ALSO BY MARÍA ROSA MENOCAL

The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History:
A Forgotten Heritage

Writing in Dante's Cult of Truth
from Borges to Boccaccio

Shards of Love:
Exile and the Origins of the Lyric

The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature:
Al-Andalus (COEDITOR)

The Ornament of the World

HOW MUSLIMS, JEWS, AND CHRISTIANS

CREATED A CULTURE OF TOLERANCE

IN MEDIEVAL SPAIN

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reared alongside Arabic from the eighth century onward. We now sometimes call it by the technical name of Andalusi Romance, which reveals its kinship with the other Romance languages as well as its ancestral home, al-Andalus. But its older and more familiar name is, ironically, Mozarabic, because it was, indeed, the other language of those Arabized Christians who lived under Islam. While Latin was disappearing even among the Christians, its Mozarabic daughter and heir thrived as the language of the nurseries, passed on generation after generation by many Cordoban mothers, Muslim as well as Christian. Mozarabic, the Romance of the Christians of al-Andalus, lived inside the House of Islam, rubbed shoulders with Arabic, exchanged words with it constantly. Arabic itself was what Latin had been long before, the language of literature that was not very far from the language of the streets, despite its ties to the immutable Quran and to all the layers of commentary accumulated around that book over several hundred years. The songs sung by mothers in Arabic, itself a language heard in nurseries and children's playgrounds, were not so far removed from the songs that were the poems of the courts, nor so foreign-sounding to the young men who were learning to write letters and read commentaries—and write love songs.

A Grand Vizier, a Grand City

Cordoba, 949

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Let it be known to you, my lord, that our land is called Sefarad in the Holy Tongue, while the Ishmaelite citizens call it al-Andalus, and the kingdom is called Cordoba.

ONE OF THE MOST PROMINENT MID-TENTH-CENTURY CORDOBANS made this proud proclamation in a letter he was writing to a perhaps mythical king of a far-off land. By way of introduction, he had identified himself as "Hasdai, the son of Isaac, the son of Ezra, from the sons of the Jerusalem exile who now live in Sefarad." But Hasdai was much more than this modest identification of family and tribe revealed: he was the *nasi*, the "prince," of his own religious community. At the same time, he was a vizier, the right-hand man to the ruler of "the Ishmaelite citizens," the caliph Abd al-Rahman III. This Abd al-Rahman, who ruled successfully between 912 and 961, was the descendant of his namesake founder of that homeland called, as Hasdai indicated, Sefarad in Hebrew and al-Andalus in Arabic. The extraordinary prosperity of spirit, intellect, and power these men shared with each other glows from every page of Hasdai's

communiqué, as well it might have, since one of Hasdai's most appreciated qualities was his eloquence in Arabic.

The caliph had elevated Hasdai to higher and higher offices throughout his lifetime largely because Hasdai spoke and wrote with elegance and subtlety, and because the vizier possessed a profound knowledge of everything in Islamic and Andalusian culture and politics that a caliph needed in his public transactions. So it was that the prince of the Andalusian Jews had become the prestigious and powerful foreign secretary to the caliph. And this was no small-time, would-be caliph: during the lifetimes of Abd al-Rahman III and Hasdai, the Umayyad caliphate of Cordoba made its sweeping and plausible claim to absolute primacy within the House of Islam. Although for us it may seem astonishing that one of the most public faces of this Islamic polity, at its peak of power and achievement, should be a devout Jewish scholar, famously devoted to finding and aiding other Jewish communities in their scattered, worldwide exile, such suppleness was a natural part of the landscape of this time and place.

The compelling Cordoban panorama had been critically reconfigured one fine day in January 929, a Friday, the day of assembly observed in mosques across Islam. Hasdai ibn Shaprut was then at the beginning of his manhood, about fourteen at the time, and so he was already part of the life of intense learning and public activism of his father, Isaac, whose personal wealth supported individual scholars as well as a synagogue in that city. The Jews would have heard the momentous public announcement not long after it was read aloud from the pulpit of every mosque in the land: Abd al-Rahman III had officially taken the title of Commander of the Faithful, the caliph of the Islamic world, successor to the Prophet at the head of the entire Muslim community.

Since 756, the Umayyads, in their new home in al-Andalus, had acknowledged the caliphate of Baghdad in the Friday prayers in their mosques. And while technically and formally it was nothing more than a "province"—the emirate of al-Andalus, its rulers no more than emirs, or "governors," subservient to the caliph in Baghdad—for 173 years Cordoba had in fact been a functionally independent and distinctly Umayyad polity. Abd al-Rahman's public proclamation of 929 was first and foremost an oral declaration of what everyone had always known: that the Umayyads of Cordoba did not serve at the pleasure of the Abbasids of Baghdad, that they were not mere governors, and that the House of Islam had not been under a truly single rule since the moment Abd al-Rahman I had claimed his birthright in exile.

There were other powerful emirs in Islam—the governor of Egypt, for one—but the voice that was heard that Friday in Cordoba spoke not from power or arrogance. Abd al-Rahman I had carried his legitimacy in his blood, from Damascus to Cordoba, where it passed from generation to generation, discreetly but well tended. Now Abd al-Rahman III was shouting it from the rooftops. His pronouncement made clear that the head of the House of Islam in al-Andalus had claims far beyond that independent polity's frontiers. All sorts of questions cry out here: Why, just now, this provocative declaration of independence and superiority? Did Abd al-Rahman really believe he was on the brink of wielding the sort of political power and moral authority that would make him truly a caliph to all the world's Muslims—a leader on the far western margins of an empire that extended as far as the frontier of Sinkiang and the source of the Indus? What would a Cordoban have thought on that day when the city echoed, from one end to another, with that unexpected Sabbath-eve announcement? Could Hasdai himself, an impressively educated young man, proficient in all the languages of his native city—Latin, Mozarabic, Arabic, and Hebrew—a pious Jew and

budding physician and philosopher, possibly have imagined what it might mean to him?

The Abbasids had created a brilliant civilization in Baghdad. Perhaps they did not wield direct political control over the Andalusians, but that would have mattered precious little to the political and cultural empire that knew itself to be unrivaled in wealth and accomplishments worldwide. While Charlemagne in his halting and stultified Latin was being crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800, the Abbasid caliphs were already well into the monumental translation project that brought the Greek philosophical and scientific tradition into Arabic. Continuous traffic between Cordoba and Baghdad meant that the Andalusians were soon enough reading the same things and eagerly keeping up with the latest innovations, fashions, and products, and, eventually, capable of sending their own back in return. Despite their sometimes quirky ways—quirky by normative Abbasid standards—the Andalusians were profoundly indebted to and appreciative of the material, intellectual, and artistic emanations from the luminous eastern capital. The long first Umayyad century in al-Andalus was thus predicated on a healthy respect for the murderous, usurping Abbasids, for their political prowess and stability as well as for their cultural leadership.

In more recent years things had begun to fall apart in Baghdad. By 909, the political and military center had lost its hold to the extent that the almost unthinkable had happened. At the turn of the tenth century the Shiites, another legitimist group of Muslims, had successfully taken control in the North African provinces of what had been the Abbasid empire. The Shiites were supporters of Ali's descendants—Shiite means "of the Party of Ali," the Prophet's murdered son-in-law—as the divinely appointed and thus legitimate heir to the leadership of the House of Islam. From Tunis, the Arab Ifriqiyya, or "Africa," these pre-

tenders, now led by an imam who claimed direct descent from Fatima (the Prophet's daughter and Ali's wife), issued loud challenges to the Abbasids' claim to true legitimacy and succession, along with the proclamation of an independent state. If the imams of this upstart Muslim polity claimed to represent what an Islamic state was and was meant to be, and to have not merely political but religious authority over all Muslims, how long would the Andalusians—who constituted far more of a threat where legitimacy was concerned—continue to publicly acknowledge the central power of the distant Abbasids?

At the time these dramatic events were taking place in North Africa, Abd al-Rahman III, the beloved grandson and heir-designate of the ruling Umayyad, Abdullah ibn Muhammad, was eighteen years old. When the latter died, three years later, in 912, the young Abd al-Rahman assumed full powers. He spent the first eighteen years of his rule reunifying a kingdom that had in recent years suffered from internal bickering and skirmishing that bordered on civil war. He also strengthened his frontiers to the north, pushing deep into the regions of Leon and Navarre, in one famous battle taking and sacking the town of Pamplona. With his own house very much in order and prospering more than ever, and with his frontiers to the north under control, Abd al-Rahman was finally ready, in 929, to make his own counterclaim to that of the Fatimids. Here was the voice of the Umayyads now issuing that house's long-delayed assertion of defiance to the Abbasids who had murdered and displaced it.

It seems unlikely that Abd al-Rahman imagined he could establish the sort of political unity across the broad Islamic universe that his Syrian ancestors had once had, and that in a limited way the Abbasids had hung on to for some time. The House of Islam was now broken down into too many separate and rivalrous polities, each in its own region and with its own character and army. But he was quite right to understand that the struggle for the symbolic leadership that the position of caliph

entailed was open to contest. The Commander of the Faithful was the arbiter, in some fundamental sense, of the way Islam was to be correctly lived. And the Andalusian Abd al-Rahman surely believed that way to be as the Umayyads lived it.

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"It is a fat land full of rivers, springs and stone-cut wells," wrote Hasdai in his letter to the king of the Khazars. Hasdai had heard fabulous accounts of an entirely Jewish kingdom, Khazaria, an alleged fifteen-day journey from Constantinople and to the northeast of the Black Sea. As he introduced himself to a correspondent he could only hope existed, Hasdai described his Andalusian homeland, alluding modestly to his own role there:

> It is a land of grains, wines and purest oils, rich in plants, a paradise of every sort of sweet. And with gardens and orchards where every kind of fruit tree blossoms, and those with silkworms in their leaves. . . . Our land also has its own sources of silver and gold and in her mountains we mine copper and iron, tin and lead, kohl and marble and crystal. . . . The king ruling over the land has amassed silver, gold and other treasures, along with an army the likes of which has never been amassed before. . . . When other kings hear of the power and glory of our king they bring gifts to him. . . . I receive those offerings and I, in turn, offer them recompense.

Hasdai ibn Shaprut was born in Cordoba in 915 into a world brightly lit for Jews. In the previous 150 years of Umayyad rule, the Jews of al-Andalus had become visibly prosperous—materially, to be sure, and culturally even more so. To say they were thoroughly Arabized is to acknowledge that they did a great deal more than merely learn to speak the language of the rulers, something they no doubt did in the same several first generations, alongside Berber Muslims, Slavic slaves, and Visigothic converts. Under the dhimma brought by the Muslims, the Jews,

who in Visigothic Hispania had been at the lowest end of the social and political spectrum, were automatically elevated to the covenanted status of People of the Book (alongside the Christians, for whom it was, instead, a demotion), which granted them religious freedom and thus the ability to participate freely in all aspects of civic life.

This freedom meant virtually unlimited opportunities in a booming commercial environment. Suddenly, the once economically moribund peninsula was frenetic with activity: trading across the Mediterranean and importing products from the Far East, it had also dramatically altered its own agricultural base, embarked on dozens of large and ambitious building projects, and a great deal more. The Jews' improved status also meant that they were able to join the educated classes, which they did with alacrity and, as the life and career of Hasdai reveal, with manifest success. And, of course, at the heart of the Jewish community's prosperity lay an enthusiastic attitude about Arabization, which meant full cultural assimilation.

The Jews' often loving relationship with Arabic culture contrasted from the outset with the attitude of the hierarchy and leadership of the Christian community, whose resistance to what they regarded as unbearable cultural oppression led to the crisis of the Mozarab martyrs. There were obvious and foundational reasons for the critical differences in attitude: the Christians were adjusting to the loss of ruling status, and then of wholesale conversions that meant, just after the time of Alvarus's famous complaint, they were a shrinking minority in al-Andalus. The Jews' position under Muslim rule, on the other hand, was in every respect an improvement, as they went from persecuted to protected minority. The results of these different attitudes may well have contributed to the paradoxical social and cultural outcomes clearly visible by the turn of the tenth century. There was a surviving Christian community, but it was smaller and more discrete than it had been even at the time of Alvarus, a stubborn

group of Mozarabs who believed they could use Arabic and be devout Christians, and in fact by now their scriptures and rites were all in Arabic. But the once-majority Christian community had been decimated at least in part by that Alvarus-like all-or-nothing attitude that seemed to push people to one extreme or the other: conversion to Islam, on one hand—the majority—or voluntary exile to the handful of Christian enclaves in the far northwest of the peninsula, on the other.

The Andalusian Jews universally embraced a third option: they assimilated into the Islamo-Arabic culture of the Umayyads *and* remained a devout and practicing religious community, with its religious language intact. Hasdai, growing up as the child of a prosperous (but not culturally unrepresentative) Jewish family, was thoroughly educated in two separate but complementary spheres: that of an observant Jew, learned in Hebrew and its biblical and exegetical traditions, in order that he might be at ease in the company of rabbis, or be a rabbi himself; and that of an intellectual at ease in the most cultivated Islamic society. Hasdai was a scion of a Jewish intellectual class so successfully assimilated within the sparkling Umayyad culture of al-Andalus that they had themselves become prominent contributors to it. These men were visible and significant participants in the flourishing of letters that, by the time Abd al-Rahman III was caliph and Hasdai his vizier, had made Cordoba as serious a contender as Baghdad, perhaps more so, for the title of most civilized place on earth.

The Jews understood themselves to be Andalusians and Cordobans, much as the German Jews of the late-nineteenth century—Marx and Freud most prominent among them—considered themselves Germans, or the American Jews in the second half of the twentieth century, who helped define the intellectual and literary qualities of their time, never thought twice about calling themselves Americans. But unlike many later European and American Jews, the Andalusian Jews had not had to abandon their orthodoxy to be fully a part of the body politic and culture

of their place and time. The Jews of al-Andalus were able to openly observe and eventually enrich their Judaic and Hebrew heritage and at the same time fully participate in the general cultural and intellectual scene. They could be the Cardozas and the Trillins and the Salks of their times because they were citizens of a religious polity—or rather, of this particular religious polity. The Umayyads, much like the Abbasids who devoted vast resources and talent to the translation of Greek philosophical and scientific texts, had created a universe of Muslims where piety and observance were not seen as inimical to an intellectual and "secular" life and society.

So it was that the rich and varied cultural and intellectual Arabophone universe that was the House of Islam in the ninth and tenth centuries provided the backdrop for the Umayyad vision. The Andalusian scene, where a man like Hasdai could occupy center stage, was accessible to the Jewish community in far more than just a technical or linguistic way; indeed, it was a vital part of their identity and in no way at odds with their Jewishness. At the same time, the broader culture partook of their presence and contributions, and Jews added to the every-day-expanding Arabic library in areas ranging from science and philosophy to poetry and Arabic philology, this last the queen of the sciences in an Arabic tradition in love with its own language. This thoroughgoing assimilation would have all sorts of long-term effects down the road, when the Umayyad caliphate was gone and much lamented. But those are later stories.

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In 949, Hasdai ibn Shaprut was at the head of the delegation representing the caliphate of Cordoba in delicate foreign negotiations. The caliph, who twenty years before had broken with Baghdad, was interested in a strategic alliance with the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople. Greek-speaking Eastern Christendom and Arabic-speaking Muslim al-Andalus had a

common enemy in the Abbasids of Baghdad, who were a menace to both.* The historic and colorful encounter between the representatives of these two powers with seats at either end of the Mediterranean took place in the most lavish of Andalusian settings, the new palatine city of Madinat al-Zahra. "The City of Zahra" was a fairy-tale-like series of palaces and gardens, still in the making, that Abd al-Rahman III had begun building outside Cordoba a dozen years before, ostensibly in honor of one of his beloved concubines, and named for her. Legendary in its own time as a wonder of the world, it would eventually become one of the most powerful and enduring monuments of the caliphate, second only to the Great Mosque as an iconic memory. For these delicate and potentially momentous talks in the innermost enclaves of Cordoban power, no man was better suited than Hasdai, who was thirty-four at the time. He had risen meteorically through the capital's intellectual and political ranks, beginning as a gifted physician whose invaluable specialty was antidotes to poison, soon enough becoming a central player in the diplomatic corps attending the caliph.

Because prominent Christians also figured in these caliphal foreign policy circles, it is probable that Hasdai worked closely at this time with the Mozarab bishop of Elvira, Racemundo, who in 949 figured prominently in the caliph's diplomatic representation to the court of Constantinople. Half a dozen years later, in 955, the bishop, known in Arabic as Rabi ibn Zayd, would end up as the caliph's envoy to the court of Otto I, where he would meet the nun Hroswitha and give her the materials for both her life of the Mozarab martyr Pelagius and her enduring description of Cordoba's marvels. Among the gifts that Rabi ibn Zayd

*They also had common Christian enemies, a fact that would emerge vividly during the time of the Crusades, when Byzantine cities—Constantinople chief among them, in 1204—were sacked and looted by Crusaders. The four famous bronze horses that grace and even seem to define the look of Piazza San Marco in Venice were taken from the hippodrome of the capital of Eastern Christendom.

brought back from Constantinople was a green onyx fountain adorned with human figures that ended up in the newly built Madinat al-Zahra.

Another of the gifts from the Byzantines presented to the caliph by Constantine VII—whose official title, Autokrator Romaion (Autocrat of the Romans), belied his mixed political heritage—was a fundamental Greek medical work until then known only in a poor Arabic translation, itself based on a mangled Greek original. Here was a real treasure, and an opportunity for Hasdai: the Greek original, in an early version, of an invaluable resource, Dioscorides' *On Medicine,* complete and lavishly illustrated. This gift spoke to the intellectual and cultural interests and pursuits shared by the two would-be allies. But it also immediately revealed, ironically, the extent to which the Andalusians had relied on the very Abbasids against whom they were at that moment conspiring. Cordoba had benefited from the vast translation enterprise in Baghdad, where the Greek library had been translated and then passed on to the rest of the Arabophone world—and the Cordobans had been eager, even greedy, recipients, as the impressive Cordoban libraries attested. But Cordoba itself, like the rest of Europe, had no Greek readers, and thus no way to make immediate use of that extremely desirable present.

Again, it was Hasdai who seemed to be able effortlessly to shift gears from the political negotiations to the even weightier task of making this medical encyclopedia available to the distinguished libraries of Cordoba. He set to work at the head of a team of experts put together for the purpose, a group of men that included a monk sent from Constantinople, once it became clear that help was needed to even begin to translate the Greek into Arabic—although it was Hasdai himself who, reportedly, had the last hand in crafting the Arabic version (after it had been through several relays of translators), he being both a physician and an exquisite stylist. The immediate task was accomplished

and thus the Andalusians had symbolically claimed one further measure of independence, small but significant, from the Abbasids. This triumph in an area so central to Andalusian concerns—the acquisition of technical and scientific preeminence in the world—made clearer than ever Hasdai's brilliance in the public arena of Cordoba, at its very highest levels.

Hasdai's success in society at large, at the heart of the just-declared caliphate, did not in the least detract from his stature within the Jewish community. He was still the nasi, its prince, and every year more powerfully and broadly so. Following in his father's footsteps, he became an important patron of religious scholarship in Hebrew. Yet he was also the founder of new initiatives for this time of unprecedented prosperity for the Andalusian Jews. Like their Muslim neighbors, they had a strong sense of their own centrality in the universe, and, like the caliph who employed him, the nasi felt the need to redefine his community's relationship to the larger world. The center of Jewish authority at that time was, like the old caliphate, in Baghdad. There, the *gaon*, the head of the community, exercised his authority by (among other things) his annual setting of the Jewish calendar. This would no longer be so, declared Hasdai, in a statement of independence that echoed that made by Abd al-Rahman not many years before. Henceforth, the nasi proclaimed, Andalusian Jewry would mark its own new moons and holy days. So it was that by the halfway mark of the last century of the first millennium of the Common Era, in their grand city of Cordoba, Muslims and Jews alike had come fully into their own.

The Gardens of Memory

Madinat al-Zahra, South of Cordoba, 1009

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ONE HAS TO WONDER WHICH AMONG THE MANY FANTASIES-come-to-life of the palatine city of Madinat al-Zahra would have most stupefied the army troops that breached its walls one day in 1009. The reception hall with the gold and silver roof to cover the giant pearl hung from its center? The quicksilver pool that sent rays of sunlight flashing in every direction? The zoo with its wild and strange animals, surrounded by a moat? The hundreds of other pools, of every kind, in every courtyard? Perhaps the fountain with the black amber and pearl lion at its center? Or the gardens filled with statuary, some preserved from earlier, barbaric times, some newly carved, with animal and human forms (sure proof of the Umayyads' lack of piety)? These sprawling palaces must have looked like the marvelous settings for tales from *The Thousand and One Nights*,