

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Naming North Africans in Latin Christian Chronicles from Medieval Iberia

Emma Snowden

Department of History, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, USA
Email: esnowden@tennessee.edu

Abstract

This article examines the words used by Christian chroniclers in medieval Iberia to refer to North Africans. Following the Islamic conquests of the Peninsula in the early eighth century, Iberian Christians increasingly associated North Africans with Islam – and, conversely, Muslims with North Africa. I demonstrate that the term “Moor” reflected a growing tendency over the Middle Ages to collapse religious identity and geographical origins, and further suggest that it was racialized in various ways. In other cases, chroniclers employed scriptural identifiers like “Moabite” and “Hagarene” to distinguish between Muslims from North Africa and those from Iberia. While such terms acknowledged a measure of geopolitical specificity in the present, they simultaneously asserted a kinship between contemporary Muslims and ancient biblical peoples, casting them as religious others, denying their coevalness with Christians, and further racializing them. Finally, I discuss the use of the word “barbarian,” which was sometimes applied to Muslims in general, but was occasionally used to refer to North Africans in particular, drawing on Arabic usage to associate barbarity and lack of civilization with North Africa. Ultimately, I argue that the application of such labels to North Africans and Muslims functioned to displace them geographically and temporally, serving Iberian Christian colonizing impulses and projects over time.

Keywords: Western Mediterranean; Muslim-Christian relations; ethnonyms; historical chronicles

The eighth century ushered in significant changes in the political and religious landscape of Iberia. Around 711, Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād, a Muslim commander and governor of Tangier, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and began the process of conquering the Peninsula in the name of Islam and the Umayyad caliphate based in Damascus. This spelled the end of the Visigothic monarchy, which had begun to overtake Roman territory in Iberia in the fifth century, ruling first as Arian Christians before converting in the late sixth century to Roman Catholicism. Although conversion to Islam was a slow and piecemeal process in the province of al-Andalus, which would become an independent Umayyad emirate in 756 and then a caliphate in 929, the earliest Christian Iberian chroniclers that recount the Islamic conquest of the Peninsula recognized it as a landmark event with substantial political and religious implications. The close connection

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between invasions from North Africa and the advent of Islam in Iberia would continue to inform the way these chroniclers wrote about Muslims and North Africans throughout the Middle Ages. The emergence of the Almoravid emirate in the eleventh century and the Almohad caliphate in the twelfth century, both Islamic dynasties based in Marrakesh that conquered and administered significant portions of Iberia, only furthered the association between these particular geopolitical and religious identities in the minds of Iberian Christians.

In this context, the frequent usage of labels like “Moor” conflated Muslims and North Africans in ways that worked to undermine the place of both groups in the Peninsula and bolster the efforts of various Christian states to push back Muslim-Christian frontiers. Such language gained momentum as the later Middle Ages saw a reversal in the directionality of conquest and colonization from north to south so successful that Christian Iberian states like Castile and Aragón were able to build on the peninsular gains of previous centuries to venture across the Strait of Gibraltar and into the Mediterranean. This article will trace the usage of labels like “Moor,” “barbarian,” and “Moabite” in Christian Iberian chronicles written in Latin from the eighth through the thirteenth centuries, considering times when they were used to distinguish between different groups of Muslims as well as moments when they elided geographical and ethnocultural specificity. It will also explore how these identifiers drew on long histories of stereotypes about marginalized groups and conquered peoples in both Christian and Islamic contexts. I argue that Christians in medieval Iberia drew on the histories of these terms for colonizing purposes, depicting Muslims as inherently foreign to Iberia in an effort to justify their rhetorical (and at times more literal) expulsion from the Peninsula.

More often than not, the labels that Christians applied to North Africans and Muslims did not reflect the ways they referred to themselves. This cannot be attributed to linguistic differences alone, since Latin writers were quite capable of transliterating and translating words, names, and phrases in a variety of contexts. The disparity between the words North Africans and Muslims used to speak of themselves and the ones Christian chroniclers chose was not necessarily the result of a lack of knowledge, but instead often constituted what Hélène Sirantoine has called “strategic ignorance.”¹ She shows that Iberian Christian chroniclers throughout the Middle Ages held remarkable, if varying, knowledge about Muslims and Islam. Such awareness was sometimes reflected in the words they used to refer to different groups of Muslims, but other times, chroniclers seem to have intentionally chosen to misrepresent the communities they wrote about in an attempt to undermine their political and religious claims. This may have been the case for Christians living in the kingdom of Asturias, which emerged in northern Iberia in the eighth century and would claim to be a revival of the fallen Visigothic monarchy. Asturians gained knowledge of al-Andalus through a combination of diplomatic relations, continued Christian migration from the south, and contact with *muwallads* – Muslims whose ancestors had lived in Iberia before the Islamic conquests and who had converted in the intervening generations, but often maintained aspects of their Christian and Visigothic heritage.² Similar cross-cultural connections

¹Hélène Sirantoine, “What’s in a Word? Naming ‘Muslims’ in Medieval Christian Iberia,” in *Making the Medieval Relevant: How Medieval Studies Contribute to Improving Our Understanding of the Present*, eds. Chris Jones, Conor Kostick, and Klaus Oschema (Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 230.

²Jessica Coope, *The Most Noble of People: Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Identity in Muslim Spain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 128–158.

prevailed as Asturias gave way in the early tenth century to the kingdom of León, which in turn eventually became part of the Crown of Castile. Even more knowledge of Arabic and Islam was available to Christians living under Muslim rule in al-Andalus, who from at least the eleventh century were referred to as Mozarabs, from the Arabic *must'arab*, meaning "Arabized."³ Andalusī Christians seem to have become thoroughly immersed in the Arabic language and Arab culture within a century and a half of the conquests, prompting Paul Alvarus to lament in the mid-ninth century that Christian youths were fluent in Arabic and valued it more highly than Latin.⁴ Even polemicists like Alvarus and his friend and contemporary Eulogius, a priest who recorded the martyrdoms of several dozen Christians in the Andalusī capital of Córdoba and who was eventually martyred himself, displayed a great deal "discretionary" knowledge of Islam that they employed and often distorted for their own purposes.⁵ A few decades later, Ḥaḥṣ ibn Albar al-Qūṭī – another Christian scholar who lived in Córdoba and who may have been related to Paul Alvarus – demonstrated more openness to Arabic as a vehicle of Christian knowledge, producing an Arabic translation of the Psalter and using his substantial knowledge of Islamic scripture and practices to defend Christianity in the language and style of the Qur'ān itself.⁶

Nor was this cultural and religious knowledge one-directional. Amira Bennison demonstrates that Muslims in al-Andalus likewise referred to Christians in ways that indicate a fairly nuanced awareness of cultural and geopolitical specificity.⁷ Given the extent of this reciprocal awareness, therefore, the increased or decreased specificity of the identifiers employed by chroniclers should not be understood as a direct measure of how much Muslims and Christians across the Strait knew about one another. Instead, the choice to elide, conflate, single out, and/or misrepresent specific ethnonyms can be analyzed as part of each chronicle's larger historical context and narrative approach to religious and cultural difference. The words Christian Iberian chroniclers used to refer to Muslims and North Africans in inaccurate and misleading ways can often be understood as building blocks for larger narrative strategies and practices aimed at undermining their claims to occupy and rule contested territory. For example, terms like "Moor" and "barbarian" drew on a long history of Greco-Latin and Arabic usage that, in Christian texts, tended to associate Muslims with a specific geographic origin – North Africa – and a specific ethnocultural background – Berber. That Christian chroniclers regularly applied these terms to Muslims in both Iberia and North Africa effectively collapsed their religious and ethnocultural identities.

³For more on the Christians of al-Andalus, see Ann Christys, *Christians in Al-Andalus, 711–1000* (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2002).

⁴Juan Gil, ed. *Corpus scriptorum Muzarabicorum*, vol. I (Madrid: Instituto Antonio de Nebrija, 1973), 314–315; for an English translation of the relevant passage, see Edward P. Colbert, "The Martyrs of Córdoba (850–859): A Study of the Sources" (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 301.

⁵Jessica A. Coope, *The Martyrs of Córdoba: Community and Family Conflict in an Age of Mass Conversion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 50; Andrew Sorber, "Prophetic Resistance to Islam in Ninth-Century Córdoba: Paulus Alvarus and the Indiculus Luminosus," *Medieval Encounters* 25, nos. 5–6 (2019): 448.

⁶Jason Busic, "Negotiating Language and Religion in Umayyad Córdoba: Ḥaḥṣ b. Albar al-Qūṭī's Arabic Psalter," *EHumanista* 41 (2019): 19–39.

⁷Amira K. Bennison, "The Peoples of the North in the Eyes of the Muslims of Umayyad Al-Andalus (711–1031)," *Journal of Global History* 2, no. 2 (2007): 157–174.

Similarly, while some names borrowed from scripture – including “Moabite” and “Assyrian” – were used to refer specifically to Muslims from North Africa, it was much more often the case that scriptural identifiers like “Ishmaelite,” “Saracen,” and “Chaldean” were applied to Muslims as a whole. Many of these labels thus erased regional and ethnocultural specificity, instituting what can be understood as a kind of religious racialization, in which adherents of the same religion – in this case Islam – were understood to be historically and genealogically connected, resulting in shared heritable traits that were perceived negatively. “Moor” was also connected to ideas about epidermal race and physiognomic blackness. In my discussions of epidermal race and religious racialization, I follow Geraldine Heng’s analysis of race as “a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content” and race-making as “specific historical occasions in which strategic essentialisms are posited and assigned through a variety of practices and pressures, so as to construct a hierarchy of peoples for differential treatment.”⁸ As Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh reminds us, words like “Saracen” and “Moor” continue to be racialized and to exert racial and religious violence into the present.⁹ Because of the persistence of the derogatory origins and associations of these and similar terms, I will use them only as an indicator of the words being employed by premodern sources themselves, rather than as a descriptor of historical individuals or groups.

I. “Moors” and Epidermal Race

The Latin word for “Moors,” *Mauri* (sg. *Maurus*), was borrowed from Greek and initially referred to the local inhabitants of Mauretania, a region in Roman North Africa. It carried this meaning in the geographical works of authors like Strabo and Pliny the Elder. Geographically, the term was malleable and could refer to specific provinces in North Africa or even to the African continent as a whole.¹⁰ From very early on, it was also associated with blackness. As Frank M. Snowden noted, *Mauri* in ancient texts was sometimes used in ways that were equivalent to or overlapped with *Aethiopes* (“Ethiopians”), denoting blackness as well as African origins. Some Roman authors like Manilius even suggested that the name for Mauretania itself was derived from the blackness of the *Mauri*, and in the early seventh century Isidore of Seville offered a similar etymology, stating that the Greek *Mauros* meant “black.”¹¹ Although the association of the Greek terms for *Mauri* and Mauretania with blackness in fact seems to have postdated their application to North Africa and its inhabitants, their connection to epidermal race would reappear at various points throughout the Middle Ages and become more pervasive in the early modern period.

From the eighth century, with the Islamic conquests of Iberia, *Mauri* gained a religious valence as well. For example, the Latin *Chronicle of 754*, the earliest detailed description of the conquests by an Iberian author, displays a fairly nuanced understanding of the relationships between different groups of Muslims. Its anonymous Christian

⁸Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 3.

⁹Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, “The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure,” *Literature Compass* 16, nos. 9–10 (2019): 1–8.

¹⁰Josiah Blackmore, “Imagining the Moor in Medieval Portugal,” *Diacritics* 36, nos. 3–4 (2006): 29.

¹¹Frank M. Snowden, Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1970), 11–12; Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 199.

author consistently distinguishes between “Arabs” (*Arabes*) and “Moors” (*Mauri*), using the former to refer to Muslims from the Middle East and the latter to refer to Muslims from North Africa. As a result, there has sometimes been a slippage in scholarly usage of *Mauri* and “Berbers,” a term I will discuss in more detail below.¹² Certainly both labels were externally applied and constructed, and tended to collapse a multiplicity of geopolitical and ethnocultural identities under broad umbrellas. Ramzi Rouighi has even drawn on the *Chronicle of 754* to suggest that the particular use of the Arabic term *barbar*, or Berber, with which we are most familiar today – that is, to refer to indigenous North Africans, or at least those whose presence in North Africa predated the Roman and Islamic conquests – emerged in a specifically Andalusí context.¹³ He argues that these similarities between medieval usages of “Moor” and “Berber” should caution us against employing the terms uncritically. Without a doubt, however, the term *Mauri* in the *Chronicle of 754* maps onto later conceptions of Berbers in medieval Arabic texts, and it is clear that the Latin chronicler employs it to speak of North Africans rather than Middle Easterners, highlighting geopolitical differences between groups of Muslims.

This distinction can be seen, for example, in an episode from the early 730s involving a man named Munnuza, “from the people of the Moors.” Munnuza is said to have allied with the Franks and rebelled against “the Saracens of Spain” in response to news that judges in “Libya” were oppressing his people.¹⁴ The Christian chronicle thus depicts affiliation and kinship that spanned the Strait of Gibraltar for two separate groups, the “Moors” and the “Saracens.” Although Munnuza was active in Iberia, loyalty to his people in North Africa superseded any geopolitical devotion to the Arab governor of al-Andalus, who ruled in the name of the same Umayyad government responsible for appointing the abusive judges in North Africa. The chronicle makes this division clear at various points, referring to the “Moors of Spain” and the “Saracens of Spain” as distinct groups.¹⁵ It also provides information on the so-called Berber revolts of the 740s, which likewise spanned the Strait. The Latin author states that “all that vast desert, from which the Arab multitudes had arisen, was full of unrest, unable to tolerate the injustice of the judges. And in the western region, which extends to the southern zone and which is occupied more than any of the others by the Moors, the inhabitants openly shook their necks from the Arab yoke, unanimous and determined in their wrath.”¹⁶ This is the closest we get to a definition of the “Moors,” who are identified by their presence in northwest Africa.

The anonymous chronicler’s account of the revolts demonstrates the early medieval association of the term “Moor” not only with North African origins but also with epidermal race. We are told that the Umayyad caliph sent an enormous army toward Tangier to subdue the rebels. The North African troops are described as wearing nothing but loincloths and riding “their most beautiful horses, showing their dark color

¹²Ramzi Rouighi, “The Berbers of the Arabs,” *Studia Islamica* 106, no. 1 (2011): 49–76.

¹³Ramzi Rouighi, “The Andalusí Origins of the Berbers?,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 2, no. 1 (2010): 93–108; Ramzi Rouighi, *Inventing the Berbers: History and Ideology in the Maghrib* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

¹⁴Juan Gil, ed. “Chronica anni 754 vel Chronica Muzarabica,” in *Chronica Hispana: saeculi VIII et IX, Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis* 65 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 364.

¹⁵Gil, ed. “Muzarabica,” 361, 372.

¹⁶Gil, ed. “Chronica anni 754 vel Chronica Muzarabica,” 370; Kenneth Baxter Wolf, trans. “The Chronicle of 754,” in *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, 2nd ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 148.

(*tetrum colorem*) and gnashing their white teeth. The Egyptian horses immediately reared back, fleeing. But when, despairing, they made another charge, the Arab cavalry promptly scattered due to the color of their skin, frightened and seeking flight, and killing themselves and their riders.”¹⁷ Their skin color is portrayed as so unexpected and off-putting that it startled their enemies’ horses, such that they obtained victory not through their own efforts or skills but through an aspect of their appearance over which they had no control. In this description of their rebellion, the “Moors” are depicted as terrifying because of their epidermal race, in contrast to both Iberian Christians and Arab Muslims. The word used to describe their skin color, *tetrum*, most often indicated something loathsome or offensive, but it was also used at times to refer to darkness or blackness. The historical precedent for associating *Mauri* with blackness suggests that this is what was implied in the *Chronicle of 754* as well. In the early sixth century, the Greek historian Procopius records a somewhat similar episode, in which the “Moors” are described as both “black-skinned” and inspiring fear in foreign foes, but these pieces of information come in separate passages and are not connected.¹⁸ Procopius says that prior to an encounter with Byzantine troops, a commander of the “Moors” encouraged his men by assuring them that the Byzantines would be “worsted by the agility of the Moors, and their cavalry will be terrified both by the sight of the camels, and by the noise they make.”¹⁹ The Byzantine chronicler therefore does not attribute the North Africans’ ability to intimidate their foes in battle to their epidermal race, as the *Chronicle of 754* does in recounting the Berber revolts of the 740s.

Significantly, the same event, in which North African rebels scared off the mounts of troops under the command of Kulthūm, the Umayyad governor of Ifrīqiya, is described in an Arabic chronicle without reference to epidermal race. The anonymous *Akhbār majmū’a* (Collected Anecdotes), likely compiled in al-Andalus in the late tenth century, states that when Kulthūm’s nephew Balj ibn Bishr led the cavalry charge against the Berbers, “they met him with dried animal skins filled with stones, so the horses of the Syrians fled. And the Berbers took headstrong mares and attached water skins and dried leather mats to their tails and directed them against Kulthūm’s army, so the horses fled and the people cried out and most of them fell from their mounts.”²⁰ The Arabic account thus preserves a similar sequence of events, but instead of attributing the flight of the Arabs’ horses to the skin color of the North African rebels, it explains it as an intentional military tactic that had nothing to do with their appearance. Like the *Chronicle of 754*, the *Akhbār majmū’a* writes unfavorably about the Berber rebels, but without any reference to their epidermal race, suggesting another key difference between Christian constructions of “Moor” and Muslim constructions of “Berber” in medieval Iberia.

This is not to say that blackness and epidermal race were not mobilized to similar literary ends in Muslim chronicles from the western Mediterranean. While Berbers were generally referred to as white in the Arabic chronicle tradition (when their skin color was mentioned at all), another group of Africans were identified specifically by

¹⁷Gil, ed. “Chronica anni 754 vel Chronica Muzarabica,” 370–371.

¹⁸Procopius, *Procopius II: History of the Wars, Books III and IV*, trans. H. B. Dewing, Loeb Classical Library (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1916), 323.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 301.

²⁰Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, ed. *Akhbār majmū’a fi fath al-Andalus wa-dhikr umarā’ihā wa-l-ḥurūb al-wāqī’a bihā baynahum* (Al-Qāhira; Bayrūt: Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1981), 38.

their epidermal race – *al-Sūdān*, literally “the Black people.”²¹ *Al-Sūdān* in medieval Arabic texts was most specifically associated with sub-Saharan West Africa, but like “Moors” in the Greco-Latin tradition, it was a broad and flexible term that could be applied to people from a variety of geopolitical and ethnocultural contexts. An Arabic chronicle dating from the twelfth century or later, the *Faṭḥ al-Andalus* (Conquest of al-Andalus), includes an episode in some ways comparable to that in the *Chronicle of 754*, in which blackness is depicted as intimidating enemy forces – in this case, the Christian Visigoths. The anonymous Muslim author says that during the eighth-century conquests of Iberia, the North African leader Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād placed the Black troops (*al-Sūdān*) under his command at the front of his battle lines, “so that when the Goths saw the appalling sight it frightened them. They also took prisoners from the Christians and slaughtered them, cooking them and pretending to eat them.”²² Feigned cannibalism as a scare tactic appears in multiple medieval Arabic chronicles, but the *Faṭḥ al-Andalus* is unique in coupling it with the terror inspired in the Visigoths by the Black soldiers in Ṭāriq’s army, presenting their skin color as something startling and disturbing to sell the façade of cannibalism.

While neither Christian nor Muslim chroniclers depicted North Africans as uniformly Black, therefore, at various points they both used epidermal race to illustrate the alterity of certain groups. And though connecting “Moorish” identity to blackness would mostly fall out of the Christian Iberian chronicle tradition for several centuries after the *Chronicle of 754*, it became much stronger in the later medieval and early modern European imaginary. In the mid-thirteenth century, for example, the archbishop of Toledo, Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada (d. 1247), would include the same anecdote about the North African rebels in his *Historia Arabum*, repeating the phrase “tetrum colorem” but also adding details about their “black appearance” and “curly hair.”²³ With the rise of Portuguese expansion into Africa in the fifteenth century and the increasing proportion of Black Africans among the enslaved populations of Iberia, “Moor” once again came to be closely associated with blackness, and became newly connected – and at times even synonymous – with forced servitude.²⁴

II. “Moors,” *Getuli*, and Goths: Ancient Affinities and New Identities

After the *Chronicle of 754*, the next three entries in the Christian Iberian chronicle tradition, all anonymous and written in Latin, come from Asturias in the late ninth century, during the reign of Alfonso III (d. 910). The *Chronicle of Albelda* was likely composed in 881 and redacted 2 years later, when it was incorporated with the

²¹For a more thorough analysis of external constructions of the *bilād al-sūdān* (“lands of the Black people”), see Michael A. Gomez, *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 43–57.

²²Luis Molina, ed. *Faṭḥ Al-Andalus* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1994), 17.

²³Juan Fernández Valverde and Juan A. Estévez Sola, eds. “Historia Arabum,” in *Roderici Ximenii de Rada Historiae minores: Dialogus libri vite*, by Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis 72C (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 111.

²⁴Blackmore, “Imagining the Moor”; Kenneth Baxter Wolf, “The ‘Moors’ of West Africa and the Beginnings of the Portuguese Slave Trade,” *Journal of Medieval & Renaissance Studies* 24, no. 3 (1994): 449–469; Ross Brann, “The Moors?,” *Medieval Encounters* 15, nos. 2–4 (2009): 307–318; and Pamela A. Patton, “What Did Medieval Slavery Look Like? Color, Race, and Unfreedom in Later Medieval Iberia,” *Speculum* 97, no. 3 (2022): 649–697.

Prophetic Chronicle, produced earlier in 883.²⁵ The *Chronicle of Alfonso III* exists in two major manuscript traditions, both of which originated in the late ninth century and were redacted in the early tenth century.²⁶ These chronicles are particularly well known for marking the beginning of a neo-Gothic ideology that posited the eventual redemption and restoration of the Visigothic legacy by means of the defeat and so-called “reconquest” of territories lost to the Islamic conquests.²⁷ The Asturian chronicles continued to make some distinctions between Muslims of North African and Middle Eastern origin, though such efforts were far less consistent than in the *Chronicle of 754*, reflecting their chronological remove from the initial context of the Islamic conquests. The *Prophetic Chronicle* seems to maintain the distinction between “Moors” as North Africans and “Saracens” as Middle Easterners, though in this case the former does not seem to indicate a Muslim identity as it does in the *Chronicle of 754*. One manuscript mentions that both the “Goths” and the “Moors” were descended from Noah’s son Japheth, while other manuscripts omit the mention of “Moors” in this regard.²⁸ Multiple manuscripts state that when the Umayyad caliph al-Walid I (d. 715) reigned “in Africa,” the first Muslim conqueror arrived in Iberia, while his commander, Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr, “remained in Africa and cleansed the lands of the Moors.”²⁹ While it may be that the text did not intend to locate the caliph in North Africa but merely to assert his power over the region, there is also an erroneous claim in the *Chronicle of Albelda* that the prophet Muḥammad had preached in Africa.³⁰ Here, then, we see the beginnings of what would become an increasing association between Muslims and North Africans in Christian Iberian chronicles, though the statement that Mūsā cleansed Africa of the “Moors” simultaneously suggests an awareness of differences and conflicts between Muslim conquerors from the Middle East and local populations in North Africa.

Beginning with the Asturian corpus, we see some Christian Iberian chronicles use *Getuli* (sg. *Getulus*), a Roman term for inhabitants of the region south of the Atlas mountains, as an ethnonym with a meaning similar to that of “Moor” in the *Chronicle of 754*. The *Chronicle of Albelda* employs the term only once, stating that Alfonso II of Asturias (d. 842) “achieved multiple victories against the Ishmaelites, and defeated armies of the *Getuli*, one in Asturias. . . and the other in Galicia.”³¹ While “Ishmaelites” here seems to function as a religious designator, *Getuli* appears to indicate more geographical specificity, perhaps referring to people of North African origin as a subgroup within the broader category of Muslims. The same passage also mentions Maḥmūd of Mérida, who rebelled against the Andalusi emir and fled to Asturias under Alfonso’s protection, events related in multiple Muslim and Christian

²⁵Thomas Deswarte, “The *Chronicle of Albelda* and the *Prophetic Chronicle*,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Volume 1 (600–900)*, eds. David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 810–815.

²⁶Thomas Deswarte, “The *Chronicle of Alfonso III*,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Volume 1 (600–900)*, eds. David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 882–888.

²⁷Martín F. Ríos Saloma, *La Reconquista: una construcción historiográfica (siglos XVI–XIX)* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Ediciones de Historia, 2011).

²⁸Yves Bonnaz, ed. and trans. “Chronique Prophétique,” in *Chroniques asturiennes: (fin IXe siècle)* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1987), 2.

²⁹Bonnaz, ed. and trans. “Chronique Prophétique,” 7.

³⁰Gil, ed. “*Chronica Albeldensis*,” in *Chronica Hispana: saeculi VIII et IX*, 458, 480.

³¹*Ibid.*, 465.

chronicles.³² Although the *Chronicle of Albelda* does not specify Maḥmūd's religious or ethnocultural identity, he is generally understood to be of North African descent and/or a *muwallad*, someone whose ancestors converted to Islam after Iberia was conquered. The mistreatment and inferior status of non-Arab Muslims in al-Andalus prompted a number of revolts, including that of Maḥmūd, against the local Umayyad government. It makes sense, then, that the chronicle would mention him in the context of populations in Iberia who were differentiated from Arabs and associated with North Africa, even if this was achieved through the use of an apparent archaism, *Getuli*. The passage in the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* that relates Alfonso II's defeat of the invading forces in Asturias, however, refers to them as Arabs.³³ It is not clear why this text employs an ethnonym suggesting their Middle Eastern origins while the *Chronicle of Albelda* uses one indicating their North African heritage, but it may be reflective of the confusion of some late ninth-century Asturians toward the finer points of ethnocultural and geopolitical identities in al-Andalus.

Getulus also appears a handful of other times in Christian Iberian chronicles. While most manuscripts of the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* describe a *muwallad* named Mūsā as "a Goth by nation but a Mohammedan by rite," one manuscript replaces *Gothus* with *Getulus*.³⁴ Similarly, the anonymous *Chronicle of Nájera*, written in Latin in the second half of the twelfth century, refers to Mūsā first as "a Goth by nation" and a few lines later as "a Getulian by nation."³⁵ Juan Estévez Sola, the modern editor of the text, suggests that the latter was simply an error and "Goth" was intended. While this is very possible, and may be attributed to the same confusion in the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, which the *Chronicle of Nájera* draws on as one of its sources, there is also evidence for a connection between *Gothus* and *Getulus* in Iberian Christian thought. In his *Etymologies*, Isidore of Seville asserts that:

The Getulians are said to have been Getae who, setting out from their homeland with a huge force on ships, occupied the region of the Syrtes in Libya and were named by derivation Getulians, because they came from the Getae. Hence also the idea among the Goths is to speak of the Moors as close blood-relatives of themselves from their ancient affinity. Thus Africa was held initially by the Libyans, then the Africans, and after this the Getulians, and finally the Moors and Numidians.³⁶

Getae, he explains a bit earlier in the text, was the ancient name for the Goths.³⁷ There may be some echoes of this association between the Visigoths and North Africans in the manuscript variant of the *Prophetic Chronicle*, mentioned earlier, that says both the "Goths" and the "Moors" were descended from Japheth. Although *Getulus* appears only very rarely in Christian chronicles from medieval Iberia, therefore, some uses of the term suggest an occasional but intriguing slippage in their presentation of

³²Ann Christys, "Crossing the Frontier of Ninth-Century Hispania," in *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, eds. David Abulafia and Nora Berend (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 35–53.

³³Gil, ed. "Chronica Adefhonsi III," in *Chronica Hispana: saeculi VIII et IX*, 418–419.

³⁴Bonnaz, ed. and trans. "Chronique d'Alphonse III," in *Chroniques asturiennes*, 56.

³⁵Juan Estévez Sola, ed. *Chronica Hispana Saeculi XII Pars II: Chronica Naierensis*, Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Medievalis 71A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), 110–111.

³⁶Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, trans. Barney, 198.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 197.

Visigoths and North Africans.³⁸ That this comes most often in the context of *muwal-lads* is perhaps not surprising, since Iberian converts to Islam gave lie to what was often presented in these texts as a binary opposition between foreign Muslims and peninsular Christians. The single use of *Getulus* in the *Chronicon mundi* – a Latin chronicle composed in the 1230s by Lucas, future bishop of Tuy, at the behest of Queen Berenguela of Castile (d. 1246) – is also in reference to Mūsā, though by this point any mention of Gothic identity was no longer included.³⁹ In Latin chronicles after the Islamic conquests, therefore, we see varied attempts to reconcile two older ethnonyms for North Africans – “Moor” and *Getulus*, which were sometimes connected to shared ancestry with the Visigoths – with a new religious identity that was often perceived as putting North Africans into conflict with peninsular Christians. While *Getulus* never gained much traction, however, “Moor” would proceed to take on a much more religious character, becoming closely associated with Muslim identity.

III. “Moors” and the Racialization of Religion

Certainly the sharp distinction between “Moors” and “Saracens” in the *Chronicle of 754* leaves little trace in the Asturian chronicles of the ninth century. This is not to say that these distinctions disappeared entirely from the chronicle tradition in Christian Iberia, however. Although the majority of the twelfth-century *Chronicle of Pseudo-Isidore* is devoted to pre-conquest history, it too distinguishes between Middle Easterners and North Africans, and its use of the term “Moors” is often specific to the latter. The anonymous chronicle draws on a mix of Arabic and Latin sources, and like many chronicles from both linguistic traditions, it begins with a geographical description of Iberia, stating that there are “two Spains; that is, the upper and the lower. . . one of which is close to the Moors, and one of which is farther from them.”⁴⁰ This indicates that the “Moors” were located across the Strait of Gibraltar, in North Africa. When relating how the Byzantine emperor Heraclius came to power, Pseudo-Isidore says that he gathered “all the African and Arab nations up to the sea of the ocean,” along with “all the dromonds and galleys he found in Africa and the Arab territory and that of the Spanish.”⁴¹ The events in question would have taken place in the early seventh century, around the same time the prophet Muḥammad began preaching about his divine revelations, and though nothing in the text implies that Arabs here are understood to be Muslim, Pseudo-Isidore establishes a close relationship between events in Byzantium, the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, and Iberia. This sets the stage for all the major players in the Islamic conquests, first in the east and then in the west, and indicates that while there were connections between Africans and Arabs, they were hardly seen as one and the same.

Even so, a key episode in the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Isidore* directly contrasts being a Christian with being a “Moor,” giving it a religious valence and linking it more closely to Islam. To avenge his daughter, who had been raped by the Visigothic king, a man named Julian is said to have betrayed the monarch and guided Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād through

³⁸Though the version of the *Chronicle of Sampiro* incorporated into the *Historia Silense* seems to use *Getuli* once as a synonym for “Arabs”: Juan Estévez Sola, ed. *Chronica Hispana Saeculi XII, Pars III: Historia Silensis*, Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis 71B (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 179.

³⁹Lucas de Tuy, *Chronicon mundi*, ed. Emma Falque, Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis 74 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 241.

⁴⁰Fernando González Muñoz, ed. and trans. *La Chronica Gothorum Pseudo-Isidoriana* (ms. Paris BN 6113) (A Coruña: Toxosoutos, 2000), 110–111.

⁴¹Ibid., 174–175.

Iberia, leading to the Islamic conquests. This infamous episode appears in numerous Christian chronicles, and was borrowed from Muslim historians writing in Arabic. In Pseudo-Isidore's version, when Julian initially approaches Ṭāriq, the Muslim asks him, "What faith will I have in you, since you are a Christian and I am a Moor?"⁴² Despite the chronicle's differentiation between Arabs and Africans, therefore, this question toward the end of the text collapses Ṭāriq's Muslim and North African identities into the term "Moor," which is presented as diametrically opposed to being Christian.

In most Latin chronicles from the twelfth century on, the definition of a "Moor" as any Muslim prevailed, concealing ethnocultural and geopolitical specificity. The association between Muslims and North Africa was thus built into one of the most common words used by Christians in medieval Iberia – and indeed Europe more generally – to refer to Muslims. This was significant not only because it elided both the Middle Eastern and Iberian origins of many Andalusi Muslims, but also because it continually asserted their foreignness to the Peninsula, a kind of double displacement. The collapsing of religious, geopolitical, and ethnocultural identities – sometimes paired with stereotypes about the startling physiques of North Africans, as in the *Chronicle of 754* and the *Historia Arabum* – functioned to racialize Muslims on multiple levels. This continued to be the case in later medieval Romance chronicles, where, as Ross Brann observes, the word Moor "underscored for Christian readers not only the Muslims' religious and cultural otherness but also and more particularly their 'foreign,' racialized African origins: their misplaced and thus temporary presence as outsiders."⁴³ We can see a direct connection between the use of the term "Moor," the collapse of religious and ethnocultural identities, and the racialization of Muslims in what became an increasingly colonial context as Christian states like Castile and Aragón embarked upon conquest and settlement campaigns against Muslims.

IV. Scriptural Identifiers and Genealogies

A number of terms used by Christians and Muslims to refer to one another in chronicles from Iberia and North Africa established alterities based on religious difference and deviance. Generic terms referring to paganism and polytheism were quite prevalent, including *paganus* (pagan) in Latin, as well as *kāfir* (infidel) and *mushrik* (polytheist) in Arabic.⁴⁴ In many cases their use signaled a deliberate obfuscation of the monotheistic nature of the religion of the individual(s) in question, an insulting misrepresentation that was underlined by the application of the same labels to traditionally polytheistic peoples like the Vikings in both Christian and Muslim chronicles.

Many of the scriptural identifiers Christians and Muslims used for one another emphasized the divergences in their genealogies and rarely reflected the ways people self-identified. This was especially common in medieval Christian usage, which often continued the pre-Islamic conflation of the terms "Ishmaelite," "Hagarene," and "Saracen" with "Arab."⁴⁵ Each of these three scriptural labels alluded, in one way or

⁴²Ibid., 184–185; see also: Ann Christys, "How Can I Trust You, since You Are a Christian and I Am a Moor?: The Multiple Identities of the Chronicle of Pseudo-Isidore," in *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Richard Corradini and others (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006), 359–372.

⁴³Brann, "The Moors?" 317.

⁴⁴Eva Lapidiera Gutiérrez, *Cómo los musulmanes llamaban a los cristianos hispánicos* (Alicante: Instituto de Cultura "Juan Gil-Albert," 1997), 143–175.

⁴⁵John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 11.

another, to the contrast between Ishmael and Isaac, the sons of Abraham in the biblical tradition. Although Isaac was the son of Abraham and his wife Sarah, Ishmael was Abraham's illegitimate son with Sarah's handmaid, Hagar. Ishmael is described as wild, having been cast out with his mother for mocking his younger brother, after which he went on to father twelve sons who were equated with the tribes of the Arabs. Isaac, on the contrary, was the ancestor of the twelve tribes of Israel. The use of "Ishmaelite" and "Hagarene" to refer to Arabs and Muslims thus highlights what Christians perceived as a less illustrious lineage through Ishmael and Hagar. Although Ishmael is cast in a much more positive light in Islamic tradition and medieval Muslims also understood themselves to be his descendants, Christians made use of such labels in a very different spirit. The externally applied "Saracen" evoked the image of a people who misrepresented their lineage and falsely claimed descent through Sarah in an attempt to elevate themselves, an explanation famously applied to Arabs by Saint Jerome in the fourth century and followed by Isidore of Seville in the seventh century, and which would later be expanded to include Muslims.⁴⁶

"Ishmaelite," "Hagarene," and "Saracen" appear with relative frequency in medieval Iberian chronicles written by Christians. The most common of these, "Saracen," appears along with "Ishmaelite" in the *Chronicle of 754*, in which there is no clear distinction in their usage. Both terms also appear in the Asturian chronicles of the late ninth century. The *Prophetic Chronicle*, for example, alleges that "Saracens perversely believe themselves to be from Sarah, but truly they are Hagarenes from Hagar and Ishmaelites from Ishmael."⁴⁷ The dismissal of their genealogy, along with the assertion that they were liars, was prevalent and persistent in medieval Christian judgments of Muslims. As Patrick Marschner argues, Asturian chroniclers employed biblical knowledge "to classify the cultural and religious 'Other' within Old Testament genealogy."⁴⁸ He further connects this to the *Prophetic Chronicle's* claim that the book of Ezekiel foretold that God would grant the Ishmaelites the power to destroy nations, but that because of their sins they would ultimately be destroyed themselves.⁴⁹ The Asturian chronicle substitutes the Ishmaelites for Gog in the original biblical verse, depicting the Muslim conquerors of the Peninsula as a divine punishment while also establishing the expectation that their presence and rule in Iberia would eventually come to an end.⁵⁰

"Chaldean" emerged in the Asturian chronicles of the ninth century as yet another scriptural term applied to Muslims. Kenneth Baxter Wolf argues that these texts "tap into the repeated references to the Chaldeans in Jeremiah and other prophetic books, where the term was used almost generically to refer to the scourges suffered by the people of Israel."⁵¹ In a similar vein, the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* refers to the Umayyad caliph in Damascus as the "Babylonian king."⁵² It does not, however, appear to use

⁴⁶Sirantoine, "What's in a Word?," 228; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, trans. Barney, 192, 195.

⁴⁷Bonnaz, ed. and trans. "Chronique Prophétique," in *Chroniques asturiennes*, 3.

⁴⁸Patrick Marschner, "The Familiar Stranger: Biblical Perception and Depiction of Muslims in Christian Chronicles of the Iberian Peninsula, c. 900," in *Otherness in the Middle Ages*, eds. Hans-Werner Goetz and Ian N. Wood (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022), 270.

⁴⁹Bonnaz, ed. and trans. "Chronique Prophétique," in *Chroniques asturiennes*, 2.

⁵⁰Marschner, "The Familiar Stranger," 260–261.

⁵¹Wolf, trans. *Conquerors and Chroniclers*, 54.

⁵²Juan Gil Fernández and Juan Ignacio Ruiz de la Peña, eds. *Crónicas asturianas: Crónica de Alfonso III (Rotense y "A Sebastián"); Crónica Albeldense (y "Profética")*, trans. José-Luis Moralejo (Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo, 1985), 122–123.

“Chaldean” to mean anything different from the broad categories of “Saracen” and “Ishmaelite.” Toward the very end of the text, we are told that Viking raiders crossed to “Mauretania” from Iberia, where they killed many “Chaldeans,” so the term clearly applies to Iberian and North African Muslims alike.⁵³

Although Asturian chronicles applied these scriptural identifiers to Muslims as a whole, “Hagarene” took on a more specific meaning in some later texts. For example, the anonymous Latin *Chronicle of Alfonso the Emperor* – written in the mid-twelfth century in praise of Alfonso VII of Castile-León (d. 1157) and in support of his claim to the title of emperor – uses “Saracens” as a catchall to describe Muslims in general but gives more specific names to distinguish between different groups of Iberian and North African Muslims. Rather than referring to all Muslims, “Hagarenes” was understood to mean Muslims from al-Andalus.⁵⁴ This was also true in the *Historia Compostellana*, a collection of documentary and narrative accounts of the episcopate and archiepiscopate (1100–20 and 1120–40, respectively) of Diego Gelmírez in Compostela, composed and compiled by at least three different authors from about 1107 to 1149.⁵⁵

Other words, sometimes drawn from scripture, were used for Muslims under the rule of the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties. “Moabites” was the ethnonym most often applied to people from the Almoravid emirate, which emerged in North Africa in the mid-eleventh century, established Marrakesh as its capital, and began conquering parts of al-Andalus in the 1080s. This label may to some extent be the result of transliteration, since the Arabic word for Almoravids, *al-Murābiṭūn*, sounds very similar to the Latin word for Moabites, *Moabitae*.⁵⁶ The biblical Moabites occupied part of the Dead Sea region and were often at odds with the Israelites. Nevill Barbour suggested that “perhaps the chroniclers were influenced by a supposed similitude of the Almoravids as overseas enemies of the Christians with the Moabites as enemies of the Jews beyond the waters of the Jordan.”⁵⁷ The first records of its use outside of a strictly scriptural context by Christian writers in Iberia, however, refer to Muslims as a whole.⁵⁸

Not long after, it appears more specifically as a descriptor for North Africans in the *Historia Silense*. The Latin chronicle was composed in the first decades of the twelfth century, probably between 1109 and 1118, by an anonymous monk likely from León whose stated aim – to narrate the life and reign of Alfonso VI of Castile-León (d. 1109) – was never quite met, though the text offers considerable detail on earlier events in Iberian history. The *Historia Silense* states that during the reign of Ordoño II of León (d. 924), the Muslim “king of Córdoba” – that is, the Umayyad emir and later caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III (d. 961) – called upon help from “Mauretania” and

⁵³Ibid., 148–149.

⁵⁴On the imperial project of Alfonso VII, see: Hélène Sirantoine, *Imperator Hispaniae: les idéologies impériales dans le royaume de León (IXe–XIIe siècles)* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2012), 289–373.

⁵⁵Emma Falque, ed. *Historia Compostellana*, Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis 70 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1988); Ron Barkai, *Cristianos y musulmanes en la España medieval: el enemigo en el espejo* (Madrid: Rialp, 1984), 139.

⁵⁶Hélène Sirantoine, “Histories of the Islamic World in the Chronicles of the Kingdom of Leon (End-Ninth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries),” *Parergon* 35, no. 2 (2018): 135.

⁵⁷Nevill Barbour, “The Significance of the Word *Maurus*, with Its Derivatives *Moro* and *Moor*, and of Other Terms Used by Medieval Writers in Latin to Describe the Inhabitants of Muslim Spain,” in *Actas, IV Congreso Do Estudios Árabes e Islámico* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 260.

⁵⁸Around the beginning of the twelfth century: Sirantoine, “What’s in a Word?,” 231.

the “Moabites” in the face of Christian attacks. This took place in the early tenth century, well before the advent of the Almoravids, suggesting that the anonymous chronicler may have associated “Moabites” with North African Muslims more broadly, rather than with a specific dynasty.⁵⁹ The same passage also includes a rather puzzling reference to Muslims as “Amorites.” We are told that “so many thousands of Moors” were killed in the resulting battle between Muslim and Christian forces that “the limbs of the Amorites (*Amorreorum*) covered all the mountains and hills, the forests and fields.”⁶⁰ Like the Moabites, the biblical Amorites were in conflict with the Israelites, and it is possible that phonetic similarities between “Amorites” and “Moors” in Latin may have prompted the usage of the former by the *Silense* chronicler. It may be that “Amorites” here, like “Moabites,” was intended to refer to North Africans. Any potential connection to North Africans is more elusive in the chronicle’s one previous use of the term, however, when it says that Fruela I of Asturias (d. 768) killed 54,000 “Amorites” because the “king of Córdoba,” the Umayyad emir ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I (d. 788), wished to attack Galicia.⁶¹ In both major variants of the ninth-century *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, the word used to describe the 54,000 Muslims killed by Fruela is “Chaldeans,” so the later Leonese chronicler’s choice of “Amorites” appears to diverge from previous historiographical precedent.⁶²

In the *Chronicle of Alfonso the Emperor*, “Moabites” is used clearly and regularly as a reference to the Almoravids, who are distinguished from the “Hagarenes”/Andalusis both linguistically and in terms of their relationship to Alfonso VII and Christian Iberia. The chronicler highlights how the Almoravid incursions into Iberia prompted an alliance between Alfonso VII and some peninsular Muslims, most notably the Andalusī leader Sayf al-Dawla, (called Zafadola in the text), who is even said to acknowledge Alfonso as emperor.⁶³ Although Muslims from both Iberia and North Africa are given rather disparaging scriptural identifiers in the chronicle, therefore, there is also a degree of specificity that signals a place for peninsular Muslims in Alfonso VII’s empire – provided, of course, that they submitted to his power. In the *Historia Compostellana*, “Moabites” is also used to refer to Almoravids, and in one instance is specifically connected to epidermal race as well, describing them as “those who the sun has made similar to Ethiopians.”⁶⁴ In the *Historia Roderici* – an anonymous Latin account of the deeds of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar (d. 1099), better known as El Cid, composed sometime between 1102 and 1238 – the Almoravids are likewise referred to as “Moabites,” whereas Andalusis are generally called “Saracens” or “Ishmaelites,” though there is some slippage between these scriptural identifiers.⁶⁵

⁵⁹Estévez Sola, ed. *Historia Silensis*, 175–176; Sirantoine, “Histories,” 136. The same usage of “Moabites” in reference to these events appears in the *Chronicle of Nájera*, of which the *Historia Silense* is a major source: Estévez Sola, ed., *Chronica Naierensis*, 117.

⁶⁰Some manuscripts read “tot milia Maurorum” and others “tot milia mortuorum”: Estévez Sola, ed., *Historia Silensis*, 176. The *Chronicle of Nájera* follows this use of “Amorite”: Estévez Sola, ed., *Chronica Naierensis*, 118.

⁶¹Estévez Sola, ed. *Historia Silensis*, 158.

⁶²Gil, ed. “*Chronica Adefonsi III*,” 414–415.

⁶³Antonio Maya Sánchez, ed. “*Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*,” in *Chronica Hispana Saeculi XII Pars I*, *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Medievals* 71 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1990), 182–183.

⁶⁴Falque, ed. *Historia Compostellana*, 57.

⁶⁵Emma Falque, ed. “*Historia Roderici vel Gesta Roderici Campidocti*,” in *Chronica Hispana Saeculi XII Pars I*, 3–98; Simon Barton and Richard Fletcher, trans., “*Historia Roderici*,” in *The World of El Cid: Chronicles of the Spanish Reconquest* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 115 n. 57.

The association of “Moabites” with Almoravids is made explicit in the *Latin Chronicle of the Kings of Castile*, written in the early thirteenth century and often attributed to Juan, who served as bishop of Osma and Burgos as well as chancellor to Fernando III of Castile-León (d. 1252). When describing the rise of the Almohads in the early twelfth century, the chronicle states that the dynasty’s spiritual founder, Ibn Tūmart (d. 1130), “preached in the kingdom of Morocco, then held by the Moors who were known by the special name Moabites (who are commonly called Almoravids),” giving both the common scriptural identifier as well as a Latin transliteration of the Arabic name. The text repeats typical Almohad criticisms of the Almoravids, including that they imposed heavy taxes and were guilty of the vice of “liberality, nay rather, prodigality.” Ibn Tūmart, on the contrary, is described as a “wise and discreet man, even though an infidel,” and his successor, the first Almohad caliph ‘Abd al-Mu’min (d. 1163), is likewise praised. Although one might be tempted to take this as a suggestion that the author viewed the Almohads somewhat more favorably than the Almoravids, the same passage adds that the Almohads were “now by the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . wonderfully beginning to be destroyed.”⁶⁶ Later on in the text ‘Abd al-Mu’min is described as having “deprived their Almoravid lords of their kingdom contrary to justice,” a seeming contradiction of the earlier and relatively positive depiction of the rise of the Almohads.⁶⁷ Interestingly, however, the chronicler does not assign any derogatory scriptural identifiers to the Almohads. Instead, they are referred to throughout either by the Latin transliteration of their Arabic name – which is further explained, correctly, to be a reference to their emphasis on the unitary nature of God – or as “Moors,” a term that in this chronicle is applied to Andalusī Muslims multiple times as well. This is in contrast to the *Chronicle of Alfonso the Emperor*, which identifies ‘Abd al-Mu’min as “the king of the Assyrians,” likely in an attempt to draw parallels between the first Almohad caliph and negative biblical depictions of the Assyrians.⁶⁸ The chronicle also, however, calls the Almohads “Muzmuti,” a Latin transliteration of Maṣmūda, one of the major North African tribal groupings involved in the rise of the new dynasty, indicating more specific cultural knowledge at play. While no scriptural identifier for the Almohads seems to have had the staying power of “Moabites” for the Almoravids, twelfth- and thirteenth-century chronicles demonstrate the coexistence, often in the same text, of ethnonyms for North Africans that were drawn both from derogatory scriptural allusions as well as from fairly detailed geopolitical and linguistic knowledge. They also display a persistent interest in distinguishing between Iberian and North African Muslims, while nonetheless continuing to use terms like “Moor” to refer to Muslims in general.

Overall, biblical terms like “Ishmaelite,” “Hagarene,” and “Saracen” were used by Christian chroniclers to bring attention to what they perceived as the historical and genealogical inferiority of Muslims, creating religious alterities and adding to the ways that Muslims were racialized. Labels like “Moabite,” “Chaldean,” “Amorite,” “Assyrian,” and “Babylonian” ignored the monotheistic nature of Islam, instead casting Muslims inaccurately as pagans and polytheists while also divorcing them from their

⁶⁶Luis Charlo Brea, ed. “Chronica Latina Regum Castellae,” in *Chronica Hispana Saeculi XIII*, Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis 73 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 39–40; Joseph F. O’Callaghan, trans., *The Latin Chronicle of the Kings of Castile* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 13–14.

⁶⁷Brea, ed. “Chronica Latina,” 88; O’Callaghan, trans., *Latin Chronicle*, 93.

⁶⁸Maya Sánchez, ed. “Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris,” 200, 244.

actual geographic, temporal, and ethnocultural contexts. Nonetheless, while many of these terms were applied to Muslims of all stripes, some, including “Hagarenes,” “Moabites,” and “Assyrians,” were at times used to acknowledge geopolitical and ethnocultural differences between groups of Muslims in Iberia and North Africa.

V. “Barbarians” across Linguistic Traditions

Christian chroniclers also used the term “barbarian” – the Latin *barbarus* – to refer to Muslims, and seem to have drawn on both the ancient Greco-Latin history of the term as well as the Arabic sense of the word *barbar*, or Berber. The Arabic term was itself derived from Greco-Latin usage, implying both an incoherence of speech and a lack of civilization. Many Muslim chroniclers, especially in earlier centuries, associated the people they called *barbar* with ethnocultural and religious inferiority, and the term shares a number of similarities in usage and meaning with labels that Muslim chroniclers generally used for Christians, like *’ilj* and *’ajam*. *’Ilj* can carry the sense of non-Arab, infidel, barbarian, and/or chattel.⁶⁹ Like “Moor” in later medieval Christian chronicles, over time, *’ilj* in chronicles from the western Mediterranean became increasingly associated with a particular religious group (in this case, Christians) and their enslavement. More widespread was the term *’ajam*, from an Arabic root which, like the Greek word from which we derive “barbarian,” refers to incoherent speech.⁷⁰ Its usage shifted over time, in some contexts referring specifically to Persians, but *’ajam* was used most generally as an antonym for Arabs, who prided themselves on their eloquence in speech. In the western Mediterranean, it was often applied to Christians and used to describe the languages in which they spoke and wrote.⁷¹

Many of the same ideas were tied up in the Arabic usage of *barbar*, or Berber. As Nicola Clarke puts it, “the overriding portrayal is of the Berbers as *’ajam*: non-Arabic speaking barbarians who are barely controllable, barely civilised, and barely Muslim.”⁷² Along these lines, the anonymous Arabic *Fath al-Andalus* cites the opinion of the famed eleventh-century Andalusí writer Ibn Ḥazm that “Berber Muslims are the worst Muslims, and most of them are a disgrace.”⁷³ That over time many people came to self-identify as *barbar* and to write of Berber heritage with pride does not erase the term’s discriminatory history or the similarity in the language Muslim chroniclers used to speak of religious and ethnocultural others.⁷⁴ Ramzi Rouighi argues that though *barbar* had a longer history in Arabic usage, it gained the sense of “Berber” as we understand it today only in the context of post-conquest Iberia, where it provided a useful way

⁶⁹Lapiedra Gutiérrez, *Cómo los musulmanes*, 189–247.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 258–285.

⁷¹María Angeles Gallego, “The Languages of Medieval Iberia and Their Religious Dimension,” *Medieval Encounters* 9, no. 1 (2003): 126–135.

⁷²Nicola Clarke, “‘They are the most treacherous of people’: Religious Difference in Arabic Accounts of Three Early Medieval Berber Revolts,” *eHumanista* 24 (2013): 512.

⁷³Molina, ed. *Fath al-Andalus*, 55.

⁷⁴“Berber” as a proud self-identifier persists in Arabic, English, and multiple other languages today, though the terms Imazighen for people (often rendered Amazigh in English) and Tamazight for language are gaining traction. While “Berber” should therefore not be understood to signify a historically monolithic community of indigenous North Africans, its proud use by some of the people to whom it referred in the past may at least partially justify its continued use in modern scholarship. That being said, the use of Berber as a positive self-identifier in the available sources postdates many of the groups to whom the term is applied by medieval and modern authors alike.

to distinguish between Middle Eastern and North African settlers. In North Africa, on the contrary, local authors rarely used *barbar* in the centuries after the Islamic conquests, favoring more specific terms instead.⁷⁵ Eventually, however, it became so prevalent that many North Africans began to use it as a self-identifier while also maintaining more specific tribal affiliations, a process Rouighi refers to as “Berberization.” Notably, many Muslim chronicles from later centuries do not use *barbar* to describe the language spoken by Berbers, instead referring to it as *al-lisān al-gharbī* (“the western tongue”) or merely *gharbī* (“western”).⁷⁶ Although multiple chroniclers report that the Berbers originally migrated from the Middle East, their presence in the west remained a significant component of how they were defined and distinguished from Arabs, by Muslims and Christians alike.⁷⁷

The twelfth-century *Historia Silense* uses the Latin *barbarus* with great frequency to refer to Muslims in general. In its opening lines, the chronicler characterizes the eighth-century Islamic conquests of Iberia as a time when Spain was “inundated with the strength of the barbarians,” causing study and learning, once so abundant, to vanish from the Peninsula.⁷⁸ The text then makes note of various Christian Iberian ruling groups that had strayed into the Arian “madness,” such as the Vandals, Sueves, and Visigoths – the last of whom, though initially taken in by heterodoxy, came to govern their territories “in a Catholic manner,” including “the province of Tingitania in the furthest reaches of Africa.” Immediately following this, however, the chronicle returns to the flood imagery of its opening lines, lamenting that due to the impiety of the Visigothic king Witiza (d. 710), “in the manner of the time of Noah, divine providence allowed barbarian peoples to occupy Spain, sparing few Christians, as the flood had the earth.”⁷⁹ Drawing on both scriptural and classical traditions, therefore, Muslims are cast as uncivilized and decivilizing forces who would eventually be overcome by a return to orthodox Christianity, receding like the primordial floodwaters and modeled on the “barbarian” waves of late antiquity. Indeed, almost immediately following this, the monastic chronicler explains his intention to record the life and deeds of Alfonso VI, “the orthodox emperor of Spain,” who is further described as “sprung from the illustrious lineage of the Goths.”⁸⁰ At various points, he makes a point of emphasizing the ideology of neo-Gothic revival and restoration, drawing on the precedent of the ninth-

⁷⁵Rouighi, *Inventing the Berbers*, 15–43; Rouighi, “The Andalusī Origins of the Berbers?”

⁷⁶Evariste Lévi-Provençal, ed. *Documents inédits d'histoire almohade: fragments manuscrits du “legajo” 1919 du fonds arabe de l'Escorial* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1928), 100, 163–164; ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalāt, *Mann bi-l-imāma: tārikh bilād al-Maghrib wa-l-Andalus fī ‘ahd al-Muwahhidin*, ed. ‘Abd al-Hādī Tāzī (Bayrūt: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1987), 333, 411, 434; and Ibn al-Qaṭṭān al-Marrākushī, *Naẓm al-jumān li-tartīb mā salafa min akhbār al-zamān*, ed. Maḥmūd ‘Alī Makki (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990), 135, 173. Some chronicles, however, do refer to *al-lisān al-barbar(i)*, *al-lughā al-barbariyya* (“the Berber tongue”), or *kalām al-barbar* (“the speech of the Berbers”): ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Zar’ al-Fāsi, *al-Anīs al-muṭrib bi-rawḍ al-qirtās fī akhbār mulūk al-Maghrib wa-tārikh madīnat Fās*, ed. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Maṣṣūr, 2nd ed. (Rabat: Al-maṭba‘a al-malikiyya, 1999), 77, 87, 226, 365; and Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn al-Qūṭiyya, *Tārikh iftitāḥ al-Andalus*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, *Maktaba al-Andalusiyya 2* (Al-Qāhira; Bayrūt: Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1982), 53.

⁷⁷Maya Shatzmiller, “Le mythe d’origine berbère: aspects historiographiques et sociaux,” *Revue de l’Occident Musulman et de La Méditerranée* 35, no. 1 (1983): 145–156.

⁷⁸Estévez Sola, ed. *Historia Silensis*, 133.

⁷⁹Ibid., 138.

⁸⁰Ibid., 139.

century Asturian chronicles.⁸¹ In this context, it is possible to read the depiction of the Islamic conquests as a “barbarian” flood as a subversion of the historiographical tendency to characterize groups like the Visigoths as “barbarians.” In the *Historia Silense*’s telling, the Visigoths are valorized and confirmed as the rightful inhabitants of the Peninsula while the “barbarian” label is transferred to Muslims, suggesting that they were outsiders capable only of disrupting local scholarship and culture rather than adding to it, whereas the Visigoths ultimately embraced orthodoxy and brought about a cultural florescence, granting them a legitimate place not only in the Peninsula’s past, but also its future.

Along with this invocation and reframing of the Greco-Latin history of the term *barbarus*, another function of the *Historia Silense*’s frequent application of the label to Muslims may have been connected to the use of *barbar* by Arab Muslims to differentiate and denigrate North Africans. As with the ninth-century Asturian chronicles, there is some suggestion in the *Historia Silense* that its author associated Islam with North Africa more than the Middle East. In fact, very similarly to the *Prophetic Chronicle*’s reference to the Umayyad caliph al-Walid I reigning in Africa, the *Silense* chronicler identifies him as “the king of the barbarians” and “the African king.”⁸² As Sirantoine puts it, this has the effect that “the Islamic domain is again assimilated to Africa” and “the establishment of al-Andalus therefore is presented as linked to a larger ‘African’ Muslim empire.”⁸³ Although *barbarus* is applied to North African and Iberian Muslims alike in the *Historia Silense*, the depiction of the Islamic conquests as a divine scourge comparable to the flood of Noah in contrast to the century-and-a-half-long orthodoxy of peninsular Visigoths suggests that the chronicler was invested in presenting all Muslims as historically foreign to Iberia and religiously incapable of truly belonging there. Referring to them as “barbarians,” therefore, may not only have been intended to invoke the term’s Greco-Latin history, but also to draw on the sense of the Arabic *barbar* and its association with being both uncivilized and North African. In this interpretation, the word’s shared etymology comes to the fore. Although it is much less pervasive and systematic, this use of *barbarus* also appears in the twelfth-century *Chronicle of Nájera* – which draws on the *Historia Silense* as one of its sources – as well as the thirteenth-century *Chronicon mundi* of Lucas of Tuy.

The *Chronicle of Alfonso the Emperor*, on the contrary, appears to use *barbarus* not as a generic term for any Muslim but specifically to refer to North Africans. It states that the Almoravid emir ‘Alī ibn Yūsuf (d. 1143) placed the viscount of Barcelona, known as Reverter, in charge of “the captive Christian soldiers and the barbarians.”⁸⁴ While it is not entirely clear whether Reverter found himself in North Africa as a captive or a mercenary, his service to the Almoravids against the rising Almohad threat is attested in multiple Christian and Muslim sources.⁸⁵ Given this context, as well as the specificity of other ethnonyms for Iberian and North African Muslims in this particular chronicle, it seems likely that its use of “barbarians” functions here as a transliteration of the Arabic *barbar*, communicating that Reverter commanded both Christian and Berber troops in North Africa.

⁸¹Ibid., 151, 156.

⁸²Ibid., 147–148.

⁸³Sirantoine, “Histories,” 134.

⁸⁴Maya Sánchez, ed. “Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris,” 200.

⁸⁵Hussein Fancy, *The Mercenary Mediterranean: Sovereignty, Religion, and Violence in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 88–89.

Barbarus may also be used in this way in the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Isidore*, though it is less clear. The text says that in the seventh century, the Visigothic king Gondolus (probably Chindasuinth, d. 653) “was most learned in the barbarian tongue, and he sent delegations to the barbarians and to the people of the Oriba.”⁸⁶ Fernando González Muñoz, the modern editor and translator of *Pseudo-Isidore*, has suggested that the Oriba might refer to the Awraja tribe that inhabited the region around Fes.⁸⁷ Even if this was not the case, it seems probable that “barbarians” in this instance refers to North Africans. Although the bulk of the chronicle is devoted to ancient and late antique history, it is not clear what other “barbarian” people or language might have been meant by a twelfth-century chronicler describing these seventh-century events. While “Berber” would not have been a particularly accurate label for North Africans in the seventh century, it certainly follows the twelfth-century Arabic usage of *barbar*.

We also see a clear attentiveness to both the Greco-Latin and Arabic implications of “barbarian” in the various historical works of Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, who served as the archbishop of Toledo from 1209 until his death in 1247. His *De rebus Hispanie*, completed in 1243 and also known as the *Historia Gothica*, offers an account of Iberian history that moves from its settlement by the descendants of Noah to events in the author’s own lifetime. In this text, Jiménez de Rada states that the Visigoths were “the most wise of almost all the barbarians, showing themselves to be quite similar to the Greeks.”⁸⁸ He thus distances the Visigoths from the classical image of “barbarians” as unlearned and uncivilized, comparing them instead to the very society that coined the term and which continued to be celebrated for its cultural achievements. This is in line with the archbishop’s historical vision of the Visigoths as the seeds of the Castilian monarchy of his own time, which had brought the former Visigothic capital of Toledo back under Christian rule in 1085. His *Historia Arabum*, on the contrary, was completed in 1245 and focuses more tightly on Islamic history and its impacts on Iberia, beginning with the life of the prophet Muḥammad and ending with a brief mention of the rise of the Almohads.⁸⁹ In this text, the archbishop uses *barbarus* in a way that is clearly more synonymous with the Arabic *barbar*. At times, for example, he refers to North Africa as “Berberia,” and his description of the period of upheaval preceding the ultimate dissolution of the Umayyad caliphate based in Córdoba in 1031 pays particular attention to the role of Berber troops under various caliphal claimants.⁹⁰ The *Historia Arabum* emphasizes disunity within Arab and Muslim societies, but in so doing Jiménez de Rada also displays a detailed knowledge of Islamic history and Arabic sources, correctly referring to the Almoravids and Almohads with Latin transliterations of their Arabic names and accurately distinguishing between Iberian and North African Muslims.⁹¹

⁸⁶González Muñoz, ed. and trans. *Chronica Gothorum Pseudo-Isidoriana*, 178–179.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 76–77.

⁸⁸Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, *Historia de rebus Hispanie, sive, Historia Gothica*, ed. Juan Fernández Valverde, Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis 72 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1987), 25.

⁸⁹Juan Fernández Valverde and Juan A. Estévez Sola, eds., “Historia Arabum,” in *Roderici Ximenii de Rada Historiae minores: Dialogus libri vite*, by Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis 72C (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 87–149.

⁹⁰On which, see: Peter C. Scales, *The Fall of the Caliphate of Córdoba: Berbers and Andalus in Conflict* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

⁹¹Olivia Remie Constable, “Perceptions of the Umayyads in Christian Spanish Chronicles,” in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, eds. Antoine Borrut and Paul Cobb (Boston: Brill, 2010), 123–128.

Where Arabic writers used *barbar* to collapse the distinct identities of multiple North African populations, therefore, some Latin chroniclers used *barbarus* as they did “Moor,” grouping all Muslims under a term that emphasized their North African origins and foreignness to Iberia and that simultaneously drew on classical tradition to assert their barbarity. Unsurprisingly, this usage seems to have emerged in the twelfth century, at a time when North African powers like the Almoravids were playing an increasingly colonizing role in southern Iberia and challenging the colonial aspirations of Christian Iberian states in the same region. The use of the term “barbarian” to imply the uncivilized nature of Muslims and suggest that they belonged to North Africa but not to Iberia can thus be understood, like “Moor,” as a function of Christian Iberian coloniality, which often rested on assertions of the inherent and perpetual foreignness of Muslims. Around the same time, however, we also see some Christian chroniclers begin to use *barbarus* specifically to refer to North Africans, following the Arabic *barbar*. This too seems to have served Christian colonizing impulses, given the broader context of these particular chronicles, which were often focused on asserting the continuity and superiority of the Visigothic legacy in the face of the Islamic conquests and legitimating the rule of a particular Christian leader or dynasty over the Peninsula as a whole. The various uses of *barbarus*, therefore, suggest once again that the accuracy or precision of the ethnonyms Christian chroniclers applied to Muslims and North Africans were not necessarily reflective of the cultural and linguistic knowledge available to them, but instead constituted part of more conscious efforts to define hierarchies of belonging and rights to rulership within Iberia.

VI. Conclusion

As the preceding discussion has shown, while the *Chronicle of 754* in the eighth century maintained a careful linguistic distinction between Iberian and North African Muslims, this practice seems mostly to have fallen out of use in the Asturian chronicles of the late ninth century, reemerging only in the twelfth century, when a number of new ethnonyms came into use along with several more specific and accurate Latin transliterations of Arabic terms. Throughout the Middle Ages, however, many of the words medieval Christian chroniclers in Iberia used to refer to North Africans were inextricably connected with Muslim identity, which was racialized in various ways. Multiple labels – including “Moor,” “barbarian,” and scriptural identifiers like “Moabite” – drew on ancient histories and etymologies to suggest both literal and figurative kinship with North Africans and Middle Easterners. In so doing, they suggested that Muslims were geographically and temporally alien to the Iberian Peninsula. And though I have focused mostly on the literary histories of the words Christian Iberian chroniclers used to describe North Africans and Muslims, these labels and their implications were connected to and reflective of real-world political and social contexts. Many of these chronicles were penned by clergymen in support of Christian rulers who were engaged in military campaigns against – as well as colonial suppression and exploitation of – Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula. Although Christian Iberian expansion into North Africa would not come until the later Middle Ages, earlier chronicles laid the groundwork for the idea that Muslims were perpetual foreigners in Iberia who came from and belonged on the southern shores of the Strait of Gibraltar. As Ross Brann puts it:

Moor arguably served as the principal linguistic vehicle for suppressing the indigenous nature of the Andalusí Muslim cultural heritage in Iberia and rendering

Andalusi Muslims as others in a projected Christian Iberia. It enabled Christians in thirteenth-century Castile to dismiss as “foreign” the substantially mixed Andalusi Muslim population to their south, as well as Castile’s own Mudejars, and to disregard the extent of social and cultural ties among all Andalusis, including Muslims from Africa.⁹²

The same could be said of various other labels for Muslims discussed in this article, many of which were associated with North African and Middle Eastern origins, despite the fact that the majority of Iberia’s Muslims were descended from converts whose presence in the Peninsula predated the Islamic conquests.

Of course, this was never the only way that Iberian Christians wrote and thought about North Africans and Muslims in the Middle Ages, and there were plenty of instances of alliance, cooperation, and exchange across religious and geopolitical lines. Indeed, some of this exchange is reflected in the overlap between Christian and Muslim depictions of North Africans, as with the use of the Latin *barbarus* to replicate the Arabic *barbar*, and it is also true that there are multiple instances where North Africans referred to by derogatory and/or inaccurate ethnonyms are praised or described positively in Christian chronicles. Nonetheless, we should not minimize the violent potential of the rhetorical work performed by these labels. As Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh observes, “violence never dies, and cannot be bound by time, space, or genre. It is also never fictional.”⁹³ The racialized figures of the “Saracen” and the “Moor” are neither wholly real nor wholly fictional, but they have permitted and continue to permit violence against real Muslims. In Iberia, this rhetorical violence culminated and was realized in the expulsion of Muslims and Moriscos – forced converts from Islam to Christianity and their descendants – in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Even today, “Saracen” and “Moor” still appear uncritically as synonyms for “Muslim” in scholarship in multiple modern languages, and to an even greater extent in popular usage. As this article has shown, however, these and many other terms from the medieval period were rooted in attempts by Christians to dismiss, degrade, and misrepresent the identities of those to whom they referred. They were never adopted as self-identifiers on any significant scale, and they were and are racialized in various ways. “Moor,” for example, “is still so unstable a term that it can accommodate efforts to reclaim the figure of Othello as an African or re-invent him as an Arab or a Turk.”⁹⁴ *Moro* remains extremely common in Spanish, and is the root of the word *moreno*, used to describe a person with dark skin. One can still walk down a major thoroughfare in the UK and be confronted with signage for the “Saracens Head” pub, including a stereotyped caricature of the head in question. It behooves us, then, to recognize not only the historical association between Iberian Christian coloniality, Islamophobia, and racialization, but also the persistence of many of these legacies in even the basic vocabulary we use to discuss and represent this history.

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⁹²Brann, “The Moors?” 313.

⁹³Rajabzadeh, “The Depoliticized Saracen,” 5–6.

⁹⁴Brann, “The Moors?” 317; see also: Emily C. Bartels, “Making More of the Moor: Aaron, Othello, and Renaissance Refashionings of Race,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (1990): 433–454.

Emma Snowden is an Assistant Professor of History at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her research focuses on Muslim–Christian relations in medieval Iberia and North Africa, drawing primarily on historical chronicles in Arabic, Latin, and Romance.

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