Arabic Origins of the Foundational Myth of Western Identity: Between Histories of the Conquest of America and the Conquest of Andalusia[1]

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The history of the conquest of America has constituted a primary source of self-perception and identity formation for Western nations, feeding their imagined superiority over the other nations of the world. This comparative study shows that modern Western historical knowledge is linked much more closely to Arab knowledge than it is to a pure Greco-Roman origin, contrary to the commonly accepted idea in contemporary Western thought. It compares the work of Spanish historians on the conquest of America in the sixteenth century CE with Arab texts concerning the conquest of Andalusia written in the 9th and 10th centuries AH, drawing out similarities between the two stories. It concludes that the narrative of the conquest of America is a copy of the Andalusia conquest narrative, reclaimed by the Spanish at the beginning of the modern era. It thus affirms the diverse origins of western knowledge against the claim that it is purely Greco-Roman.

Conquest of America | Conquest of Andalusia | Recurring Themes | Western Identity

Many Western historians consider the conquest of America the greatest event of modern history. This story has been spun into a tale closer to fiction, in which it is claimed that just five hundred men conquered the huge kingdom of Mexico that ruled over millions of people.[3] The historian Francisco López de Gómara (1511-1566), the first to record the history of the conquest and the biography of the leading Spanish conquistador Hernàn Cortés (1485-1547), wrote: "The conquest of Mexico and the conversion of the peoples of New Spain can and should be included in the histories of the world, not only because it was well done but because it was very great."[4] In the same biography, he ends up describing the conquest of America as "the greatest event since the creation of the world."[5] Commenting on the conquest of Mexico in addition to the conquest of Peru, the Spanish historian Antonio de Solís (1610-1669) also wrote that what happened was "wholly incompatible with the sincerity of history, and even in a romance would surpass the exaggeration and the license of fable itself."[6] Subsequently, the English historian William Robertson (1721-1793) wrote of the Pizarro brothers, to whom he attributed to the conquest of Peru, referring to them as "extraordinary men" because they defeated "one of the greatest kingdoms of the world."[7]

Commenting on this glorification of conquest, contemporary American historian Matthew Restall says that during the sixteenth century, the story of the conquest created what might be called the "Cortés cult" in Europe, stating that "admirers travelled like pilgrims to Cortés' residence in Spain. the Cortés cult was further stimulated by Gómara's hagiography of

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3 The study focuses on the extent to which two versions of a specific type of historical discourse – the Spanish discourse of conquest at the beginning of the modern era and the Arabs' discourse in the Middle Ages – overlap. It is thus not concerned with whether the process by which the Spanish took control of the Americas is best considered a "conquest" or an "invasion" or an "encounter", as some Western historians prefer to call it.

4 Francisco López de Gómara, *Cortés, The Life of the Conqueror by his Secretary, Lesley Byrd Simpson* (Trans., ed.) (Berkely & Los Angles: University of California Press, 1966), p. 4.

5 David A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots and the Liberal State* 1492-1876 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 46.

6 Antonio De Solis, *History of the Conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards, Thomas Townsend* (trans.), vol. 1 (London: John Osborn, 1738), p. 457.

7 William Robertson, *The History of America*, vol. 3 (London: W. Strahan, 1739), pp. 3-5.

1552 – that the crown attempted to suppress too" because Cortés's rising stature threatened the position of the king himself.[8] To understand the relevance of this story to Arab and Islamic history requires a brief description of the circumstances in which it took place. It is closely related to the Arab-Islamic presence in Andalusia, which lasted nine hundred years beginning from the Arab conquest in 92 AH/711 AD through to their departure between 1609 and 1614. Arab and Muslim Andalusians lived through the conquest of America in Spain and remained Spanish citizens for nearly a century after the conquest.[9]

Brief Historical Background to the Spanish Conquest of America

In 1492, Fernando and Isabella, the king and queen of Aragon and Castile who united their kingdoms with their marriage, seized the Kingdom of Granada, the last of the Andalusian Muslim kingdoms. In the same year Christopher Columbus chanced upon America on his way to India, after fighting as a crusader in the war against the Muslims of Granada.[10] Upon his arrival in America, the King of Spain asked the Pope to grant him that continent on the basis of the European idea of "discovery", requiring the presentation of a story demonstrating their arrival upon "a new land." On 4 May 1493, Pope Alexander VI (1431-1503) issued a papal bull granting America to Spain. The decree divided the "new" territories of the world between Portugal and Spain, the two most powerful European countries at that time, granting the lands to the west of the 100th meridian to Spain, and the lands east of it to Portugal.

Subsequently, Spanish immigrants flocked to America, and their numbers increased. On 1 April 1520, an unidentified Spanish leader, Hernan Cortés sent a letter to the King of Spain, Charles V (1500-1558), informing him that in 1519 he had "discovered" a country, called Yucatan by its residents, on the American continent.[11] The Spanish had claimed what is today Mexico, calling it "New Spain". A second letter arrived from Cortés in August 1521, informing the king that he had conquered the country inhabited by the Aztecs. Those letters detailing the story of Yucatan, and the gold and silver that Cortés sent with them, led the king of Spain to name Cortés ruler of Mexico in 1522. This story would change everything for the continent and for the entire world. A race to conquer the world began among the countries of Western Europe, a race which continued throughout the modern era. Here lies the importance of the story to the history of the modern world.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The historical sources of the discourse surrounding the conquest of America are important for several reasons. The first is that this discourse formulated concepts and justified practices that made European global hegemony in the modern era possible. According to historian Matthew Restall, European claims about their right to spread their civilization were based on "the myth of Spanish superiority, a subset of the larger myth of European superiority and the nexus of racist ideologies that underpinned colonial expansion from the late fifteenth to early twentieth centuries."[12]

Studying this discourse contributes to an understanding of how modern European discourse on conquest developed, and how it rendered the peoples

8 Mathew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 12.

9 Most Arabic texts agree that the conquest of Andalusia was in the year 92 AH, differing over the month. Ibn Abd-El-Hakam says that it happened in Sha'ban, see: bn Abd-El-Hakam, *History of the Conquest of Spain*, John Harris Jones (ed.) (Guttenberg-London: John Harris Jones, 1858), p. 9; While Ibn al-Qūṭiyya says that it happened in Ramadan, see: Abu Bakr Muḥammad Ibn ʿUmar Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, *Ta'rikh Iftitāḥ al-Andalus* (History of the Conquest of Al-Andalus) (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Maṣrī; Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Libnānī, 1989), p. 33.

10 Christopher Columbus, *The Log*, Robert H. Fuson (trans.) (Camden-Maine: International Marine Publishing, 1992), p. 51.

11 Cortés sent his letter, which arrived late, on 10 July 1519, to Queen Joanna and her son Charles V:

Hernando Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, Anthony Pagden (trans.) (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 3-46.

12 Restall, p. xix.

of the world, along with their lands and wealth, the object of description that allowed Europeans to control them. It demonstrates the extent to which this discourse has contributed to the development of the contemporary Western system of knowledge, based on the distinction between Western nations as "modern societies" and non-European nations as "traditional societies". By inventing a historical stage, called "modernity", the old distinction between Europeans and non-Europeans that was used in the "age of discovery" on racial grounds was reproduced, but in the form of historical knowledge cloaked in the veil of science and objectivity.

For non-European nations, the European conquest discourse is important because it implanted a willingness to submit to the invaders in the peoples who were conquered, portraying them negatively in their own eyes, as impotent societies. The western-educated elites embraced those stories spinning a miraculous tale of European invaders as culturally superior and spread them among subsequent generations through modern educational and cultural institutions. It has instilled a culture of dependency that requires great effort to change to this day.

The study highlights the importance of Arab historical knowledge to critique of Eurocentrism in modern history. This is a critique that is developing today in several regions of the world, the most important of which is Latin America.[13] The departure from the narrow, specialized historical perspective that examines fragmented parts from the past, to a comprehensive perspective that rethinks contemporary issues, such as the rise of civilizations, the history of modern times, and the role of knowledge in controlling peoples, does not find much interest from those involved in the study of Arab history. This study attempts to draw attention to the ability of Arab historical studies to enrich this growing effort today in the global south.

From a terminological perspective, the conquest of America means the totality of conquests and invasions that took place in the period 1520-1535, whereby kingdoms such as the Aztecs in Mexico and the Incas in Peru were taken over. After Cortés, other Spaniards from America sent letters to the king, which included similar stories about their conquests of kingdoms neighbouring Mexico. The Pizarro brothers wrote the story of the conquest of Peru, and the Alvarado brothers wrote the story of the conquest of Guatemala. The conquest of Mexico is the most prominent example among these stories, and so the study uses the term "conquest of America" or "conquest of Mexico" interchangeably. The only difference is that the first describes the general wider context of the conquest, while the second describes the finer details of events.

The main question posed by this study is: What are the sources of historical knowledge within which the story of the conquest of America has been developed and given a central place in modern European conquest discourse? The answer should be that the Arab historical knowledge that developed in Andalusia, especially that which dealt with the conquest event, formed the basis for the Spanish historical imagination that shaped the story of the conquest of America. This premise, which is based on the assumption that its historical knowledge contributes to its production of collective imagination and memory, is justified by two historical observations, the first historical and the second social. Historically, the sixteenth century in which the history of the conquest of America was written was dominated by the Spanish preoccupation with the escalation of new Islamic influence, exemplified by the appearance of Ottoman fleets in the Mediterranean basin. The Muslims of Andalusia were still living in Spain and had not yet been expelled, so there was a looming threat of internal revolts supported by the Turkish armies that controlled the southern coast of the Mediterranean, who invaded Egypt in 1517 and then Algeria in 1518 – just a year before Spain invaded America. The Turks also threatened the southern coasts of Spain and Portugal, competing with Portugal for influence over the Indian Ocean region, occupying Yemen, and approaching India.[14] Socially, it has been noted that societies' knowledge of itself and its perception of its history are closely related to the collective imagination that inspires its dealings with others. Because Andalusian culture prevailed in the Iberian

13 The most representative contemporary intellectual trend regarding this approach is the De-coloniality Project. See: Walter D. Mignolo & Arturo Escobar (eds.), *Globalization and the Decolonial Option* (New York: Routldge, 2010).

14 Turkey was not absent from what the Europeans call "the age of discovery," and for a modern view on this subject, see Chapter 1 in: Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Peninsula for a period of nearly a thousand years, it continued even after the Muslim exodus in 1614. Culture cannot just be packed away and transported upon physical departure, so its influence on the Spanish imagination, and their historical memory, persisted beyond the time it took to write the story behind the conquest of America.

To analyse historical discourse, the study relies on a trans-disciplinary approach fusing critical historicism and the "Study of Topoi" – the analysis of recurring themes in the study of contemporary historical discourse to extract a system of narrative elements that appear repeatedly in various historical texts. Since the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, research has developed in the narrative nature of fields neighbouring literature, especially mythology and history. The critic Northrop Frye was the first to link literary study with narrative knowledge, indicating the influence of certain literary methods in organizing Western narrative knowledge.[15] Hayden White went further to distinguish between the plot and the story, in an analysis of a considerable sample of historical texts.[16] He demonstrated the parallels with different literary genres, such as comedy, tragedy, and novels, instigating an important shift in the field of historiography, which argued that the task of historians is to produce a story that explains the succession of certain events, controlled by a limited number of narrative patterns.

The German Islamic studies academic Albrecht Noth has developed an analysis of recurrent themes in the texts of Muslim historians, based on the perception that they were reproducing narrative elements from ancient texts when they needed to include an event in their texts and did not have enough information about it to fill a void that their neglect of the event might have caused.[17] Thomas Sizgorich then used the same approach to study the texts in which Muslim historians formulated positive images of social actors, such as reformers and Sufis, as well as conquerors.[18] The feasibility of this approach is evident in its ability to investigate the relationships between contiguous discourses over long periods, as in the case of discourses surrounding the north and south of the Mediterranean's conquests studied here.

There are very few studies of topoi in Islamic texts by Westerners or indeed by Arabs that might serve as an example. One of these is the work of Nicola Clarke, who notes that Western academics' attitudes to Arabic-language histories of Islam either denigrate them or assign them only limited value.[19] Many such academics consider the repetitive nature of Arab history-writing to prevent it from being taken a source of historical knowledge, because, "it speaks to us through the use of persistent topoi and abstracted, stylized, narratives. And it certainly is fraught with a considerable amount of fiction."[20] They argue that conquest histories can be reduced to only limited facts of a general nature, and that the details of events, and the opinions of those who are said to have lived through them, do not add anything.[21] This is a position that pre-conceives a distinction between Arab historical knowledge – not scientific because it is based on topoi – and Western knowledge – considered scientific despite being no less dependent on topoi – as the analysis of the conquest of America discourse below will explain.

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15 Fry identified four narrative styles: Romantic, Tragedy, Comic, and Paradox. He linked them to the four seasons in the first chapter of: Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000).

16 Hayden White, "Interpretation in History," *New Literary History*, vol. 4, no. 2, On interpretation: II (Winter 1973), pp. 295-297.

17 Albrecht Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source Critical Study* (New York: Darwin, 1994).

18 Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 217.

19 Nicolas Clark takes the example of Patricia Crone, who argues that the Arabic texts reflect the concerns of the ninth and tenth centuries AD in which they were written, and not the events of the seventh century about which they are written, considering them a fabrication; Nikola believes that Stefan Leder can also be ranked alongside Crone. See the introduction of: Nicola Clarke, *The Muslim Conquest of Iberia: Medieval Arabic Narratives* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

20 See: Shoshan Boaz, *The Arabic Historical Tradition and Early Islamic Conquests: Folklore, Tribal Lore, Holy War* (New York: Routledge, 2016), Introduction.

21 Ibid. p.4.

Narrative Elements in the History of the Conquest of Andalusia Reproduced in the History of the Conquest of America

Since the study seeks to draw out the sources of the conquest story told by Western historians, it will first look to the conquest of America before turning to its Andalusian counterpart.[22] The story develops over four stages, each of which comprises an important shift. The first and second stages both lay the groundwork for the conquest, with the first reinforcing the superiority of the invaders with their advanced intelligence and civilization, and the second affirming the moral depravity of the natives. These two stages prepare the reader for the image of the invaders as exceptional individuals whose actions are positive, while natives are passive, unable to take action. In this way, it prepares for the third stage, in which the conquest begins at the level of symbolic acts. This is then followed by the fourth, practical stage, culminating in the consolidation of Spanish control over Mexico. This study will compare two major stories from the third stage. It lists an element from the first stage — the only one that Arab historians have noticed in the two stories — which is the burning of ships by both leaders of the conquests, Tariq Ibn Ziyad and Cortés.[23]

Shortly after the Spanish soldiers landed on the coast of Mexico, some of them revolted, because Cortés began to contravene his direct commander, the ruler of Cuba, so they demanded to return. The historians' texts on the conquest say that Cortés resolved the rebellion with a rare genius. In his letter to the king, he explained his actions, saying: "Believing, therefore, that if the ships remained there would be a rebellion, and once all those who had resolved to go had gone I would be left almost alone, whereby all that in the name of God and of Your Highness has been accomplished in this land would have been prevented, I devised a plan which left the ships unfit to sail, I grounded them, so they lost all hope for escape and I advanced safely."[24] Then Bernal Diaz (1496-1584), who was a soldier in and wrote about the campaign, added that Cortés, having destroyed the ships, addressed his soldiers, saying: "we could look for no help or assistance except from God, for now we had no ships in which to return to Cuba. Therefore we must rely on our own good swords and stout hearts."[25] The historian Cervantes Salazar says that Cortés burned his ships, contradicting Cortés and his companion Diaz's attestations that the ships were sunk. This assertion was supported by Spanish historian, Joseph de Acosta (1540-1600) who wrote that Cortés "ha[d] burnt his ships, and shut himself in the midst of his enemies, there to vanquish or to die."[26]

The Arabic texts, meanwhile, report that after landing on the Andalusian coast the Arabs accompanying Tariq Ibn Ziyad became suspicious of him and his soldiers because he had begun to act without the permission of his superior, the governor of Morocco Musa ibn Nusayr. They thus demanded that they be allowed to go home. To avoid this, Tariq burned the entire campaign fleet and, according to some historians, then addressed the Arabs, urging them to win or they would die, so the soldiers were united and determined to meet the army of Visigoths who were ruling Andalusia at the time.[27] This was reported by a number of historians, most notably al-Himyari, in the context of his description of Gibraltar. He said: "It was named Jabal Tariq [Tariq's Mountain] because when Tariq bin Abdullah made the crossing with the Amazigh who were with him, he took up a fortified position on this mountain. He guessed that the Arabs would not take him down and he wanted to clear

22 Contrary to the texts of Ibn Abd al-Hakam and Ibn Habib written in the ninth century AD, and the text of Ibn al-Qūṭiyya written in the tenth century AD, some Arabic texts used here were written after the eleventh century CE, but most of its historical material is taken from the texts of the ninth and tenth centuries.

23 Muḥammad ʿAbdullah ʿAnān refers to this correlation in passing. See: Muḥammad ʿAbdullah ʿAnān, *Dawlat al-Islām fī al-Andalus: min al-Fatḥ ila ʿAhd an-Nāṣir* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānijī, 1988) p. 49.

24 Cortés, p. 52.

25 Bernal Díaz, *The History of the Conquest of New Spain*, John M. Cohen (trans.) (England: Penguin, 1963), p. 131.

26 Joseph de Acosta, *The Natural & Moral History of the Indies, Edward Grimestone* (trans.), Clements Robert Markham (ed.), vol. 2 (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1880), p. 520.

27 ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ʿUways believes that Tariq's burning of his ships was not mentioned by historians of the Egyptian school, such as Ibn Habib, nor by historians of the Andalusian school, such as Ibn al-Qūṭiyya and Ibn Abd Al-Hakam, but that it was only reported by Al-Idrisi and his contemporary Ibn al-Kardabūs, and that al-Himyari was late to relay Al-Idrisi, see: ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ʿUways, Qaḍiyyat Iḥrāq Ṭāriq Bin Ziyād li's-Sufun bayn al-Usṭūra wa't-Tarīkh (Cairo: Dār al-Ṣaḥwa li'n-Nashr, 1987), p. 6-7.

himself of the charge, so he ordered the burning of the boats he had arrived in and he was exonerated from that of which he was accused."[28] Al-Idrisi also wrote of Gibraltar, "It was called Jabal Tariq because of Tariq bin Abdullah bin Wanamu al-Zanati, who allowed the Amazigh to fortify themselves on the mountain and felt that the Arabs did not trust him, so, wanting to change that, he ordered the burning of the boats that he arrived in and he was exonerated from that of which he was accused."[29]

It is clear that the incident of burning ships in the conquest of America is exactly the same as that in the conquest of Andalusia in every detail. In both stories, some soldiers rebel against the commander because he acted without the permission of the governor, his immediate superior; to settle the rebellion, the commander orders self-sabotage, destroying the campaign ships. Some historians of both say that he burned them and then addressed the rebels, claiming there is no way to survive without victory, before they came together and went off to conquer the kingdom. Although the story in the Spanish and Arabic texts perfectly correlates (rebellion, ship burning, a speech, and the soldiers uniting behind their commander), Western historians have instead searched for the historical source of the story of Cortés burning ships in Roman history. American historian William Prescott (1726-1795) links it to a story reported by the English historian Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), in his book *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, in which the Roman commander Julian burns his ships.[30] Although Prescott does not cite the source of the story reported by Gibbon, Julian's campaign, even if its ships were completely burned, has no parallel with the Cortés incident, because the function of the recurrent theme is not represented in just one component — the burning — but rather through various corresponding elements that make up what might be called a "cluster theme."

The story behind the conquest of Mexico includes a build-up to the actual burning — the rebellion caused by the unauthorized conduct of the commander — and involves a consequent event, the speech, followed by the resulting unification of rebels and soldiers. There are five elements that combine to persuasively function as narrative unity and contribute to the creation of historical truth. All these elements are linked in the same way in the story of Andalusia. Without this kind of logical connection, the isolated incident serves no purpose within the story. More importantly, the burning incident in the story of the Julian campaign is not presented in the wider context of the overarching story of conquest as it is within the story of the conquest of Mexico, or of Andalusia whereby dozens of narrative elements correspond.

The third stage begins with the arrival of the Spaniards to what is now the centre of Mexico City, which was called Tenochtitlan by its inhabitants. They were received by Moctezuma, the King of Mexico at the time, known for his tyranny, and his subjects, and shown great hospitality. Historians say that the Mexicans welcomed the Spaniards because they believed that they did not want to settle in their kingdom, and that they would return only to obtain gold. And because gold did not have much value for the Mexicans, this was not much cause for concern. This misunderstanding was one of the main factors behind the Spanish victory, as it prevented the Mexicans from mounting a defence of their country. According to the Spanish texts, Cortés was aware of this from the start, reinforcing the Mexicans' belief that he did not wish to seize their kingdom. Gómara wrote that Cortes was telling the Mexicans that he had come to avenge them for the injustice of King Moctezuma, and that he would then return to his country, to avoid the unification of their forces against him.[31] The strength of the Mexicans was thus dispersed and they did not consider fighting him.

In the conquest of Andalusia, the Arabic texts attributed the same behaviour to the Visigoth nobles who made up the military leadership class and provincial rulers of the country. They claimed that one of the reasons for the Muslim victory was the Visigoth belief that Tariq did not want to seize

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28 Évariste Lévi-Provençal pointed out that there is another expression used instead of "take him down" in a different version of the al-Himyari narrative, which means "they did not trust him." It is clearer in meaning, and corresponds to the word used by Al-Idrisi, from whom al-Himyari took the account, see: Muḥammad bin ʿAbdullah bin ʿAbd al-Munʿim Al-Ḥimyarī, *Ṣifāt Jazīrat al-Andalus*, Évariste Lévi-Provençal (ed.), 2nd Print (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1988), p. 75.

29 Muḥammad Bin Muḥammad Bin ʿAbd Allah Al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-Mushtāq fī Ikhtirāq al-Āfāq*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Maktabat ath-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 2002) p. 540.

30 William Prescott H, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1873), p. 368.

31 Diego Durán, *History of the Indies of New Spain*, Doris Heyden (trans.) (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 2009), p. 548.

power, and their confidence that he would be satisfied with the spoils of the invasion, then return to where he came from. They did not think of fighting the Muslims and supporting their king, referred to as Ludric by Arab sources but Rodrigo in the Spanish.[32] For his part, Tariq realized the importance of fostering the confidence of the Visigoth leaders in his disinclination to take over their country, so he assured them that he would return to Africa after helping them to overthrow their oppressive king, who was known for his tyranny. Ibn Idhari wrote about the Visigoth nobles' abandonment of king Rodrigo: "When the Arabs and Amazigh entered with Tariq, Christians surrendered him [Rodrigo] and he was defeated."[33]

Al-Maqqari's records on the Visigoth nobles mentioned that: "Some of them told each other: This *Ibn al-Khabītha* (son of a bitch) has defeated our king, and is not of his family, but rather was one of our vassals, and we are not short of trouble with him. These people who come with Tariq have no need to settle our country, but want to fill their hands with loot then leave us, so let us concede defeat to *Ibn al-Khabītha* when we meet them, and perhaps they will suffice themselves with that. Once they are gone, we will give power to someone who deserves it."[34] Al-Maqqari's text confirms that the leaders of Andalusia did not defend their country as a priori measure when they learned of the arrival of the invaders. Recently, a contemporary historian, David Levering Lewis, noticed the clear similarity between the belief of the Visigoth and Aztec nobles that the invaders would be satisfied with taking the spoils of war, and neither of them fought off the invaders, and that misconception led to the conquest of Andalusia and Mexico. But Lewis did not go beyond his preliminary observation to trace other symmetries in the two stories.[35]

The story of the conquest of America continues with the Spaniards settling in Mexico City, where they began to secretly search for a rumoured colossal treasure, including the riches of former Mexican kings, hidden by Moctezuma in a hidden location. The story was first reported by Gómara, despite not being found in Cortés' letters. He narrates that "While [Cortés] was thus pacing [in Moctezuma's palace], he noticed that one wall of the room was whiter than the others. He approached and saw that it had recently been whitewashed, and that a short while before there had been a doorway in it, now sealed with stone and mortar. He called two servants (the rest of them being asleep, for the hour was very late) and had them open it. He entered and found many rooms, in several of which was a large quantity of idols, feather works, jewels, precious stones, silver, and an astonishing amount of gold, as well as so many lovely things that he was amazed. He closed the door as well as he could and left, without touching anything, so as not to alarm Moctezuma."[36]

Bernal Diaz tells the story differently to Gómara, who attributed the discovery of the treasure to Cortés alone. Because Diaz was a soldier in the campaign, he was keen to assign a role in finding the treasure to the soldiers. He noted that while some of them were walking around Moctezuma's Palace, "two of our men one of whom was the carpenter Alonso Yañez, called attention to some marks on one of the walls which showed that there had once been a door, though it had been well plastered up and painted. Now as we had heard that Montezuma [Moctezuma] kept his father's treasure in this building […] they mentioned the matter to Cortes. So the door was secretly opened and Cortes went in first with certain captains. When they saw the quantity of golden objects- jewels and plates and ingots- which lay in that chamber they were quite transported. They did not know what to think of such riches."[37] Historian Diego Durán says: "One day the Spaniards' eagerness and hunger for gold led them to a small low door that had been filled in and recently plastered, a mystery that intrigued them. They were ordered to open it, and when they passed through a narrow door they found a spacious

32 Author Unknown, *Akhbār Majmūʿa fī fatḥ al-Andalus wa-Dhikr Umarāʾihā Raḥimahum Allah wa'l-Ḥurūb al-Wāqiʿah baynahum*, Ibrahim al-Abiyari (ed.) (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Maṣrī; Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Libnānī, 1981) p. 19.

33 Aḥmad Bin Muḥammad Ibn ʿIdhārī, *Al-Bayān Al-Mughrib fī Tarīkh al-Andalus wa'l-Maghrib*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār ath-Thaqāfa, 1980) p.3.

34 Aḥmad Bin Muḥammad al-Tilmisānī Al-Maqarrī, *Nafḥ al-Ṭīb min Ghuṣn al-Andalus al-Raṭīb wa Dhikr Wazīrihā Lisān al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-ʿIlmiyya, 2012), p. 248.

35 David Levering Lewis, *God's Crucible: Islam and the Making of Europe*, 570-1215 (New York: Norton, 2008), p. 125.

36 Gómara, p. 169.

37 Diaz, p. 242.

chamber in the middle of which stood a pile of gold, jewelry and rich stones, the whole pile as high as the tallest man."[38] When the Spaniards added this hidden treasure to that which they had seized from their campaigns in other provinces, on their way to Mexico city, it formed the sum of all the wealth they had gathered from their conquest of Mexico.

In the Arabic texts on the conquest of Andalusia, Muslims also obtained two treasures. One of them was hidden behind a door, found by Musa Ibn Nusayr when he joined Tariq in Andalusia, and the second was collected by Tariq from the spoils of different cities. Ibn Abd al-Hakam records the news of Musa's treasure by writing: "Abd al-Malik ibn Maslama told that Al-Layth ibn Sa'd said, "When Andalusia was conquered, a man came to Musa bin Nusayr, and said: "Send a party with me and I will lead you to a treasure", so he sent one with him. The man then told them "open here", so they opened it. Then they were flooded with riches of the kinds of peridot and rubies they had never seen before. They were amazed and said that Musa ibn Nusayr did not believe them, so they sent for him to come and see."[39] Ibn Abd al-Hakam did not provide further details about the place behind which it was hidden from the account of Al-Layth ibn Sa'd.

Another historian, Al-Dhahabi, records the narration of Al-Layth ibn Sa'd closely to the text of Ibn Abd al-Hakam, but in more detail: "Musa sent his son Marwan to the army [...], and a man pointed him to a treasure in Andalusia, so they broke open its door, and they were flooded with rubies and peridot that dazzled them."[40] Here, al-Dhahabi mentions a piece of the story neglected by Ibn Abd al-Hakam, which is that the treasure had, or was behind a door. It should be noted that Musa's soldiers did not think he would believe the news of the treasure, so they sent for him to come to see its magnitude. This perfectly mirrors Diaz's reports on the behaviour of the Spanish soldiers when they found the Mexican treasure hidden behind the door. He said that they summoned Cortés so he would come to see it for himself. Thus, the treasure theme in the texts of historians writing about the conquest of America mirrors what was previously recorded in texts written seven hundred years before Cortés's conquest of Mexico.

This is not everything regarding treasure, as the Arabic texts confirm that Tariq's treasure contained the precious legacy of all the former kings of Andalusia and included part of the treasure of the Prophet Suleiman (King Solomon). Al-Himyari enumerates the contents of the treasure, saying: "among it are a hundred and seventy crowns inlaid with pearls and precious stones, and they found a thousand swords encrusted with royal jewels and piles of pearls and rubies and gold and silver vessels, the type of which could not be described, and the table of Sulaymān Ibn Dawūd."[41] Al-Maqqari says: "Tariq found great treasures in Toledo, including one hundred and seventy crowns of pearls, rubies and precious stones, and a hall full of gold and silver vessels. And it was so huge it was said that the horsemen jousted in it with lances due to its vastness. And it was said that the tableware was made of gold and its platters of jade and onyx, and they mention other things that the beholder can hardly believe."[42]

Just as the Arabic texts revealed that Muslims found treasures that included the swords, crowns and wealth of former Andalusian kings, the American conquest story repeated the same narrative. The Historian Durán provides us with important information about the owners of the hidden Mexican treasure, which included "the treasure that had belonged to all the kings who were his [Moctezuma's] ancestors, which they had deposited there but which could not be used by the present ruler. When a king died, on that very day all his wealth in gold, gems, feathers and weapons and wardrobe were placed in that room and guarded as if they were sacred or divine things. The king who was about to reign would then begin to acquire wealth so that it could not be said he used the treasures of his ancestors. So it was that the treasure was guarded as a testimony to the greatness of the city of Mexico Tenochtitlan."[43] Thus, the American

38 Durán, p. 532.

39 Ibn Abd-El-Hakam, p. 6.

40 Muḥammad bin Aḥmad bin ʿUthmān Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, vol. 4 (Beirūt: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 2001) p. 498.

41 Al-Himyarī, p.131.

42 Al-Maqarrī, p. 159-160.

43 Durán, p. 532.

conquest historians provide a description of the treasure found by Cortés that emulates that of Tariq and Musa's treasure by the Andalus historians: the hidden location, the content that included the legacy of the former kings, and the function of the treasure as a record of royal history.

In the story so far, historians of the conquest of America have not found anything equivalent to Suleiman's table, which was found in the treasure of Andalusia, in the treasure of Mexico. Yet here, Durán allows for a comparison to be drawn by noting that the Spanish found a distinctive four-piece masterpiece among the treasure, which attracted their attention and admiration, and he describes the piece: "The most remarkable were four large platters made to represent fountains. […] In sum, this chamber contained the most amazing wealth ever seen, and the bewildered Spaniards took the gold platters to Cortés as proof of these great riches."[44] Durán describes the most distinguished piece of treasure as a being made of four large platters, which parallels the unique piece of Andalusian treasure that Muslims called Suleiman's table: it too had four legs, and was also discovered with platters.

There is no difference between Muslims likening the Andalusian four-piece with the platters as a table, and the Spanish likening the Mexican one with platters to a fountain. The analogy is metaphorical, and most significant is the description of the piece as being distinguished from the rest of the treasure, while Muslims invented the "table", which was nothing but a church altar inlaid with gems.[45] They believed it to be a table because they found a large number of golden platters and cups with it, which Durán also describes with the Mexican treasure. Meanwhile Gómara expressly stated that the Mexico piece was also a table. He wrote that the treasure contained "a great table service of gold and silver, cups, pitchers, plates..."[46]

All that remains to indicate the perfect symmetry between the two treasures, is for the Spanish texts to claim that the treasure of Mexico is similar to the treasures of King Solomon, as the Muslims did before them. This time, Cortés personally makes the comparison, as he linked Mexico's treasures to King Solomon before his soldiers found it. This is likely to come from ancient knowledge, predating the conquest of America, deeply rooted in the collective memory of the Spaniards. In the first letter to the king of Spain, in which Cortés conveyed the news of his descent from the coast of Mexico before entering deeper, he likened the wealth of Mexico to the treasures of Solomon. Then he conveyed to the king what he had heard about the abundance of in gold and jewels in Mexico City, saying: "We shall endeavor to see and learn the secret of this and other things of which we have heard so that we may render Your Royal Highnesses a true account, as of the wealth in gold and silver and precious stones which Your Majesties may judge according to the samples we are sending. In our view it cannot be doubted there must be in this land as much as in that from which Solomon is said to have taken the gold for the temple."[47] The US historian Prescott likewise notes that the Spanish conquerors drew comparisons between Mexico and King Solomon's treasure.[48]

Thus, all elements of the treasure narratives coincide, forming a cluster theme more complex and interconnected than that of the burning ships. Finally, Gómara, furthers the parallel with Andalusia by adding that, among the treasures of Mexico the King of Spain received: "The Emperor was also given many precious stones, among them a fine emerald as big as the palm of one's hand, square, pointed like a pyramid."[49] And among the Andalusian historians also, the most important pieces of treasure, after the golden table, was a rare big gem, which some called "the orphan of the pearl", indicating its uniqueness, and Al-Himyari mentioned "an unmatched pearl."[50]

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44 Ibid.

45 Arab sources say that this piece was the prayer niche of the Toledo Church, with four bases and decorated with gold and jewels. Others say that it was an altar. See: Jayyusi, p. 60.

46 Gómara, p. 296.

47 Cortés, p. 29.

48 William H. Prescott, History of the Conquest of Mexico, vol. 2 (Paris :Baudry's European Library), 1844, p. 361.

49 Gómara, p. 296.

50 Al-Himyarī, p. 5.

It is significant that the similarity between the Arabic description of the Andalusian treasure and the Spanish description of the Mexican treasure does not stop with the hidden door. They both include the fortunes of the former kings, found in a spacious room, and included a four-piece with platters, a rare pearl, and a relationship to the treasures of King Solomon, and the symmetry is ingrained in the patterns of the conquerors' behaviour towards the treasures. Muslim historians wrote that Tariq bin Ziyad secretly seized part of Solomon's table, breaking one of its legs and hiding it from Musa to use as evidence that it was he and not Musa ibn Nusayr (who had taken it from him) who had found it.(51) Correspondingly, Spanish historians say that Cortés's soldiers also seized part of Mexico's treasure table. Durán states that "the bewildered Spaniards took the gold platters to Cortés as proof of these great riches."(52) The story of the conquest of America does not clarify the function of this evidence, unlike the clear role it plays in the struggle of Musa and Tariq, but it is significant that part of the Mexican table is taken as evidence as well just as in the Andalus story.

It is notable that the confrontation between the invaders and the people of the Kingdom plays out, in both stories of conquest, at this third stage, only at the level of symbolic actions. On the part of the conquerors, the invasion begins with a symbolic action expressing their determination to conquer, destroying their ships, followed by the delivery of a speech by the leader to quash any rebellion, while also misleading the Kingdom's leaders, convincing them that they have no intention to stay in their country. The invaders also seize a hidden treasure that has a symbolic, in addition to material, value, which represents the legacy of the former kings indicating the kingdom's political independence and sovereignty.

After this third stage based on symbolic actions comes the fourth stage, in which a military confrontation erupts between the two parties ending with the Spanish invaders taking over Mexico City. The sequence of actions here emulate the actions recorded in the Arabic texts about the conquest of Andalusia. An example of this is the closing event in which the Spaniards mounted their decisive victory, completing the conquest: the arrest and murder of the King of Mexico.

After the prolonged Spanish siege of Mexico City, its people were unable to defend it after losing men, food and water. And when it was confirmed to Cuauhtémoc — the king of Mexico who took power after the death of Moctezuma — that his capital was on the brink of collapse, he tried to escape. But the Spaniards managed to capture him, because instead of hiding himself, he left using the water channel surrounding the city in a procession of boats, with his being distinguished by luxurious royal decorations, inside which he sat on his luxurious royal throne. The distinctive appearance of the royal boat gave away his location to the Spanish soldiers, who then captured the king: "It pleased our lord God that Garcia Holguin should overtake Cuatemoc's fleet, which by its rich decorations, and awnings, and royal seat he recognized as the craft in which the lord of Mexico was traveling," wrote Bernal Diaz.(53)

The story of the Mexican leader who brings about the defeat of his army by appearing in his royal adornment has been repeated throughout the story of the conquest of America, and even some contemporary Western thinkers have taken this as evidence that the indigenous peoples of America did not understand the function of signs. In his semiotic study of the conquest of America, which gained worldwide popularity at the end of the 20th century, the French thinker Tzvetan Todorov contended that the native Mexicans did not understand that signs could be used deceptively to mislead enemies, but rather used them only to denote the truth.(54)

In the Arabic texts, the appearance of the Visigoth King, Rodrigo (Ludriq), on the battlefield with complete royal adornment, carried on his great throne, which Muslim historians described as a *sarīr* (bed), led to his death at the hands of Tariq bin Ziyad, and the success of the conquest. Ibn al-Raqiq wrote about the decisive confrontation between Muslims and the

51 Ibn Abd-El-Hakam, p. 4.

52 Durán, p. 532.

53 Díaz, p. 402.

54 See also the opinion of historian Anthony Pagden approaching Todorov's thesis in his introduction he wrote for the book: Tzvetan Todorov, The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

Visigoth army: "And Tariq went to al-Andalus [...], and when news of his arrival reached the kings of al-Andalus, they turned to the greatest king, Ludriq, who was a tyrant, with great Christian manpower, and he went to Tariq with a well-equipped army, and brought a bed of gold encrusted with pearls and rubies [...], and all the ornaments of those kings who preceded him. When he reached the mountain where Tariq was, Tariq and the men went to him on foot [...] The mountain was rugged, and the Amazigh were faster on their feet. The Amazigh reached their horses first, and rode their horses, plunged their swords in and obliterated them [the Visigoths] ceaselessly for three days and three nights."[55] Evidently, the story of the death of the King of Mexico mirrors that of the King of Andalusia, revealing the choice to display grandeur rather than hide from the eyes of the invaders.

The symmetry in the end of the stories of the conquest of America and of Andalusia does not stop with the killing of the Mexican king's successor. According to historians, when García Holguín captured the King of Mexico, his direct commander, Gonzalo de Sandoval, contested it, claiming that he was the leader and Holguín was under his command, and that the honour of arresting the king must be his.[56] Díaz wrote: "On receiving the news he [Sandoval] told the oarsmen in his own launch to make all possible speed, and overtaking Holguin, claimed the prisoner. Holguin refused his demand, saying that he and not Sandoval had made the capture. Sandoval replied that this was so, but he was commander of the launches and Garcia Holguin sailed under his command."[57] The dispute between them escalated until being put to Cortés.

In the story of the conquest of Andalusia, the same thing happened in the arrest of the second king. After Musa Ibn Nusayr joined Tariq, the Muslims in Cordoba besieged Rodrigo's successor.[58] When the siege intensified, the king tried to escape secretly, but Maghith Al-Rumi, a soldier under Musa's command, noticed his exit, and chased him until he was arrested. But Musa deprived Maghith of the honour of the king's arrest, under the pretext that Musa was Maghith's superior and should take the credit. It was said that "Musa sent a request that he bring him the infidel, so he [Musa] said by God, do not take him, I will present him to the caliph, so he attacked him [Maghith] and took [the infidel] from him."[59] When Maghith saw Musa's insistence, he proposed to him the solution that the captive king be his victim saying: "I captured him. But you behead him. And he [Musa] did it."[60] This mirrors the story of Mexico's successor king who was killed following a row over the details of his captivity.

With the arrest and murder of King Cuauhtémoc, the tale of the conquest of America ends, and it is clear that most of the story has reproduced elements from that of the conquest of al-Andalus, at least within the third stage. The parallels revealed by this study include the destruction of ships, the leaders of the country believing that the invaders planned to leave, the treasure stored behind a hidden door, the legacy of the former kings, the rare table/platters and pearl, the downfall of the leader due to his royal adornment, and finally, the conquerors dispute over who captured the leader. These seven elements are cluster themes, containing several elements that share the same function to serve the narrative discourse that fabricates historical truth. Complementing the symmetry of these seven themes is another group of symmetrical themes, pertaining to the fourth stage, in the tricks that both parties resort to during the war. Thus, the story behind the conquest of America is a replica of the story of the conquest of Andalusia.

Western historians produced many texts about the conquest of America, formulating the story of a supernatural conquest of Mexico, and the story formed the basis for the historical Western discourse on the conquests of the modern era, still prevalent today. Western historical knowledge, as the conquest

55 Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Qāsim Ibn al-Raqīq, Tarīkh Ifrīqiya wa'l-Maghrib (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1980) p. 43.

56 Díaz, p. 403.

57 Ibid.

58 The author here called this king "The King of Cordoba," describing that, "Magith captured him, and he was the only king of Andalusia to be caught." He describes Cordoba as "the house of the king of illiterates and Ludrique before them," so the king of Cordoba, who was captured by Magith after the death of Ludrique in Cordoba was his successor. See: Author Unknown, Akhbār Majmūʿa fī fatḥ al-Andalus wa-Dhikr Umarāʾihā Raḥimahum Allah wa'l-Ḥurūb al-Wāqiʿah baynhum, (Magritte [Madrid]: Rapidnaire Press, 1867). P.14-18.

59 Ibid, p.19.

60 Ibid, p.20. In the copy of the book that Ibrahim Al-Abyari edited, see p.27.

discourse shows, rests on a deep structure connected to the discourse of medieval Arabic knowledge, from which it draws generative rules, allowing it to produce a large number of texts to create a history that has been falsely attributed to exclusively Greco-Roman, purely European, sources. The end result is that modern Western knowledge, despite claims of its purely Greco-Roman origin, like the knowledge of all other civilizations, has diverse roots. It is closely related to the civilizations whose existence coincided with the beginning of the rise of Europe in the sixteenth century, most notably the civilizations of the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean.

Conclusion

As noted at the beginning of this study, most Western researchers describe the conquest texts written in Arabic in the Middle Ages as narratives with recurring themes, with no historical value. Boaz describes them as "folkloric stories about a glorious past, a reflection of the state of mind and agenda of their creators and transmitters, and a response to the interests of the milieu of their consumers."[61] They do not in any way reveals the truth about the conquest at hand, but rather represent "the foundation myths of the Muslim society in the areas that generated them," according to Hugh Kennedy.[62] Weighing this position on Arabic texts based on reproduced stories, this study concludes that what Western thinkers and historians consider to be modern European history, beginning with the conquest of Spain, Mexico, Peru, and the rest of America, as it is based heavily on stories replicated from Arabic texts. As the study demonstrates, the text does not offer any kind of factual knowledge of what happened in Mexico and the rest of America during the European invasion. They should thus be considered as representatives of modern "founding myths" of Western society, if Kennedy's phrasing is fair.

61 Boaz, p. 6.

62 Ibid.

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