

## CONFLICT AND SYNTHESIS OF CULTURES IN THE COUNTRY OF AL-ANDALUS (VIII<sup>TH</sup>-XV<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)

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### ABSTRACT

Intreaction and natural influence of various cultures of East and West were taking place in the Mediterranean region in the course of all studied history of mankind. On the Iberic Peninsula it took place for the last time after the Arab conquest in the VIII<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The country of Al-Andalus that emerged as a result of this became the civilization to creation of which contribution was made by Arabs who had come from the Middle East, Berbers from the North africa who had adopted Islam not long before that, descendants of former conquerants –Germans–Vestgoths and of lokal inhabitants that had been subject to Latin influence (Ibers, Celts, Celt-Ibers, Goths, Alans and others). Al-Andalus is the only West European country that adopted Arabic language and Arabian-Islamic culture though the local inhabitants were 120 times more numerous than the Moslems who had come to the Peninsula from Africa.

Close contacts, interaction and interpenetration of totally different cultures and peoples, various modes of life resulted in emerging of an original syncretic civilization the significance of which for the South of Europe is as great as the significance of the Byzantine civilization for Eastern Europe and west Asia. The history of Al-Andalus is inseparable from the history of Spain and Portugal. Nevertheless, Al-Andalus had always been an integral part of the world of Islam. Christians, Jews and even Slavs (“Sakalibas”) spoke Arabic there, though the Roman dialect was permitted in tribunals, in mosques and at the court. All well-known rulers of Al-Andalus were dynasty in Sevilla, Emirs Nasrides in Granada. They even called the Mediterranean that separated them from their historic fatherland “the Syrian sea”.

The Al-Andalus country during almost eight centuries of its existence was waging wars with Christians in the north of the Peninsula. But there were long interruptions in this war during which both parties turned into partners and were learning a lot from each other. Thanks to this the Al-Andalus country left a profound imprint in spiritual and material heritage of all the Mediterranean region.

**Key Words:** Al-Andalus, Omayyades, Abbasides, Nasrides, Sakalibas.

## РЕЗЮМЕ

### конфликт и синтез культур в стране аль-андалус (VIII-XV вв.)

Взаимодействие и взаимовлияние разнообразных культур Востока и Запада происходили в регионе Средиземноморья на протяжении всей изученной истории человечества. На Иберийском полуострове это произошло последний раз после арабского завоевания в VIII веке нашей эры. Возникшая вследствие этого страна Аль-Андалус стала местом рождения цивилизации, в создание которой внесли свой вклад арабы, пришедшие с Ближнего Востока, берберы Северной Африки, принявшие ислам незадолго до этого, потомки господствовавших ранее в стране германцев-вестготов и ещё ранее латинизированных местных жителей (иберов, кельтов, кельтиберов, готов, аланов и прочих). Аль-Андалус – единственная в Западной Европе страна, принявшая арабский язык и арабо-исламскую культуру, хотя местных жителей было в 120 раз больше, чем пришедших на полуостров мусульман из Африки.

Тесные контакты, взаимодействие и взаимопроникновение совершенно разных культур и народов, непохожих укладов жизни привели к возникновению самобытной синкретической цивилизации, значение которой для юга Европы и стран Магриба было столь же велико, как и значение цивилизации Византии для Восточной Европы и Западной Азии. История Аль-Андалуса неотделима от истории Испании и Португалии. Но всё же Аль-Андалус всегда был частью мира ислама. Христиане, иудеи и даже славяне (“сакалиба”) говорили там по-арабски, хотя в судах, мечетях и при дворе допускался разговор на романском диалекте. Все наиболее известные правители Аль-Андалуса были арабами из Сирии: эмиры и халифы династии Омейядов, эмиры Аббаиды в Севилье, эмиры Насриды в Гранаде. Даже Средиземное море, отделявшее их от исторической родины, они называли “Сирийским”.

Страна Аль-Андалус почти восемь столетий своего существования вела войну с христианами на севере полуострова. Но в этой войне были длительные перерывы, во время которых обе стороны превращались из врагов в партнёров и многому учились друг у друга. Благодаря этому страна Аль-Андалус оставила глубокий след в духовном и материальном наследии всего Средиземноморья.

**Ключевые Слова:** Аль-Андалус, Омейяды, Аббаиды, Насриды, сакалиба.

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The country of Al-Andalus emerged in the course of Arab conquests as a specific part of the world of Arabo-Islamic civilization that included at various

stages of its multi-secular existence (711-1492) the Iberian Peninsula, the Balear islands and some other islands, and, for a short period of time, even the South of France and the North-West of Maghreb. Historical, geographical, political and ethnocultural specifics of Al-Andalus explains not only the originality of this “East-in-the West”, but also its role in the general evolution of the Islamic world, as well as in the evolution of the South of Europe, the North of Africa and all the Mediterranean region.

In the history of the Iberian Peninsula there were frequent inter-civilizational contacts that resulted in synthesis of cultures and sometimes in the formation of new ethnoses. Mutual rapprochement (and mutual repulsion) of the East and the West, change of cultural and political leadership in the historic competition between them, interaction and mutual influence of their cultures have been taking place in the Mediterranean Region practically in the course of all the history of mankind that was studied. The Mediterranean gave to the world most striking examples of cultural synthesis and became the place of encounter, merger and emergence of different peoples and civilizations. On the Iberian Peninsula it took place at least four times:

1. in XV<sup>th</sup>-XI<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. when Ibers according to the data of the Spanish historian Raphael Altamira-y-Crevea created jointly with Libyans (Protoberbers) a vast empire spread from the South of France to the North of Africa and Cadiz had the Berber name of Agadir;<sup>1</sup>

2. in XII<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.-I<sup>st</sup> c. A.D., when on the Iberian Peninsula, especially in the South of it there was an important influence of Phoenician civilization and in the South and in coastal colonies especially during the period of Carthagen domination the oriental elements of culture were more evident than in Etruria and in Grece of the orientalizacion period;<sup>2</sup>

3. in II<sup>nd</sup> c. B.C. – III<sup>rd</sup> c. A.D. when the Roman colonization that had to a large extent homogenized the variety of languages, cultures, tribal and ethnic traditions achieved practically total romanization of local population;<sup>3</sup>

4. in VIII<sup>th</sup>-XV<sup>th</sup> c. when the Arab conquest resulted side by side with the established domination of the Arabic language and Islam, in a specific symbiosis of various ethnoses, religions and civilizations, mutual influence and interaction of which also produced various forms of cultural and ethnosocial synthesis.

The picture of ethnocultural evolution of the Peninsula is richer, for sure. To the south of Pyrenees there always existed something like a testing area not only for interaction and mixture of a variety of peoples, cultures and religious cults

<sup>1</sup>Альтамира-и-Кревеа Р., *История Испании*. М., 1951. С. 10,17.

<sup>2</sup>Циркин, Ю. Б., *Финикийская культура в Испании*. М., 1976. С. 222.

<sup>3</sup>Benassar, B., *Historia de los Espanholes*. Siglos VI-XVII. Barcelona, 1989. P. 17-19.

but also for struggle without compromises in the course of which whole ethnic and religious entities were expelled, vanished, changed their face, merged, were assimilated. Romans, Phoenicians, Ibers and Muslims, Greeks, Gauls, Celts and Celt-Ibers, various Germans from Franks and Sveves to Wandals and Visigoths, even Alans (ancestors of modern Ossets) participated in this complicated, frequently conflictual evolution. Their relations were determined by correlation of forces as well as by the formula of “resistance of cultures” by Fernand Braudel according to which “at each attempt of their suppression they re-emerge trying stubbornly to survive”.<sup>4</sup> It could be proved by the Arabic period of the history of the Iberian Peninsula that is the object of our study.

This period was full of wars and conflicts. The war of Christians who had to retreat to the north of the Peninsula with Muslims of Al-Andalus was practically permanent since 718. But sometimes it was extinguished and it did not hinder trade, cultural and other contacts. Insurrections and even clashes between communities, including those caused by religious and ethnic reasons frequently broke out in Al-Andalus. But, little by little, the situation stabilized and the interaction began to dominate mutual repulsion. The society gradually acquired unity in diversity.

Islam that had been brought to the Mediterranean countries by Arabs became there as well as elsewhere not only a religion but also a philosophy, a regulator of social relations and of way of life, and also a factor creating culture, integrating (though not always) cultural layers that had preceeded it. Islamization of the Mediterraneans proceeded as their countries and regions were being included into the gigantic Arab Caliphate and the Arabic language was spread from Hindu Kush to the Pyrenean mountains which at first was co-existing with the Aramaic language (Syriaque), the Greek and the Persian languages in the Middle East, the Greek and the Coptic languages in Egypt, the Berberic, the Punic and the Latin languages in the North of Africa, the Latin language (later on the Romance language) on the Iberian Peninsula. Islamization usually was leaving behind arabization as it was connected not only with cultural and linguistic factors, but also with economic and political processes, with obtaining a privileged social and legal status. At the same time it contributed to arabization as Arabic was the language of the **Koran** and **Sunna**, shariat (legislation) and fikh (that is the law closely related to theology), the language of administration and commerce, later on, the language of science and art. It was not without reason that it was called “Latin of the Orient”<sup>5</sup> in the Middle Ages.

The Arabs who came to the Peninsula could resolve the problems that were beyond the Visigoths who had dominated there before them. They restored

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<sup>4</sup>Альтамира-и-Кревеа Р., **История Испании**. М., 1951. С. 10,17.

<sup>5</sup>Циркин, Ю. Б., **Финикийская культура в Испании**. М., 1976. С. 222.

commerce and handicrafts, they stopped persecutions of Jews, Greeks, Arians and other ethnic and confessional minorities who supported Arabs from the beginning. Economic oppression was reduced, slaves and peasants turned into serfs who adopted Islam were given freedom. Almost all the strata of the population were, partly or to a large extent, satisfied as many representatives of the Visigoth aristocracy who adopted Islam became later on representatives of the Muslim aristocracy enjoying full rights. Side by side with this, “Arabs contracted marriages with local women thus giving rise to a new generation of Muslims of Arabo-Roman or Arabo-Visigoth origin”.<sup>6</sup>

Coming mostly from Syria they felt nostalgia for the East, they compared Granada to Damascus, called Cordoba “the second Bagdad” or “Western Constantinopol”, the Mediterranean sea was the Syrian sea for them. But that does not mean that as the academician V. V. Bartold thought “Cordoba was copying Bagdad or Samarra” and that successes of Al-Andalus were “related to the cultural progress of Egypt or of Byzant taking place at the same time”.<sup>7</sup>

Almost eight centuries of the existence of Al-Andalus (711-1492) gave an example of rare pluralism of sociocultural and ethnocivilizational forms. Even Arabs were divided there into “kaisits”(northern) and ‘kyalbits” (southern), and later on into “baladiyun” (that is taking roots in the country from 712-716) and “shamiyun” (“Syrians”) who came in 741 and later on. Beside that, there lived in the country “ar-rum al-baladiyun” (“Christians of the country” that did not obey to the Muslims) and “an-nasara al-muahidoun” (“Christians on the contract”, subjects of Muslims who paid taxes to them), Berbers (who were always more numerous than Arabs) and Africans (black “afarika”, usually slaves or mercenaries), newly-converted Muslims from local inhabitants (‘mousalims”) and their descendants “mouvallads”. The Jewish community played an important role in economics, culture and administration, according to the famous geographer Al-Adrissi it was flourishing as nowhere else. Many scientists, doctors, diplomats, philosophers including Ben Maimoun (“Maimonide”) famous all over the world came out of its ranks.

All communities of the country differed from each other and often were at war with each other. Newly-converted Muslims for a long time did not merge with other Muslims as far as cultural and language aspects were concerned. Mouvallads (this term later on gave rise to the word “mulatto”) as a rule in general used the Romance language (Romance) in everyday life, it was also used at the Court of the caliphs in Cordoba. Examples are known when the shariat judge

<sup>6</sup>Benassar, B., *Historia de los Espanholes*. Siglos VI-XVII. Barcelona, 1989. P. 17-19.

<sup>7</sup>Бродель, Ф., *Материальная цивилизация, экономика и капитализм*. XV-XIII вв. М., 1986. Т. 1. С. 116.

(kadi) of Cordoba was considering in the mosque the cases of Muslims who could understand only Romance (it was 200 years after the Arab conquest).<sup>8</sup>

The adoption of Islam which at first was caused mostly by material reasons (a possibility not to pay capitation) later on, in the opinion of U. Montgomery Whatt, was related to “more advanced and attractive civilization”.<sup>9</sup> It could be proved, in addition, by the fact that in the VIII century about 60 %, and in the X century not more than 20 % of the population of Al-Andalus were mozarabs (from the Arab word “moustarab”, arabized). They were actually Arabs by language, culture and customs while remaining Christians by religion, legal status and social state. They were considered “zimmiyas” (dhimmis) that is a non-Muslim community being under protection, “**People of the Book (Ahl Al-Kitab)**”. They were forbidden to wear weapons and they were obliged to pay capitation (“jizyah”). But in general restrictions were not significant. Nevertheless, beginning from the XII<sup>th</sup> century they (as well as Jews) started to migrate to the North, to Christian kingdoms, in order to escape from persecutions of fanatics from the Berber dynasties of Almoravids and Almohads that conquered Al-Andalus. At the same time in the IX<sup>th</sup>-XI<sup>th</sup> centuries when nobody disturbed them they forgot the Latin language almost completely (though they used Romance in everyday life) and they composed poems in Arabic, “with greater beauty and art than Arabs themselves”, as the Cordoba bishop Alvaro said. Up to the XII<sup>th</sup> century they could have free contacts with Muslims which contributed to their active participation in creation of the culture common for the whole country.<sup>10</sup>

For a long period of time (up to XII<sup>th</sup>-XIII<sup>th</sup> centuries) the atmosphere of religious tolerance, ethno-confessional “openness” remained in Al-Andalus. It was promoted by a certain synthesis of “Oriental” and “Western” structures in the Arabic Al-Andalus society which was manifested in a combination of pre-Arabic customs with rooting of the tribal factor into everyday life of the local society, relative freedom of women being coupled with existence of numerous bondwomen and concubines, in co-existence of clan structures and the population that was completely de-tribalized, that is having lost tribal divisions, especially in cities, strengthening the power of the State and existence of “assabiya” (clan and tribal patriotism), especially in the ranks of the nobility.

In a specific atmosphere of Al-Andalus every group of population found its “niche”. It can be said about the above mentioned communities as well as about numerous people originating from almost all the countries of Europe and

<sup>8</sup>Ислам и проблемы межкультурного взаимодействия. М., 1994. С. 194.

<sup>9</sup>Бойко, К. А., *Арабская историческая литература в Испании*. М., 1994. С. 19; Sanchez-Albornoz, Cl., *L'Espagne musulmane*. OPL – Publisud, 1985. P. 18-19.

<sup>10</sup>*Известия Российской Академии наук*. Петроград, 1921. Т. XV. С. 239; Шакир, М., *Аль-Андалус в истории (на араб. яз)*. Дамаск, 1990. С. 26; Sanchez-Albornoz, Cl., *Op. cit.* P. 114-115.

Mediterranean, among which it is desirable to mark-out “Sakhalibas” that is Slavs who usually came to Al-Andalus via Byzant or Italy as slaves or war prisoners. Having adopted Islam they made sometimes a succesfull career at the courts of khalifs, as governors, high officials and guardsmen. Sometimes there were among them Franks, Germans and Sicilians who pretended to be Slavs. However, among Sicilians there were people coming from various countries as wars, slave-trade, pilgrimages, commerce and other reverses of fortune mixed on the Mediterranean islands Slaves, Greeks, Caucasians, Turki and Africans.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, “Sakhalibas” were frequently called “As-Sikillis”, Sicilians. Later on, after disintegration of the Cordoba Caliphate “Sakhalibas” even played the role of feudal rulers of Badajos, Valencia, Murcia, Denia, Almeria, the Balear islands and Tortosa. As well as other rulers of independent principalities (“mulyuk at-tawaif”) they waged many wars, constructed a lot and showed themselves as skillful carpenters. But their relatively small number limited the scale of their activities despite great cohesion and activity of this small community.<sup>12</sup>

Contacts and interaction of all groups of the population made the Arabo-Iberic experience of synthesis of civilizations unique. Thanks to religious tolerance and the open character of the society, cultural exchange, three religions (Islam, Christianity, Judaism) and many ethnoses gave literally to each community a possibility to reveal itself and to make its distinctive contribution to the civilization of Al-Andalus, common for all of them. Therefore, this civilization achieved a remarkable success and for a long time remained the leading light for Western Europe and the Islamic world, as Byzant was for Eastern Europe. Al-Andalus by the level of its economic development for a long time left Christian Europe behind. Achievements of philosophers, poets, lawyers, architects, astronomers, agronomists and historians (who formed a separate estate, “ahl at-tarikhi”, that is “people of history”) inspired delight to their contemporaries (including those from the Christian world) and continue to inspire delight to descendants. Agriculture, horticulture, construction of towns, handicrafts, sceinces and arts were prosperous in the country. West Europeans were learning everything from the Moors of Al-Andalus until the XIII century!<sup>13</sup>

The disintegration of the Cordoba Caliphate at the beginning of the XI<sup>th</sup> century, while weakening Al-Andalus politically, did not affect its high economic and cultural level. Independent principalities (“tawaif”) while waging wars and

<sup>11</sup>Бойко, К. А., **Указ**. Соч. С. 11-21; Аль-Хушани, М., **Книга о судьях**. М., 1992. С. 96, 13, 141-142; Guichard, P., **Al-Andalus 711-1492. Une histoire de l'Andalousie Arabe**. P., 2000. P. 144-146.

<sup>12</sup>Уотт, У. М.-Какиа, П., **Мусульманская Испания**, М., 1976. С. 41.

<sup>13</sup>Крачковский, И. Ю., **Арабская культура в Испании**, М.-Л., 1937. С. 11-12; Conrad, Ph., **Histoire de la Reconquista**. P., 1998. P. 27-28; **Islamic Studies**, Islamabad, 1991, N 1-2. P. 47.



scheming against each other at the same time were rivals in refinement of their rulers' palaces, splendour of their gardens, skills of their craftsmen and riches of their merchants. 20-30 emirs tearing the country into pieces tried to excel each other in exuberance of their courts, in a number of famous scientists and musicians, talents of their court poets and architects, physicians and jewellers, decorators and calligraphs. It was at that period that literature and poetry of Al-Andalus reached its golden age.<sup>14</sup>

In 1091-1248, the country was governed by the Berber dynasties of Almoravids and Almohads both of which, beginning with preaching fanaticism and asceticism, ordered to burn in fires musical instruments and bright-coloured tissues, scientists' and philosophers' books, to pour out on earth wine, to destroy cosmetics and expensive vessels. By accusing non-Muslims of the achievements of the Reconquista recently started they began to persecute Mozarabs and Jews provoking massive exode of the both to the North, to Christian kingdoms. It made Al-Andalus weaker in economic and military respect. Nevertheless, both Almoravids and Almohads by combining the military power and human resources of Maghreb with developed economy and refined culture of Al-Andalus, postponed the fall of the latter for almost two centuries. Finally, having become affected by the influence of its remarkable civilization they contributed to its flourishing and introduction of its achievements in Maghreb.<sup>15</sup> The defeat of Almohads in 1212 almost resulted in completion of Reconquista after the seizure of Sevilla by Castile in 1248. Only in the South-East of the country a Muslim emirate of Granada under the power of the dynasty of Nasrids was established. It could deter the attacks of Reconquista for about two centuries and a half by using the assistance of Maghreb rulers and scheming on dissensions of Christian kings. This emirate had achievements in construction (in particular the famous fortress and palace of Alhambra), in culture and commerce (especially with Genova), its legends and poets such as Ibn Zumraq, its own scientists such as Ibn Al-Khatib. But after the unification of Castile and Aragon in 1479 there were no chances for it to survive. In January 1492, after 10 years of war Granada had to capitulate.<sup>16</sup>

From the historic point of view, the country of Al-Andalus ceased to exist 500 ago. But its cultural and material heritage, its cultural riches and various traditions are still alive in the Maghreb countries where Moors of Al-Andalus and their immediate successors Moriscos had to migrate as well as in the countries of the Iberian Peninsula. It is sufficient to remind that in the modern Spanish language

<sup>14</sup>Bresc, H., *Un Monde Méditerranéen*, P.-Palermo, 1986. P. 439-444; Peres. *Les éléments ethniques de l'Espagne musulmane et la langue Arabe*. Alger, 1959. P. 7-12.

<sup>15</sup>Мишин, Д. Е., *Сакалиба (славяне) в исламском мире в раннем средневековье*, М., 2002., С. 137-234.

<sup>16</sup>Монтгомери, Уотт У., *Влияние ислама на средневековую Европу*, М., 1976. С. 18-50; Vernet, J., *Ce que la culture doit aux Arabes d'Espagne*, P., 1985. P. 69-352.



there are 4 thousands words of Arabic origin (in Portuguese a little bit less), and the influence of Arabs on poetry, folklore, music, architecture and crafts of Spain and Portugal is well-known. As many people consider, “it is quite clear to an unbiased view that nowadays artists and craftsmen in Spain are still inspired by Muslim sources”. The style of Mudejar that was developed in XI-XV centuries by Muslims and Mozarabs who lived in Castile and Aragon on the basis of “fueros”, special rights granted to them by Christian kings, is still alive nowadays. It is rooted in the long established similarity of material and spiritual culture of Al-Andalus and Maghreb, Sicily, Southern Italy and Provence in the Middle Ages. Poetry and music, philosophy and medicine, architecture and esthetics of Al-Andalus had influence on ideas and tastes of the peoples of Maghreb in the elites of which there are still many descendants of Moors and Moriscos. But the influence of Al-Andalus can be felt today in Spain and Portugal as well. It is represented, besides the works of art in Mudejar style, by interior courts (patios) and narrow streets of ancient blocks of buildings, by bell towers of cathedrals that look like minarets, by decorative mosaics with refined arabesques at the entrance of official buildings and many private houses, by abundance of fountains, luxuriant verdure, palm-trees and olive-trees, by the passion of Spaniards for vegetable decor, ornamental multi-coloured ceramic designs, picturesque painting and vivid colouring of doors, portals, windows, ceilings and roofs, for typically oriental rhythms and melodies of songs and dances in Flamenco style. All this as well as many other things (especially related to the language, way of life, certain customs and traditions) are an integral part of the modern culture of the countries of the Iberian Peninsula and has become an important component of their civilizational peculiarity.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, about eight centuries of existence of the country of Al-Andalus as well as an attempt to extend at least its social and cultural presence in 1492-1614 that failed were periods of both acute conflicts and fruitful contacts that had a decisive influence on destinies of peoples participating in them. The political result of conflicts was a definite rupture of relations between Moors and Iberians on ethno-religious parameters. At the same time, the results of sociocultural interaction between them and, in particular, the importance of contributions of Andalusians into the culture of Iberians reveal unrealized possibilities of mutual accord and, probably, of mutual assimilation in case politico-ideological conditions had been different.

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<sup>17</sup>Леви-Провансаль, Э., Указ. соч. С. 24-25, 62-80; Уотт, У. М., Какня П. Указ. соч. С. 157; Мусульманский мир 950-1150, М., 1981. С. 157-183; *Relaciones de la Peninsula Iberica con el Magreb (siglos XIII-XVI)*, Madrid, 1988. P.1-274.

