though they continued to expand into Macedonia and Serbia. The Bulgars merged there with Slav and Vlac people, and when they converted to Orthodox Christianity under **Boris I** (r. 852–889) their liturgy was in the Slav language spoken in Macedonia, now known as Old Church Slavonic.

Boris I retired to become a monk; his first son Vladimir rebelled against Christianity and Boris returned to politics to overthrow him. The ruler was now Simeon I (r. 893–927), who aspired to rule the Byzantine Empire, for which reason he often made war with the Byzantines (894, 896, 913, 917, 923). He never took Constantinople, although it was more than once at his mercy; but he took for himself the title of ‘Tsar of All the Bulgarians’ (925). In the Balkans he extended the power of Bulgaria over south Macedonia, south Albania, and Serbia, which became his vassal; but Bulgaria’s dominion north of the Danube was probably lost during his reign as the Pechenegs, Magyars, Rus and Byzantines flooded into the area. Simeon was succeeded by his son, Peter I. As the power of Bulgaria waned, it was to become incorporated into the Byzantine empire in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Moravia and Bohemia**

Slavs who had settled around the Morava river took for themselves the name of Moravia. When Charlemagne destroyed the Avar empire in about 796, he rewarded the Moravians for their help by giving them their portion as held in fief from him. By the first half of the 8th century, Moravia was a united kingdom under Prince Mojmir I (r. ca. 818–846), including a part of Western Slovakia, and the kingdom was further consolidated under his successor Rostislav (r. 846–870).

The Franks were trying to extend influence over Moravia and in particular their bishops were keen to convert Moravians to Christianity. Rostislav was in favour of Christianity, but dissatisfied with the Latin-speaking Frankish clergy. He asked the Byzantine Emperor Michael III if he could send Slavic-speaking missionaries, and a group of clerics led by two brothers of Greek origin, Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius, arrived from Constantinople in 863. They not only preached in Slavic but also translated the sacred books into that language and used them in divine services.

Rostislav was succeeded by his nephew Svatopluk (r. 870–894) who took control over all of Bohemia, the southern part of modern Poland, and the western part of modern Hungary, thereby creating the state of Great Moravia. Christian conversion was promoted throughout the territory, according to the Orthodox rite followed by Methodius. But Svatopluk made an enemy of the Frankish king Arnulf, who attacked Moravia in 892 and devised the plan of inviting the Magyars to destroy Moravia. Though

Svatopluk's successor, Mojmir II, tried to resist the Magyar hordes, Great Moravia ceased to exist as an independent country in about 905–908.

Bohemia, however, managed to escape destruction as Moravia fell apart. Its prince Borivoj made a pact with Arnulf in 895, accepting vassalage. His descendants maintained good relations first with Bavaria, and then on the accession to the German throne of Henry the Fowler, with the Saxons. During the 10<sup>TH</sup> century Bohemia was consolidated as a state.

The best known of Bohemia's rulers was the Christian Vaclav (or Wenceslas, r. 929–967). But in 956, the Bohemian ruler would be his brother Boheslav I, who murdered him to seize the throne. Boheslav tried to avoid paying tribute to Germany's Otto I, and had to be forced by Otto to resume the tributary payments; he also sought alliances to the east, and his daughter would later marry King Mieszko I of the newly-united Poland (r. 963–992).

### **Poland**

In 956 Poland had not yet been united; there were two tribal regions, one of Wislanie (Vistulans) around the River Vistula and the town of Kraków, and the other the Polanie people around Gniezno. Mieszko I (r. 963–992) would later unite and Christianize the Polish people. (The Andalusian Jewish traveller Ibrahim ibn Ya'qub regarded Mieszko as having created the most powerful of the Slav states.).

### **Hungary (On-Ogur)**

The Magyars, a nomadic herding people who had been moving south from the Volga basin to the plains beside the River Don, had come under pressure from the Pecheneg nomads who were encroaching upon their territory from the East. But then in 892, the Magyars received an invitation from the Carolingian emperor Arnulf to assist him in the subjugation of Moravia, as described above.

Electing as their chief the leader **Árpád**, seven Magyar tribes and three hordes of Turkic Khazars known collectively as *On-Ogur* ("Ten Arrows")\* migrated across the Carpathian mountains (889–896). They destroyed the Moravian empire in 906 and occupied the plain of Pannonia the following year, defeating a German force sent against them. Settling on the plains around the Danube, the Magyars supplemented their pastoral economy by raiding against the neighbouring peoples.

The story of the Magyars' struggle against the German state, and their eventual defeat by them, is described in the section about Germany on page 39.

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\* The word 'Hungarian' is derived from On-Ogur.

## *Europe north of the Pyrenées in 956*

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Following from the great movements of peoples after the collapse of the Roman empire, Western Europe was dominated by the Germanic peoples known as the Franks. The East Frankish kingdom was Germany, with five associated 'stem' (*Stamm*) duchies of Saxony, Franconia, Swabia, Bavaria and Lorraine. The Middle Frankish kingdom included Burgundy, Italy and Provence. The West Frankish kingdom was France.

### **France**

The Carolingian King of France in 956 was Lothair (r. 954–86) who was elected to the throne without opposition on the death of his father Louis IV. However, the feudal lords he ruled in name had great autonomy, and Lothair started his reign under the domination of the powerful Duke of the Franks and Count of Paris, Hugh the Great, who was in effect the ruler of France.

The year 965 saw a realignment of forces in France. In April, Gisibert the ruler of French Burgundy died, and so his lands were inherited by Hugh the Great as his immediate suzerain lord; Hugh had also been suzerain of Aquitaine and Normandy as well as Burgundy. But then in June 956 Hugh himself died, and his lands were divided among his sons.

After Hugh's death, Lothair came under the control of his Hugh's uncle Bruno, the archbishop of Cologne, and in 960 Lothair was pressured into re-dividing Hugh's lands. Hugh the Great's son Hugh Capet, who later became king and the founder of the Capetian dynasty, especially benefitted thereby. For much of the rest of Lothair's reign he was caught up in three fruitless attempts to wrest control of Lorraine from Germany.

### **The Liudolfing monarchy in Germany and Italy**

In the tenth century the most powerful state in Western Christian Europe was Germany, a collection of dukedoms held together under the leadership of an elective monarch. The German king had long been a rather weak figure, but this started to change when the Saxon duke **Henry the Fowler** (Henry I), founder of the Liudolfing dynasty of German rulers, was elected to the throne with the support of Franconia and Saxony, over the objections of Swabia and Bavaria. This decision in favour of a strong candidate was made in the context of the threat to Germany by Magyar raids.

In 919 Henry compelled Burchard of Swabia and Arnulf of Bavaria to submit to him, but left their dukedoms in their charge. He then waged war on the kingdom of Lotharingia which had seceded in 910: in 925 he defeated Gisibert of Lotharingia, but again recognised him as its Duke. Thus Germany was brought into greater unity.

In 924 Henry agreed a nine-year peace with the Magyars (924–33) which involved payment of an annual tribute to them. But he used the period of truce to fortify German towns and build up a highly-trained cavalry force; he also expanded German influence in Slav lands to the east, defeating the Haveli at Brandenburg and the Deleminzi at Meissen in 928, and reasserting authority over Bohemia in 929. When the truce period came to an end, Henry refused to pay any more tribute; the Magyars resumed their raids, but this time Henry was ready for them and the Magyar army was destroyed by German cavalry at Riade on March 15, 933. In 934 Henry attacked Denmark and added Schleswig to the German state.

On Henry's death in 936, Henry's son **Otto the Great**, Duke of Saxony (r. 936–73) was elected to the German throne, but this was not achieved without contest especially as Otto sought firmer control over his vassals. Otto first had to suppress a rebellion by the dukes of Franconia and Bavaria, plus Saxon nobles led by Otto's half-brother Thankmar; later, his younger brother Henry rebelled against him, supported by Giselbert of Lotharingia. In this struggle (937–9), Otto had the help of the Franconian count Conrad the Red, whom he rewarded with the duchy of Lotharingia (Lorraine) and his daughter Liudgard's hand in marriage.

Otto compelled Bohuslav I of Bohemia – the killer and successor of his brother Wenceslas – to resume payments of tribute to the German crown. In 951 Otto invaded Italy, following the death the previous year of King Lothar II, thus outflanking the attempt by Duke Berengar of Ivria and his son Adalbert to accede jointly to the throne; on seizing Pavia, Otto freed Lothar's widow Adelaide of Burgundy\* from captivity, married her, and claimed for himself the additional title of 'King of Italy', though he was later content to allow Berengar and Adalbert to rule Italy as his vassals.

Otto then had to contend with an internal German rebellion (953–5) by his son Liudolf, the ruler of Swabia, who felt his inheritance threatened by Otto's second marriage to Adelaide;† in this he was supported by his uncle Henry, duke of Bavaria, and by Conrad of Lotharingia and Frederick, the archbishop of Mainz. Otto initially made some concessions to Liudolf but then repudiated them, whereupon Liudolf seized the city of Regensburg and – it is alleged – invited the Magyars once again to invade Germany.

Certainly, Conrad and Frederick withdrew support from Liudolf at this point; the latter surrendered, and was reconciled with his father. Though Conrad was stripped of his dukedom of Lorraine, he was allowed to retain his lands in Franconia; he then helped Otto raise a strong force of German knights, which crushed the Magyar army in 955 at the Battle of Lechfeld near Augsburg, in which contest Conrad himself was slain. This decisive encounter curtailed Magyar expansion: they never again invaded Germany.

\* For her later work of promoting Cluniac monasticism, she was canonized by the Roman church as St. Adelaide.

† Liudolf and Liudgard were Otto's children by his first wife Edith, the daughter of the English king Edward the Elder. Edith died in 946.

During 956, Otto was also at war, this time conducting a punitive expedition against the Slavic Wends along the Baltic coast of Saxony.

### Venice

Venice, formed around 568 as a series of island settlements by Roman mainlanders seeking escape the invading Lombards, had spent a part of its history as a nominal dependency of the Byzantine Empire, and part under Frankish control. By around 840 the Doge, the leader elected by the ruling merchant families of Venice, was conducting international agreements in his own name: effectively, Venice was an independent state. In 956, the Doge of Venice was Pietro Candiano III (r. 942–959).

### The Papacy

The Papacy was not at this time as strong an institution as it would become in the Middle Ages, and was subject to much political pressure. In 956 the Pope was John XII, the young son of Duke Alberic of Rome.

In 962, Pope John XII called on Otto the Great to protect him from a leader who had seized the Italian throne. Otto's success in this campaign would be rewarded by the Pope with the title of 'Roman Emperor', and the Germano-Italian realm later became known as the Holy Roman Empire. Otto himself intervened in the Papacy, deposing John XII in 963 in favour of his own appointee, Leo VIII. The following year John in turn deposed his rival but then died, to be succeeded by Benedict V ('the Grammarian'), but then in 964 Otto expelled Benedict and restored Leo VIII as Pope.

### England

In the ninth century, the Angles, Saxons and Jutes who had settled in Britain had in their turn been attacked and invaded by Vikings from Norway, Southern Sweden and Denmark; Mercia and Northumbria had fallen before them and only Wessex under Alfred the Great had stopped their advance. Thus England had been divided between Wessex and 'the Danelaw'.

But the new English monarchy seemed better able to maintain a centralised government and military organisation than the Danes, and after Alfred's death his son **Edward the Elder** (r. 900–24) and daughter **Ethelfleda of Mercia** set out to reconquer the Danelaw, a task that was completed by Edward's son **Athelstan** (r. 924–39). The reconquest was helped because when the Danes submitted to the Wessex dynasty, they found that their systems of law and governance were accepted as fit for the locality and traditions, and deals could be struck. Athelstan secured the temporary loyalty of Danish Northumbria by wedding his sister to the local ruler, Sihtric; when Sihtric died, Athelstan took over his lands.

Having accepted oaths of loyalty and submission from the kings of Wales and Scotland, Athelstan even went so far as to issue coins that declared him 'king of all Britain'. He also made some astute alliances on the Continent. Three of his sisters were wed to Frankish rulers: Edith married Otto son of

Henry the Fowler; another daughter married Charles the Simple, king of the Franks; a third married Hugh, Duke of the Franks.

Athelstan was succeeded by **King Edmund I** (r. 939–946), who had to face an invasion of Vikings from Ireland led by **Olaf Guthfrithson**. On Olaf's death in 942, Edmund regained the Midlands, then attacked Northumbria where Sihtric's son **Olaf Sihtricson** had risen to power. Driving out his opponents there, he went on to seize Strathclyde and entrusted it to King **Malcolm I** of Scotland in exchange for military support. But in the following year, 946, Edmund was murdered by an exiled robber at his palace in Pucklechurch in Somerset.

Edmund was succeeded by his brother **Eadred** (r. 946–955). Eadred finally brought Northumbria under permanent English rule by putting down two rebellions led by the Norwegian prince **Erik Bloodaxe**<sup>\*</sup> and one by the returning Olaf Sihtricson. Eadred is also noteworthy for his support for the influential ecclesiastical reformer **Duncan**, then Abbott of Glastonbury, who favoured Monastic control of most Church life.

But in 956, the English king would be the very young **King Eadwig**, the elder son of Edmund I. Coming to the throne in his mid-teens, Eadwig is said to have caused a stir at his own coronation by sneaking out to be with his girlfriend (and future wife) Aelfgifu; Abbot Dunstan had him dragged back to the ceremony and thus secured his enmity (so much so that Eadwig later had Dunstan driven into exile).

Eadwig did not survive long. In 957, Mercia and Northumbria declared their preference for his younger brother **Edgar**, which left Eadwig in charge only of Wessex and Kent. When Eadwig died in 959, Edgar became the King of all England. Edgar was a strong and influential monarch who also played an active role in supporting monastic reform of the Church; he promoted the Abbot Dunstan to become Archbishop of Canterbury.

## Denmark

Little is known of Scandinavian history before the 8<sup>TH</sup> century, when the Franks in their northward expansion brought Denmark into close contact with Europe. The Danes constructed a great rampart across Jutland from the Baltic to the North Sea around 740, the Dannevirke (Danewirk), to keep the Franks at bay.<sup>†</sup> In about 960 the Dannevirke was connected to a wall around the largest city, Hedeby.

During the 10<sup>TH</sup> century, after internal struggles between rival kings, the centre of power moved from Hedeby to Jelling, where Gorm the Old became king of Jutland (*ca.* 940). His son, Harald I Bluetooth (r. 940–985) became Christian in around 960 and started the Christianization of the country,

<sup>\*</sup> Erik Bloodaxe owes his nickname to having murdered seven of his eight brothers.

<sup>†</sup> The date has been derived not from historical records but by dendrochronological dating by archaeologists of the wood used in its construction.

which he had succeeded in unifying for the first time, by recruiting bishops under the guidance of the Archbishop of Hamburg.

Denmark grew in power under Harald, and even more so under his son Sweyn I Forkbeard (r. 987–1014), who established Danish control in Norway in 1000 and conquered England with his son Canute in 1013.

### **The 'Northmen'...**

From the beginning of the 9<sup>TH</sup> century, and for 200 years thereafter, a growing surplus population of young men in Norway, Denmark and Sweden set out on seaborne expeditions of raiding, trading and settlement: the Norsemen or Northmen.

The Norwegians settled Iceland permanently from around 900 and went on to establish temporary settlements in Greenland and North America. They also extensively raided the Irish coast and formed kingdoms at Dublin, Limerick and Waterford. Swedish adventurers tended to go eastwards across the Baltic Sea and for a while dominated the Slavs around Novgorod and Kiev, trading furs and other goods, and acting as a catalyst in the formation of the earliest Russian state.

England was the Vikings' nearest target, and with Ireland was the most affected by raiding and settlement. In 865 the 'Great Army' of Vikings – mostly Danes – arrived in England and started their conquest of the kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia and East Anglia. They then threatened Wessex, but held off in exchange for the payment of a tribute or ransom known to the English as 'Danegeld'. The Viking leader Healfdene captured York in 867 and settled his men in Northumbria in 876, but in 878 King Alfred of Wessex defeated Guthrum at the Battle of Edington and a truce was agreed, dividing the country between Wessex and the Danelaw.

Viking attacks on al-Andalus were far less frequent or severe, but around 844 their attacks were sufficiently troublesome to spur 'Abd ar-Rahman I to establish a navy and set up a system of watchtowers along the coast.

Whether as a result of raiding or trading, large quantities of Andalusian and other Arab silver coins have been found in Viking treasure-hoards; but this does not necessarily imply direct contact as Arab coins were extensively used in worldwide trade.

Early in the 11<sup>TH</sup> century, some eastern Vikings (Varangians) took service in the army of the Byzantine emperor at Constantinople, for which their name was Miklagård, the Great City. Here they formed the Varangian Guard.

### **...and the Normans**

Some Vikings of the Great Army which had invaded England but were disappointed by the cessation of raiding, turned to ravaging northern France (879–92), and even reached Paris, but were defeated at a battle on the River Dyle. However, this was not the last Viking incursion into France.

In about 911, the Norwegian Rollo, an active raider of Scotland, England, Flanders and France, established himself along the River Seine. Charles III

(‘Charles the Simple’) held off Rollo’s siege of Paris, and defeated him in battle near Chartres. By the treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, Charles granted Rollo and his men the part of Neustria that came to be called Normandy; in return Rollo agreed to end his pillaging, become a Christian and swear allegiance as Charles’ vassal. Thenceforth he became known as Duke of Normandy, but turned over the dukedom to his son, William I Longsword, in 927 before his death. (These of course were the same Normans who took control of Naples and Calabria from 1053, Sicily in 1061–91, England in 1066, and Malta in 1091 – and who briefly took the Spanish fortress of Barbastro in 1064–5.)