

The Berbers of the Arabs

MOORS AND BERBERS

The Arab conquest of northwest Africa is a major event in the field of North African Studies. For scholars, its most lasting effects were the Islamization and Arabization of the Berber populations. While historians often disagree about the chronology, character, and extent of these processes, they all agree that they are essential to understanding the medieval period.

In truth, the scholarly consensus is slightly more complicated than this more “popular” view. Specialists know that the category “Barbar” is of Arabic origin and thus that the Arabs could not have conquered peoples called Barbar prior to the conquest.¹ Furthermore, while Latin and Greek sources refer to some people in northwest Africa as barbarians (βάρβαροι and *barbari*), the ideas associated with these barbarians will be shown to be so different from the Arabic Barbar that it is difficult to confuse the two. Thus, in spite of the obvious linguistic similarity of the Greek, Latin, and Arabic terms, the Arabs did not apply the term Barbar to describe the exact same groups of peoples called “barbarians”

1. “Berber” is the most common Romanization of the Arabic word. The more scholarly transliteration is “Barbar.” The term Barbar in this essay highlights the modernity of “Berber,” the category most scholars have used to produce pre-Islamic Berbers.

in classical and late antique sources. So, who were the Barbar of the Arabs?

Encapsulating a widely held view among specialists, Gabriel Camps explained, “The Berbers of the Arabs are the Moors of the Romans.”² According to this understanding, instead of conquering the Berbers, the Arabs conquered the “Moors” (*Mauri*, sing. *Maurus*) and just called them by a “new” name. The historian’s task was simple: analyze the meaning of “Moor” in those Greek and Latin sources written just before the Arab conquest and compare them to the meanings of “Barbar” in the earliest Arabic sources. Unfortunately, Latin and Greek sources on North Africa begin to diminish in the sixth century, while Arabic sources on the “Barbar” only appear in the ninth century. In some respects, the equation “Moor = Barbar” attempts to resolve the problem posed by the record.³

Whether the sources call them Moors or Barbar, some scholars believe the people were the same.⁴ Proceeding from such a presupposition, historians have grown accustomed to using the category “Berber” to refer to northwest Africans in general, in any period. For these scholars, the Berbers were the same indigenous people of northwest Africa conquered by the Arabs, Byzantines, Vandals, Romans, and Phoenicians.⁵

2. Gabriel Camps noted that “En fait les Berbères des Arabes sont les Maures des Romains,” in Paul-Albert Février, *La Méditerranée de Paul-Albert Février*, 2 vols., (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1996), 2: 305. The idea has permeated scholarship. For a recent illustration, see Eduardo Manzano Moreno, *Conquistadores, Emires Y Califas: Los Omeyyas y la formación de al-Andalus*, (Barcelona, 2006), 29.

3. For a thorough discussion of late antique sources, see Yves Modéran, *Les Maures et l’Afrique Romaine (IV-VI^e siècle)*, (Rome, École Française de Rome, 2003).

4. Historians sometimes extend the equation and use the term “Berber” to refer to various ancient peoples in the region. For a recent example, see Elizabeth Fentress, “Romanizing the Berbers,” *Past and Present*, 190 (Feb. 2006), 3-33.

5. See for example, A.H. Merills (ed.), *Vandals, Romans, and Berbers: New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa*, (Aldershot, 2004); David L. Stone and Lea M. Stirling, “Funerary Monuments and Mortuary Practices in the Landscapes of North Africa,” in idem (eds.), *Mortuary Landscapes of North Africa*, (Toronto, 2006), 3-31.

In his recent study of the “Moors,” historian Yves Modéran thoroughly examined the use of the term in late antique sources.⁶ His goal was to determine the role of the populations named Moors then Berbers in the evolution of Roman Africa in the three centuries preceding the Arab conquest.⁷ Noting the difficulties inherent in the use of “Berber” to analyze the pre-Islamic period, Modéran commented on the scholarly practice of translating “Moor” as “Berber”:

“[It] imposed itself immediately to the first historians of late antique Africa without any justification, and has remained unchanged until the present. In fact, as we shall see, if in the sixth century the Moor was still an indigenous (or autochthonous) African (*autochtone*) whom the Romans considered to be “non-Romanized,” he could possess a cultural complexity that is far from the “pure Berber” dear to nineteenth-century scholars.⁸ In order to respect the sources, and avoid any anachronism and all ideological ambiguities [inherent] in the word “Berber,” we will mostly speak here of “Moors.” But as we will see, obvious stylistic reasons make it so that we could not avoid “Berber” in some sentences.”⁹

In spite of Modéran’s anachronistic and ideologically ambiguous use of Berber “in some instances,” it is important to note that

6. Since Arabic sources had little use for the category “Moor,” Modéran’s study effectively ends in the seventh century. His analysis of Arabic texts is problematic because of its liberal use of much later medieval sources such as Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406). Additionally, Modéran utilizes dated French translations, which introduce decidedly modern concepts such as “race.”

7. Yves Modéran, *Les Maures*, 811. Modéran’s study is both a recent and serious articulation of this position. In addition to critical historiographic essays, it includes a rich bibliography, which lists all the major works on this issue.

8. The idea of a “culturally complex” Moor does nothing to eliminate the idea of the “pure Berber.”

9. Modéran, *Les Maures*, 11.

his ability to do so rests on the idea that both Moors and Berbers were “indigenous.”¹⁰

In this essay, I will reassess the validity of the equation of Berbers with Moors, which underlies scholarly research, by focusing on the representation of the Barbar in early medieval Arabic sources. In particular, I will concentrate on the extent to which these sources conceived of the Barbar as the indigenous inhabitants of the region. In this way, I hope to outline research possibilities about the Arab conquests, conversion to Islam, and Arabization.¹¹

PRE-ISLAMIC BARBAR?

Did pre-Islamic Arabic authors employ the category “Barbar”? If they did, did it correspond to the Roman “Moors”?

The first century author of the Greek *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* described a region named “Barbaria” south of the Egyptian

10. For the Berbers as indigenous North Africans, see for example, Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib*, (Cambridge, 1975), 1; Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers*, (Oxford & Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1996), 10; Maribel Fierro, *Abd al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph*, (Oxford, 2005), 11; Helena de Felipe, *Identidad y onomástica de los bereberes de al-Andalus*, (Madrid, 1997), 18; Heinz Halm, *Das Reich des Mahdi: der Aufstieg der Fatimiden (875-973)*, (Munich, 1991), 95-6; Eduardo Manzano Moreno, *Conquistadores, Emires Y Califas: Los Omeyyas y la formación de al-Andalus*, (Barcelona, 2006), 29.

11. The scholarship on these subjects is dense and I can only suggest a few notable interventions. See Richard Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: an Essay in Quantitative History*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: the Evolution of the Islamic Polity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Fred Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Thomas F. Glick, *Irrigation and Society in Medieval Valencia*, (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970); Walter Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Michael Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Chase Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest: the Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

town of Berenike on the Red Sea coast.¹² A century later, the famous geographer Claudius Ptolemaeus (ca. 90 – ca. 168) located the Barbarian Sea across from the Bay of Arabia, the Red Sea, and the Barbarian Bay. The latter led to the city of Rhapsa, which he described as the metropolis of Barbaria.¹³ In the *Periplus of the Outer Sea*, Marcianus of Heraclea Pontica (fl. 400) used the name to describe an ethnos and a sea.¹⁴ In the sixth century, Cosmas Indicopleustes, famed for his sea travels to India, located Barbaria right across the Arabian Gulf, as did his contemporary, Stephanus of Byzantium.¹⁵ Clearly, for six centuries Greeks and Romans consistently and regularly described a Barbaria on the east coast of Africa.

The pre-Islamic Arabs also knew about this Barbaria and Barbar on the other side of the Red Sea facing Arabia. Excerpts from early authors, known through later recensions, contain references to them. The famous poet Imru'ū al-Qays (6th c.) mentions the Barbar and their horses in one of his poems.¹⁶ Another pre-Islamic poem attributed to 'Uday b. Zayd (d. 587) mentions in the same

12. *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, in *Geographi Graeci Minores*, ed. Karl Müller, (Paris: Firmin Didot 1855), 1: 258.

13. Claudii Ptolemaei, *Geographia*, ed. C.F.A. Nobbe, (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1966), I, 17, 6; IV, 7, 28. This Barbaria was thus located on the Red Sea coast of modern Somalia.

14. Marciani Heracleensis ex Ponto, *Periplus Maris Exteri*, in *Geographi Graeci Minores*, ed. Karl Müller, 1:523.

15. Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Topographie Chrétienne*, ed. Wanda Wolska-Conus, (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1968), II:26; II:29; II:30; II:45; II:48; II:49; II:50; II:61; II:64. Stephani Byzantii, *Ethnicorum Quae Supersunt*, ed. A. Meineke, (Berlin, 1849), 158. See "Barbaria" in Georg Wissowa, *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1896). In addition to the east African Barbar, one notes the existence of a Barbar in the Persian Gulf. See the suggestive article by G.W. Bowersock, "Tylos and Tyre: Bahrain in the Graeco-Roman World," in *Bahrain through the Ages: the Archaeology*, Shaikha Haya Ali Khalifa and Michael Rice eds., (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 399-406.

16. Medieval authors made repeated references to this fact. For example, see Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), *The Muqaddimah, an Introduction to History*, Franz Rosenthal trans., 3 vols., (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 1:99.

line the people of Barbar (*āl barbar*) and al-Yaksūm (Axum).¹⁷ This use of Barbar corresponds to the one found in Graeco-Roman geographic texts. It does not refer to a particular people like the Arabs or the Abyssinians but rather to the inhabitants of a region or city on the east coast of Africa called Barbar.¹⁸

Furthermore, the historian Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (d.871) mentioned a Barbar market (*sūq Barbar*) in the Egyptian city of Fuṣṭāṭ.¹⁹ The absence of the definite article indicates that it was the market of the people of Barbar (*āl barbar*) not *the* Barbar (*al-barbar*). Again, the Barbar in question is the east African region to the south of the city of Fuṣṭāṭ. Thus, one may safely conclude that the name predated the Arab conquest of northwest Africa.

Unlike the barbarians of ancient and late antique sources, which refer to “uncivilized” peoples found just about anywhere in the known world, the Barbar of the pre-Islamic Arabs appear in a specific geographical area. Thus, it is safe to conclude that in pre-Islamic times, the Arabs referred to some people as “Barbar” and that they imagined them as the inhabitants of eastern, not northwestern, Africa. Since these Barbar were not also Moors, it is necessary to find out whether the Arabs gave up this older conception and took on a new one once they invaded northwest Africa.

17. Ibn Hisham, *Das Leben Muhammed's nach Muhammed Ibn Ishāk*, (*Kitāb sīrat rasūl Allah*), ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, (Frankfurt am Main: Minderva, 1961), 45. Note that in his translation of the work A. Guillaume incorrectly translates “Āl Barbar” as barbarians. See A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 2nd ed., (Lahore, 1967), 33.

18. See al-Bukhārī, *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, *Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm* ed., 11 vols., (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1960), 8: 450. In an enumeration of peoples, the Barbar are situated between the Nūba and al-Sūdān.

19. Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *The History of the Conquest of Egypt, North Africa, and Spain*, Charles Torrey ed., (New Haven: Yale Oriental Series, 1922), 111, 115, 119.

CONQUEST AND POLITICS

The earliest Arabic sources describing the Muslim conquest of northwest Africa and al-Andalus were composed in the ninth century, more than a century after the first raids. In these texts, “Barbar” refers to northwest Africans. As they tend to take the category for granted, these texts need to be critically reassessed in light of the political events they recount. A synoptic narrative of the Arab conquest of northwest Africa and the politics that ensued will set the stage for a discussion of early Arabic sources and their portrayal of the Barbar, and how the term, originally applied to east Africans, came to be applied to northwest Africans.

The Arab conquest occurred in stages.²⁰ In the 640s, Arab generals based in Egypt led armies westward in search of booty and honors, and initiated a gradual conquest that lasted decades. Over time, the incursions, raiding, and settlements led to a slow and progressive reorientation of politics in northwest Africa, closely related to the new important centers of power in the Mashriq. Political struggles taking place in the east had a great impact on the formulation of a course of action, the leadership of the military campaigns, as well as shaping the terms of the opposition. The garrison town of al-Qayrawān, established in 670, became the capital of Arab presence in the west.

The articulation, and thus terminology, of political struggle between Muslims in the Maghrib owed a great deal to developments in the Mashriq. In this regard, it may seem as if eastern

20. My description of the events owes a great deal to the work of Jamil Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period*, (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and *A History of the Maghrib*, (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers*, (Oxford & Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1996); Hugh Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus*, (New York: Longman, 1996); and Abdallah Laroui, *L'Histoire du Maghreb: un essai de synthèse*, (Paris: Maspero, 1970).

politics were transplanted in the west, or that the west reproduced the politics of the east. Yet, and this is crucial, the parties that won battles in the east did not necessarily or automatically win in the west as well.

By the early eighth century, the Arabs had ended eastern Roman rule in Ifrīqiyā and more or less controlled that region. The masters of al-Qayrawān tried to expand their control beyond Ifrīqiyā. As they raided, imposed tributes and taxes, and accumulated captives, the Arabs came up against a number of political formations, which had emerged from the reordering of power subsequent to the defeat of the Byzantines. The ability of these groups to raise armies made them formidable opponents and useful allies. After a protracted series of battles, intrigues, alliances, victories, and reversals of fortune, some northwest Africans, mostly from areas near Ifrīqiyā, joined with the Arabs of al-Qayrawān. Although their social background is not known, many of them became clients or *mawālī* (sing. *mawlā*) of Arab leaders, a status that gave them new political and legal standing. These clients fought alongside the Arabs and came to espouse similar eastern ideologies.

In the first decade of the eighth century, an Arab force reached the shores of the Atlantic. Arab forays into the pre-Saharan and Saharan regions were limited and, in any case, not as spectacular as their capture of the Mediterranean city of Tangier.

In Damascus, the Umayyads (661-750) chose this juncture to make the Maghrib into a single province (*wilāya*). For the first time, the entirety of northwest Africa became an administrative unit. This act of government made “the Maghrib” more than just a general term for the geographic west.

In 711, the new governor of Tangier, the *mawlā* Ṭāriq b. Ziyād, crossed the Mediterranean into Iberia with an army predominantly composed of northwest Africans. A few months later the Arab Mūsā b. Nuṣayr followed him and took over the command of the Muslims there. In subsequent years, they accumulated further

victories and pushed their raids far into the northern regions. Al-Andalus was born.

In the west, the Arab elite put in place a system of precedence that guaranteed them preferential treatment. The Arab elite fought hard to establish and maintain the mechanisms that distinguished between Muslims, and which alienated their relatively recent northwest African allies.²¹

By the 730s, many groups challenged Umayyad rule in the east and the west. The grievances of opponents included the nepotism, rapaciousness, and arbitrary brutality of Umayyad officials. In this regard, the discontent of those who had reasons to expect something from the government in al-Qayrawān did not differ greatly from that of non-Arab, and Arab, Muslims in other regions. In 739 and 740, rebellions from al-Qayrawān to Tangier seriously threatened Umayyad rule in the region. Unsurprisingly, anti-Umayyad Arabs, some of whom had fled Umayyad police in the east, formed alliances with various groups of northwest Africans.

In the early 740s, anti-Umayyad movements seriously confronted the Arabs of al-Andalus. However, unlike the Maghrib, al-Andalus was a more recently conquered territory. Because the leaders of the conquest were Umayyad generals, Arab elites of al-Andalus were predominantly pro-Umayyad. This did not prevent the articulation of anti-Umayyad sentiment in ways that echoed eastern politics. It did mean, however, that the most serious threat to their predominance came from an alliance of anti-Umayyad Arabs and northwest Africans. For the most part, and given the overwhelming numerical superiority of the Africans among the discontented, the latter led the uprisings in al-Andalus.

In al-Andalus, a similar rebellion in 741-2 showed that disunity among Arabs could seriously challenge the status quo. Inter-Arab

21. The sources' distinction between northern and southern Arabs ('Adnānī v. Qaḥṭānī) is complicated by the pre-Islamic migration and settlement of Yemenis in Syria (al-Shām), and the later migration of southerners following the Muslim conquest.

strife was resolved by the landing of an army of Syrians (*Shāmiyyūn*). An Umayyad-inflected Arabism overwhelmed the rivalries and jealousies between northern and southern Arabs, newcomers and “older” families. In this respect, al-Andalus was different from the rest of the Maghrib where Islam, rather than Arab predominance, was the more dominant ideology.

When the ‘Abbāsids and their supporters in the east put an end to Umayyad rule in 750, al-Qayrawān hailed the new rulers. Al-Andalus took another route. The pro-Umayyad camp welcomed the arrival of the sole surviving member of the Umayyad dynasty and in 756, after routing a vigorous opposition, declared an independent Umayyad emirate in al-Andalus.

THE FIRST WESTERN BARBAR?

The *Arab-Byzantine Chronicle of 741*²² is the earliest extant historical source written after the Muslim conquest of the Maghrib and al-Andalus. Its author was Iberian, and its language was Latin. Unfortunately for historians of the Maghrib, the anonymous author was more interested in Byzantine imperial politics and barely mentioned events in al-Andalus. One of his contemporaries living in al-Andalus possibly used the same sources to pen a richer chronicle.²³ This author of *The Chronicle of 754*, also anonymous, is more informative and describes political events in Iberia from 611 to 754.²⁴

22. Juan Gil, *Corpus scriptores muzarabicorum*, 2 vols., (Madrid: Instituto Antonio de Nebrija, 1973).

23. See Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It*, (Princeton NJ: Darwin Press, 1997), 611-630. In addition to translating the chronicle, Hoyland highlights parts that correspond to earlier texts he identifies.

24. *Crónica Mozárabe de 754*, ed. José Eduardo López Pereira, (Zaragoza: Anubar Ediciones, 1980). An English translation is available in Kenneth B. Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1990), 111-58.

Although neither of these authors refers to the Barbar, the author of the *Arab-Byzantine Chronicle* refers to the Moors (*Mauri*) once to describe the battle that ended Byzantine rule in Africa (698).

“Therefore the confrontation was prepared, whereupon, the battle line of the Moors turned in flight and all the nobility of Africa, along with count Gregory, was destroyed to the point of extinction.”²⁵

The description of the Moors is rather vague and does little to identify them. The author described the soldiers as “Moors,” and distinguished them from the “nobility of Africa.”²⁶

In contrast to the imprecisely defined Moors, the authors refer to the inhabitants of the old Roman province of Africa as Africans (*Africanī*).²⁷ Arabic authors also noted their distinctiveness and referred to them as *Afāriq*. As they integrated into the Muslim polity, they came to constitute a distinctive social group in the new Ifrīqiyā. However, the continuity in the usage of this category from Greek and Latin to Arabic does not necessarily mean that the *Afāriq* were the same families that had been considered Africans (*Africanī*) under Roman rule. As the *Chronicle* indicates, the “old” Africans were “destroyed to the point of extinction.” Consequently, the *Africanī* of the mid-eighth century translated the Arabic “*Afāriq*,” which referred to a sociopolitical group specific to Arab domination in Ifrīqiyā.

While it is not clear if the author of the *Arab-Byzantine Chronicle* collected any information in Iberia, his contemporary, the author of *The Chronicle of 754*, did. In fact, he seems to have used even Arabic

25. §24: Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 618; Juan Gil, *Corpus*, 1: 10.

26. It fits the general use of the term in the late antique period. See Yves Modéran, *Les Maures*, 11, 448-50.

27. In the late antique period, “Africa” was applied to the province of Africa Proconsularis, or to the area encompassing Proconsularis, Byzacena, and Tripolitania prior to Diocletian’s reforms in the third century. See Modéran, *Les Maures*, 169.

sources.²⁸ This makes his chronicle the more important as it relies on Arabic sources now lost.

A passage about the rebellion against Arab rule in both the Maghrib and al-Andalus in 741-2 suggests that the author may have gleaned more than dates and names from Arabic sources. For instance, he refers to “the western region,” which is the translation of the Arabic “Maghrib.” In addition, he describes the Moors as “naked, girded only with loin-cloths covering their shameful parts.” When they battled the Arabs, “the Egyptian horses immediately recoiled in flight, as the Moors on their beautiful horses revealed their repulsive color and gnashed their white teeth.”²⁹

This story offers a very dramatic prelude to the landing of the Syrians in al-Andalus and explains their zeal and expertise in crushing the rebellion there. The description of the events in al-Andalus possesses concreteness and specificity missing from the narration of African affairs. This suggests that the Arabic sources in question were either Andalusí or had an Andalusí connection. For instance, as he mentions Balj’s “good lineage,” the author not only demonstrates intimate knowledge of politics in al-Andalus at the time of the Umayyad victory, but also positions himself in relation to it.

Distinguishing himself from the author of the *Arab-Byzantine Chronicle*, this author provides much more information about politics in Iberia. More importantly for the purposes of this essay, he introduces two new categories: the “Moors of Spain” and the “Saracens of Spain.”

The Moors and Saracens of Spain refer to groups who had privileges as Muslims that set them apart from Christians:

28. Wolf, *Conquerors*, 29-30.

29. §84: Wolf, *Conquerors*, 147-8; López Pereira, 107-8. López Pereira’s translation introduces the concept of the race of the Arabs (*la raza de los árabes*) which does not appear in the Latin text. For Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 871), the episode is told in terms of the struggles between Arab generals which resulted in the poor decision to send Arab horsemen against naked Barbar foot-soldiers. The “Egyptian” horses are the horses of Kulthūm the general who arrived from Egypt. The naked Barbar are described as “Ṣufīrī” khārijites. See Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 219-20.

“A Saracen by the name of Yahya succeeded at once by orders of the princes. He was a cruel and terrible despot who raged for almost three years. With bitter deceit, he stirred up the Saracens and Moors of Spain by confiscating property that they were holding for the sake of peace and restoring many things to the Christians.”³⁰

However, the Moors of Spain became threatening when their ties to “their people” in Africa led them to revolt against the Saracens of Spain.

Although he was preeminent in courage and fame, a Moor named Munnuza, hearing that his people were being oppressed by the harsh temerity of the judges in the territory of Libya, quickly made peace with the Franks and organized a revolt against the Saracens of Spain.³¹

The anonymous author cast the revolts of the 730s and early 740s in terms that mark them as a traumatic experience. Inter-Arab strife had prevented Umayyad troops from coming to the rescue and encouraged the Moors of Spain to rebel endangering the status quo.

When [in 742, ‘Abd al-Malik] discovered that the third part of the army under Balj had arrived at the port, he denied them a crossing, withholding the ships. When the Moors of Spain realized this, they assembled for war, wanting to subject ‘Abd al-Malik to themselves and, crossing over the sea in ships, offer his conquered kingdom to their allies on the other side of the sea.³²

30. §75: Wolf, *Conquerors*, 140; López Pereira, 90.

31. §79: Wolf, *Conquerors*, 142; López Pereira, 96.

32. §85: Wolf, *Conquerors*, 148; López Pereira, 109-10.

Clearly, the rebellions of the Moors against the Arabs in al-Andalus produced conditions requiring a distinction between the Moors of Iberia and those of northwest Africa. In this regard, one may see the generic use of the term “Moor” as stemming from the anxiety of the dominant Arab minority about a possible alliance between African and Iberian Moors. While Arabs may have had the sense that their rule throughout the region was unstable, northwest Africans do not seem to have formulated a collective political program against them.

The “Moors of Spain” did not defeat ‘Abd al-Malik and did not offer his kingdom to their allies. Yet, this is what the author claimed was their plan. The generic “Moors” was definitely not an ethnographic concept. Instead, it was a political category, much like “the enemy” of military schools whose plans are, by definition, always nefarious.³³

As far as this source was concerned, the “Moors of Spain” pertained to a specific political force in al-Andalus. In fact, every time they appear in the text, the context is military or political. Obviously, since the chronicle is primarily a record of important political events, this is hardly a surprise. The association could not have been merely fortuitous, however, as the “Moors of Spain” referred to a particular faction or party and did not refer to members of a guild, a monastic order, or a heretical sect.

Similarly, the “Saracens of Spain” refers to a new group of Saracens. The author recognized their ties with eastern Saracens, but viewed them as a distinct group.³⁴ As was explained above, the struggles that eventually led to the victory of the Umayyads in al-Andalus were cast in terms of the lineages claimed by each of the contenders. In fact, the author’s categories and distinctions are consonant

33. The description of the generic Moor recalls late antique conceptions discussed by Modéran. Yet, as the appearance of the “Moors of Spain” demonstrates, the older conceptions were adapted to the new political situation.

34. See for example §78: Wolf, *Conquerors*, 141; López Pereira, 92 and §82: Wolf, *Conquerors*, 145; López Pereira, 104.

with the struggles that led to the foundation of an independent Umayyad emirate in al-Andalus in 756. This political polarization in al-Andalus marked the author of *The Chronicle of 754*, framed his vision of politics, and informed his recollection of the conquest and its aftermath.

The sociopolitical specificity of the “Moors of Spain,” their rebellion and defeat at the hand of the Umayyads and their supporters, and their subsequent integration into the Umayyad order as both subaltern and distinct, illuminates the production of the generic Moors of northwest Africa. As was seen, the politics in al-Andalus in the 730s and 740s accounts for the emergence of two types of Moors: a concrete political force in al-Andalus, and its obscure “natural” allies in the Maghrib. One was a social group, the other a political construct.

The “Moors of Spain” did not appear in Latin and Greek sources prior to the process of sociopolitical differentiation linked to the formation of the Umayyad emirate in 756. While Arabic sources used by the anonymous author are neither known nor extant, it is unlikely that they contained the expression “*barbar al-Andalus*.” If they did, the expression disappeared without trace. It is more reasonable to believe that Arabic authors in al-Andalus started employing the term “Barbar” to describe both the social group and the political construct.

Once established, Andalusī conceptions of “Barbar,” grounded in the social and political realities of the peninsula, circulated broadly in the Maghrib and the Mashriq, and inevitably shaped writings about the Barbar.

DYNASTIES IN THE MAGHRIB

The victory of the Umayyads in al-Andalus was not the first time a dynasty had claimed independence from al-Qayrawān. In the western Maghrib, the Barghawāta (744/5-1058) were able to achieve their independence from the governor of the Maghrib before the fall of Damascus.³⁵ Another new polity emerged in 788 near the ancient town of Volubilis in the western Maghrib. The Idrīsids (788-959) rallied supporters and claimed legitimacy as descendants of the prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fātima and her husband ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661). The basis of their power became obvious when other ‘Alid Arabs immigrated to the Idrīsīd capital from al-Andalus and Ifrīqiyyā and attempted to seize the reins of power. The locals rebelled immediately and made their military superiority felt.³⁶ The Maghrib was no Andalus.

Other northwest Africans seized power in the Maghrib under the banner of Khārijism, a political idea that had been especially important in organizing anti-Umayyad forces. The Khārijites, Ṣufrī and Ibādī, insisted that legitimate rule did not belong to any particular group and that any pious Muslim could assume the leadership of the community. In the southern city of Sijilmāsa, the Midrārīds ruled for two centuries as Ṣufrī Khārijites. Further north and east, the Ibādīs (778-908), ruled from the city of Tāhart over most of the central Maghrib.

The early tenth-century chronicle of the Rustamid dynasty written by Ibn al-Ṣaghīr only uses the term “Barbar” once.³⁷ Basing his

35. See John Iskandar, “Devout Heretics: the Barghawāta in Maghribi Historiography,” *The Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 12, 1 (2007), 37-53.

36. See Ismā‘īl al-‘Arabī, *Dawlat al-adārīsa: mulūk tilimsān wa fās wa qurtuba*, (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1983).

37. Ibn al-Ṣaghīr, *Akhbār al-A‘imma al-Rustamiyyīn*, Muhammad Nāṣir and Ibrāhīm Baḥāz, eds., (Beirut, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1986), 52; and “Chronique d’Ibn Saghīr sur les Imams Rostemides de Tahert,” *Cahiers de Tunisie*, 23 (1975), ed. Mohamed Talbi, 331.

information mostly on the oral reports of Ibādī scholars, Ibn al-Ṣaghīr recounts a complex political history from 778 to 900 AH. The major groups he identifies are the Arabs, the ‘Ajam (i.e. Persians), and a number of Maghribī groups such as the Nafūsa and Hawwāra.

Although the author had many occasions to employ the term “Barbar” in a generic sense, his single reference may be only the reflection of Ibn al-Ṣaghīr’s usage, rather than that of his informants. Even so, it remains impressive to see that more than a century after the so-called “Barbar revolts,” a Maghribī author relying on his informants’ categories has very little use for the term “Barbar.” The degree of specificity achieved by giving tribal names makes the generic superfluous. In addition, the absence of a “Barbar” party in Rustamid politics and the predominance of struggles between identifiable tribes (Hawwāra, Zanāta, Luwāṭa) help to explain Ibn Ṣaghīr’s choices.³⁸

The Aghlabids were the first independent dynasty to emerge in Ifrīqiyā, the region where Arab influence was greatest in the Maghrib. In 800, Ibn al-Aghlab seized power in al-Qayrawān and soon after the ‘Abbāsids in Baghdad recognized him as a legitimate vassal. The Aghlabids (808-909) were in a state of constant warfare with their Khārijite neighbors. They also conquered and supported settlements in Sicily. Aghlabid politics in the island greatly resembled those of Umayyad al-Andalus. Importantly, as a privileged source of information for the ‘Abbāsīd court, the elite of al-Qayrawān played a key role in shaping eastern ideas about the Maghrib and its peoples.

Ibn Ṣaghīr’s Ibādī contemporary Ibn Sallām (d. after 887) composed the earliest extant text in Arabic written by a non-Arab north-west African.³⁹ As an Ibādī scholar writing in Ifrīqiyā, Ibn Sallām

38. Assuming a very different audience, al-Bukhārī distinguishes between the Ibādīs and the Barbar. See al-Bukhārī, *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, 8: 42.

39. Ibn Sallām al-Ibādī, *Kitāb Ibn Sallām, Eine Ibaditisch-Magribinische Geschichte des Islams aus dem 3./9/ Jahrhundert*, Werner Schwartz and al-Shaykh Sālim Ibn Ya’qūb eds., (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1986).

offered an Ibādī perspective on Islamic tenets, legitimate rule, and Muslim learning. Naturally, as a member of a group which opposed the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd dynasties, he restated arguments showing the closeness of his ideas to the original prophetic message. As a text, his *Kitāb* compiled written and oral sources.

Incidentally, all the references to the Barbar are based on oral reports collected by Ibn Sallām. Most are concentrated in only one out of the twenty-one sections or chapters that constitute the book. When he copied from earlier written material, Ibn Sallām did not refer to the Barbar. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that “Barbar” was not yet a category hallowed by tradition and usage. Most strikingly, Ibn Sallām reports a number of narratives (*akhbār*) which praise the Barbar (*faḍā’il al-barbar*).⁴⁰ Prominent among these is a report about the prophet Muhammad in which the angel Jibrīl tells him that Islam will grow in the Maghrib and that the Barbar will be its supporters.⁴¹ Another report contrasts the Arabs who fight for money (*al-dīnār wa al-dirham*) and the Barbar who fight to establish the true faith.⁴² Overall, his narrative depicts the Barbar as devout Muslims. They were one of the many non-Arab peoples who accepted Islam. Their participation in “Islam,” constitutes them as an ethnographic object clearly distinguishable from the generic conceptions tied to the military conquest.⁴³

In this light, Ibn Sallām’s most explicit statement about the political language of the Ibādīs comes in the form of a report about their early leader Abū al-Khaṭṭāb. When the Ibādīs prepared to fight the Arab general Ibn al-Ash‘ath, a man called on “the people of Hawwāra” (*al Hawwāra*) to rally. Abū al-Khaṭṭāb immediately or-

40. Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb*, 121-25.

41. Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb*, 122.

42. Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb*, 124.

43. Although clearly beyond the scope of this essay, one can see that the re-definition of Arabness, spurred by the migration of southerners into the Shām in the pre-Islamic period, continued in novel ways under the Umayyads and the ‘Abbāsīds. The discourse on universal integration within “Islam” assumed an ethnology, which was perforce shaped by events in both the Mashriq and Maghrib.

dered the man flogged for using a tribal rallying call purportedly associated with the pre-Islamic period (*jāhiliya*). He urged his supporters to call on all good Muslims instead.⁴⁴ Clearly, Ibādī politics sought to minimize tensions between those northwest Africans who supported them by insisting on their new identity as Muslims. Yet, despite their efforts, the Ibādīs were not able to eliminate tribal categories and politics.

However laudatory his comments may be, Ibn Sallām's "Barbar" do not explain political or social processes. Instead, his "Barbar" are a signal or tag repeatedly appended to the names of groups or peoples such as Hawwāra, Zanāta, Nafūsa and Luwāta, as if to inform those who are ignorant of such distinctions.⁴⁵

Furthermore, on more than one occasion, Ibn Sallām translates Arabic into "*barbariya*," the language of the Barbar, which he obviously speaks. It is not surprising to see someone who was educated in the culture and language of the Arabs and whose grandfather was an early supporter of the Ibādī Arabs use the language of the Arabs to describe his language in Arab terms. This shows that elite northwest Africans had absorbed the categories of the Arab elite.⁴⁶

Medieval Arabic authors did not distinguish between the socio-political Andalusī "Barbar" and the generic and tended instead to conflate and juxtapose them. Once they integrated the body of learned knowledge, however, the narratives had a more tenuous and less obvious connection to their own historicity.

44. Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb*, 84.

45. The Arabs lack knowledge about the Barbar. The prophet Muhammad and his caliph 'Umar b. al-Khattāb are described as inquiring about them. Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb*, 122-3.

46. Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb*, 118.

THE BARBAR IN THE EAST

In comparison with the scarcity of extant sources from the Maghrib, ninth-century Arabic sources from the Mashriq are plenty. Writing in multiple genres and disciplines, some of which were long established, and others yet in formation, authors combined narrative modes, strategies, and procedures to compose multifaceted works.

The older idea that Barbar refers to people who live across the Red Sea from Arabia persisted alongside the newly emerging knowledge about Maghribī Barbar. As I showed above, poems collected by Ibn Hishām (d. 834) mention the Red Sea “Barbar.” In fact, they appear in an even earlier source written by al-Wāqidī (747-823). This ‘Abbāsid judge of Baghdad is known for his book about the early Muslim conquests entitled *Futūḥ al-Shām* (*Conquest of Syria*).

Describing the Arab raids in the Egyptian region of al-Ṣa‘īd (Upper Egypt), al-Wāqidī enumerated the forces facing the Muslims during the caliphate of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644).

“In the Ṣa‘īd there were Nūba, Barbar, Daylam, Ṣaqāliba, Rūm, and Qibṭ; and the Rūm were dominant.”⁴⁷

Although it is not certain where these “Barbar” are located, their appearance in company of such groups situates them in northeast Africa.⁴⁸

Additional references in the text put them in the company of Bajāwa, Nūba, and Fallāḥīn, and describe them with the Sūdān as people who use elephants in warfare.⁴⁹

47. Al-Wāqidī, *Futūḥ al-Shām*, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ed., 2 vols., (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiya, 1997), 2:203. The “Barbar” do not appear in his *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*.

48. Al-Wāqidī, *Futūḥ al-Shām*, 2: 212.

49. Al-Wāqidī, *Futūḥ al-Shām* 2: 214.

It is possible that these “Barbar” are “barbarians” in the Graeco-Roman sense. However, such an assumption would require overcoming a few logical difficulties. First, al-Wāqidī does not use this term to refer to people anywhere but in southern Egypt. Second, their location so close to the ancient Βαρβαρία in the Red Sea area would have to be merely accidental.

Notably, unlike pre-Islamic authors who refer to the people of the region of Barbar (*āl barbar*), al-Wāqidī prefers *the* Barbar (*al-barbar*). Without having to exaggerate the significance of a phenomenon that could be peculiar to this author, this shift allows *the* Barbar to be imagined as a distinct people.

Sometimes an author used the category without the definite article (*barbar*), but then put it alongside other categories that referred to known peoples. This is the case of the famous litterateur al-Jāhiz (d. 869) who listed “Barbar” among the Sūdān (people with dark skin), in company of other east Africans.⁵⁰

“Among the Sūdān are the Zanj, the Ḥabasha, the Fazzān, Barbar, the Qibt, the Nūba, Zaghāwa, Marw, the Sind, the Hind, the Qumār, the Dabīla, the Ṣīn and Māṣīn.”⁵¹

Elsewhere, the historian al-Balādhurī (d. ca. 892) refers to a story about the practices of the early Muslims about the imposition of the poll tax (*jizya*) on non-Muslims. It says: “the prophet Muhammad took the *jizya* from the Zoroastrians of Hajar, [his caliph] ‘Umar (d. 644) took it from the Zoroastrians of Fāris (Persia), and [the caliph] ‘Uthmān (d. 656) took it from Barbar (*barbar*).”⁵² Since both Hajar

50. I prefer “people with dark skin” to Black people or Blacks because of the ponderous connotations carried by such categories in the modern period.

51. Al-Jāhiz, *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn ed., 4 vols., (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1964), 1: 216. See also Ibn Khordādhbeh (d. 912), *al-masālik wa'l mamālik*, 155. One notes the appearance of the Chinese (Ṣīn) among the Sūdān.

52. al-Balādhurī (d. 892), *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān*, 3 vols., Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid ed., (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriya, 1956-7), 1: 97-8.

and Fāris are toponyms, it is reasonable to infer that the Barbar meant here is the east African region.

Furthermore, knowledge about a defined entity of *the* Barbar seems to have had an additional impact on the narratives. The verb “*Barbara*,” which means to speak unintelligibly in a language other than Arabic, came to be associated with *the* Barbar. Al-Wāqidī uses the verb in its “common” meaning to describe the speech of non-Arab Byzantines.⁵³ In this case, the “barbarians” spoke Greek...

His near contemporary, the Andalusī ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb (d. 852 or 853), reported a very interesting variant. In the first exchange between God and Moses, God spoke to Moses in the language of the Barbar (*lisān al-barbar*) and identified himself as the deity in that language, apparently with little success.⁵⁴ God then tried all the languages until Moses finally was able to understand him. This story demonstrates that by the ninth century, the Barbar had become an identifiable people with a respectable Biblical past. In addition, unlike the generic babble (*barbara*) described by al-Wāqidī, Ibn Ḥabīb’s adaptation relies, at least partially, on the availability of empirical knowledge about *the* Barbar as a particular people with a language of their own.

The association between the verb and the Barbar still provided the occasion for learned punning. Al-Balādhurī (d. ca. 892) reports one such instance: “Ibn al-Kalbī [(d. ca. 819)] said: Ifrīqush b. Qays b. Sayfī al-Himyarī conquered Ifrīqiyā in the pre-Islamic period and so it was named after him. He was the one who killed Jirjir (Gregory) its king. He said about the Barābira (sing. Barbar): how predominant is the babble of these people. So, they were named Barābira.”⁵⁵

53. Al-Wāqidī, *Futūḥ al-Shām*, 1:5 and 1: 19.

54. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Ta’rīj*, ed. Jorge Aguadé, (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1991), §136, 58.

55. Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān*, 1: 270. In fact, Ibn al-Kalbī’s text is slightly different. It reads: “Ifrīqush b. Qays b. Sayfī is the one who conquered (*iftataba*) Ifrīqiyā, and it was named after him. He also killed its king Jirjir. And it is then that the Barbar were named [for] he told them “How plentiful is your babble!””

Obviously, this story projects the presence of the Yemenis in the Maghrib to the period before the Arab conquest and the arrival of the Syrians, with clear political implications. The Yemeni “school” produced many such stories, which seemingly attest their presence in the Maghrib in pre-Islamic times.⁵⁶

Medieval authors tended to be very selective and favored reports whose authority they trusted or supported. Consequently, they infused their learned narratives with political concerns that are not always easily identifiable. Even if one cannot always decipher their signs, the early medieval sources were not “confused” about the location or origin of the Barbar. Instead, they incorporated heterogeneous material put together under different circumstances, for reasons that often remain obscure, and with varying effects.

WESTERN BARBAR

The earliest extant historical narrative written in Arabic by a westerner is Ibn Ḥabīb’s *Kitāb al-Ta’rīkh* (Book of History). The author traveled to the east in the 820s where he culled information about the past from historians and storytellers, many of whom had ties to Egypt. His history, a universal chronicle beginning before the creation of the world, follows a loose chronological organization. It includes entries on a number of topics, like “the desire to accumulate wealth,” which are not related to the succession of events, rulers, and governors. Furthermore, Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 852/853) tended to report information on the authority of eastern, rather than western sources; understandably, there is little in the book that distinguishes it from the eastern narratives.

Ibn al-Kalbī, *Nasab Ma’ad wa al-Yaman al-Kabīr*, Nājī Ḥasan ed., 2 vols., (Beirut: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-‘Arabiya, 1988), 2: 548. See also al-Bukhārī (d. 870), *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, 1: 442.

56. See Ibn Qutayba (d. ca. 889), *Kitāb al-Ma’ārif*, Saroite Okacha ed., (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Dār al-Kutub, 1960), 627-8.

As was already mentioned, the Barbar appear in Ibn Ḥabīb's story of the exchange between Moses and God. They are absent from the rest of his history until the conquest of al-Andalus. Ibn Ḥabīb recounts that before the Arabs crossed into Iberia, the governor Mūsā b. Nuṣayr sent out men to the Mediterranean coast with orders to capture Roman ships and maybe find an older Roman man with some knowledge that could facilitate the conquest. When they found just such a man, the Roman captive told them that the Barbar would be the ones to conquer al-Andalus and that they would be Muslims.⁵⁷ While it is possible that this indeed occurred, it is at least reasonable to see it as a sanctification of the sense of inevitability and preordained course of history.

Whatever the intention of its producer, this story clearly establishes the "Islam" of the Barbar. In fact, this becomes the case with all the subsequent references to the Barbar, and over time develops into a recurring motif.⁵⁸ This is not surprising since Ibn Ḥabīb does not mention the Barbar in his brief description of the conquest of northwest Africa. His Barbar are in al-Andalus, where they play a politico-military role.⁵⁹

In one of the many anecdotal stories, the author compares the martial attitudes of the Barbar to those of various other groups. Among them, the Barbar are most similar to the Arabs in terms of bravery. However, they are also markedly different, as they are reputedly most deceitful, disloyal, and unlikely to respect any previously agreed pact. Alongside the Barbar, the story refers to the people of al-Andalus (*ahl al-Andalus*), who are the Arabs of al-Andalus, and are certainly not the Barbar.

Furthermore, mentioning the qualities that make Arabs and Barbar mirror images, simultaneously similar and different, may

57. Ibn Ḥabīb, §394, 136.

58. See al-Bukhārī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, 4: 255. The argument against the kidnapping of females was set in typically Islamic terms: "We found that [this practice] is not condoned by book [Qur'ān] or Sunna. And we are Muslims!"

59. Ibn Ḥabīb, 137.

have something to do with politics closer to Ibn Ḥabīb's time. Indeed, the author includes an apocalyptic prediction, according to which the Barbar will come to replace the Umayyad rulers of al-Andalus. The "apocalyptic" Barbar rebellion triggers a series of others, which eventually lead to the end of times.⁶⁰ The Barbar are clearly dangerous and the idea of an overthrow of the Umayyads is all the more abhorrent because it seems plausible.

Possibly, someone added this last account to the chronicle after the death of the author, at a time of serious challenge to Umayyad rule in al-Andalus. Even so, it does not break from the formulaic representation of the Barbar. The negative sentiments of the Andalusī author toward a rival political faction are probably to be expected, and hence they are less notable than the generic and vague information he actually offers. As was demonstrated by Maḥmūd Makkī, however, Ibn Ḥabīb's relative silence about the situation in the Maghrib and al-Andalus stems from his travel east, his intellectual inclinations, and his Egyptian sources.⁶¹ In this regard, his *Kitāb al-Ta'rikh* was the product of the same milieu that a generation later produced the richer *Kitāb futūḥ Miṣr* written by the Egyptian Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 871).

Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam begins his tale of the conquest of the Maghrib by explaining that the Barbar migrated to the Maghrib from Palestine after the defeat of their king Jālūt (Goliath) at the hands of the prophet Dāwūd (David). Effectively, the story accounts for the geographic location of various Barbar in the Maghrib as well as the servility of the Afāriq vis-à-vis the Romans and anyone who takes over their land, which is a barely veiled reference to the Arabs.⁶²

60. Ibn Ḥabīb, §452, 153.

61. See Maḥmūd 'Alī Makkī, "Egypt and the Origins of Arabic Spanish Historiography: a Contribution to the Study of the Earliest Sources for the History of Islamic Spain," in *The Formation of al-Andalus, Part 2: Language, Religion, Culture and the Sciences*, Maribel Fierro and Julio Samsó eds., (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 173-233.

62. Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, 170.

The story anchors the narrative of the conquest of the Maghrib by identifying the main characters that will play a role in the unfolding of the events. As for character development, Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam’s Barbar resemble those of Ibn Ḥabīb’s. They attack, form alliances, rebel, or fall under the command of a particular leader or authority.⁶³ They are typecast as angry adversaries, irrational rebels, and renegades who cannot be trusted, even if they become Muslim. These Barbar are products of tales by the veterans of the western conquests, as they play the part of the antagonists in the stories of the heroic Arab generals such as ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’ and Mūsā b. Nuṣayr.

On two occasions, Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam refers to specific Barbar subgroups: the Luwāṭa and the Anbiya.⁶⁴ The author gives no specific information about them beyond their approximate location in the southern regions. It is difficult to know from the text whether “Barbar” was added to their name because of some sociocultural characteristic, because they were seen as an adversarial politico-military force, or merely as a way of identifying them to his audience as such. Ultimately, adding the Barbar tag onto the names of northwest African tribes identifies them without explanation.

BARBAR CAPTIVES AND SLAVES

Many northwest Africans in the Maghrib integrated dominant Arab families as clients (*mawālī*). As client, they came to accept the ways of those Arabs who settled in the region. Naturally, Arabic sources tend to mention the names of clients who were closer to the Arabs and their politics. However, as the continued existence of powerful non-Arab tribes in the Maghrib clearly shows, clientage

63. Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 198 13; 199 3, 9, 15; 200 2, 14; 201 12, 17; 204 16; 205 1; 207 17; 208 12; 213 17; 214 3, 14; 217 22; 218 2, 4, 5, 8 (unclear), 20; 219 1 (copyist addition?), 13, 17; 220 5, 11; 222 10, 223 1, 8; 225 2, 5.

64. Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 170, 198.

was not the only type of relation that developed between the Arabs and those they conquered.

Medieval Arabic sources agree that the Arab conquests also involved the enslavement of a great number of northwest Africans. Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam is very consistent in mentioning the number of captives and slaves the victorious Arabs obtained from the defeated. If one assumes that the numbers given are accurate representations, they would be staggering indeed. For example, the author cites this report:

“We were told by ‘Abd al-Malik b. Maslama, and al-Layth b. Sa’d that when Mūsā b. Nuṣayr [d. 716-7] raided the Maghrib he sent his son Marwān at the head of an army and [Marwān] captured 100,000. Then he sent his nephew at the head of another army and he too captured 100,000. And so al-Layth was asked, “who are they?” and he answered: the Barbar.”⁶⁵

From the inception of the conquests, Arab generals such as ‘Amr b. al-‘Ās required that the defeated pay the tax imposed on non-Muslims (*jizya*) by selling their sons and daughters.⁶⁶ The status of these slaves as non-Muslims was crucial since, at least in theory, no Muslim was to be enslaved.

Many of these “Barbar” were sent to Egypt and then onward to other regions. References to Barbar slaves or servants abound. However, given the gradual and slow imposition of Arab domination in the Maghrib and the conversion of at least some Barbar, the “slave moment” would have begun after the fall of Carthage in 698 and ended around the rebellions of the 730s and 740s. Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam mentions that during the rule of the Umayyad ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 717-20), “there remained [in Ifrīqiya] not a single

65. Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 204. More conservatively, al-‘Uṣfurī reports that the number of captives was 20,000. See Khalīfa b. Khayyāt al-‘Uṣfurī (d. 854), *Ta’rīkh Khalīfa b. Khayyāt*, Akram Ḍiyā’ al-‘Umarī ed., (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1977), 278-9.

66. Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 170. See also al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān*, 1: 265.

Barbar who had not become Muslim.”⁶⁷ One may see the events of the 730s as a rebellion triggered by the illegal raiding by Arabs as well as an indication of the importance of the slave trade to the dominant Arabs in the Maghrib.⁶⁸

One wonders about the impact of the slave trade between the Maghrib and the Mashriq on the production of the chronicles, especially since these most often include references to the enslavement of thousands of Barbar after a battle, a seditious act, or betrayal of a legal agreement. All of these were valid reasons to enslave them, because they demonstrated their true character, belying their superficial conversion.⁶⁹

In the Mashriq, the naming of slaves from the Maghrib involved the addition of their “origin” (*nisba*). The preferred *nisba* seems to have been “al-Barbarī.” When used to refer to individuals in the Maghrib, “al-Barbarī” was appended to a tribal *nisba*, functioning like a signal or tag to an eastern, rather than western, audience. The difference is worth emphasizing here because medieval authors tend to take it for granted.

Like modern labels, which identify commodities, “Barbarī” described the slave, implied that he or she had certain qualities, and influenced the price. For instance, legal sources have recorded cases where the buyer of a slave girl complained that he had purchased her with the understanding that she was a Barbariya but then discovered that she was not. The opinions of the prominent jurists Mālik b. Anas (d. 795) and Sahnūn b. Sa‘īd (d. 854-5) demonstrate the existence of a fount of “common knowledge” about the dif-

67. Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 213. See also al-Balādhurī (d. 892), *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān*, 1: 265; al-‘Uṣfurī, *Ta’rīkh*, 323. ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz asked the Arabs who had a female slave from the Luwāṭa to ask for her hand from her father or return her to him according to the treaty signed by both sides. ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s fiscal policy eliminated differences between Arabs and non-Arabs.

68. The explicit link between slavery and rebellion is made by al-‘Uṣfurī, *Ta’rīkh*, 380.

69. The use of “conversion” as a concept to characterize earlier political alliances may itself be anachronistic.

ferentiation between slaves in the markets. They also show that the Arabs who purchased slaves had a predilection for the Barbar.⁷⁰ In describing the case, the author describes the theft and “illegal” enslavement of freed Barbar in the Mashriq, perhaps because of their higher price they commanded.

Furthermore, these mercantile Barbar identify the origin of the commodity but say little about the social or tribal affiliation of the individual. No slave was described as belonging to the Zanāta or Luwāta, for instance. By definition, slaves did not “have” tribes. Moreover, Arab men had an incentive to have children from non-Arab slaves who lacked tribal affiliation because they had no kin who could claim part of the inheritance. Men who attempted to guarantee that the property they accumulated would remain with their kin group preferred slaves for those reasons.⁷¹ Obviously, the majority of Arabs had fewer means. Their relations with northwestern Africans, although less clearly known, did not necessarily exclude formal marriage.

If slaves did not have tribal affiliations, at least some had marketable skills, such as writing and accounting, which allowed them to gain social prominence as individuals. The influence of Hammād al-Barbarī at the court of the ‘Abbāsīd caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786-809) exemplifies this phenomenon.⁷² The “Barbarī” origin, and thus special slave status (*umm walad*), of the mother of the ‘Abbāsīd al-Manṣūr (r. 754-775) is also remembered in the chronicles. The social visibility of these famed slaves, or former slaves, accounts for the repeated references to them as Barbar; hence, the application of this label was not automatically a way to disparage someone. Certainly, the slave merchants could only benefit from the existence of

70. Ṣaḥnūn b. Sa‘īd, *al-Mudawwana al-kubrā li al-Imām Mālik b. Anas*, (Beirut: Dār Sā dir, 19--?), 10:309.

71. Ṣaḥnūn b. Sa‘īd, *al-Mudawwana*, 10:309.

72. See Al-Ya‘qūbī, Aḥmad b. Abī Ya‘qūb, *Tārīkh*, 2 vols., M. Th. Houtsma ed., (Leiden: Brill, (1883) 1969), 2: 498, 499; al-Balādhurī (d. 892), *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān*, 1: 58, 61.

such stellar exemplars that ultimately “proved” and confirmed the high quality of Barbar slaves.

The memory of these individuals’ Barbar “origin” also points to the more systematic forgetting of the lineages of tens of thousands of people living in the Mashriq. In other words, this points to the absence of specifically “Barbar” political parties and “communities,” such as armies or separate neighborhoods, in the east, contrary to the social conditions in al-Andalus – and perhaps in Aghlabid Sicily and Ifrīqiya as well. The difference is crucial. The conversion of the Barbar slaves to Islam in the east led to their gradual social “disappearance” there, whereas the politics in the west led to their constitution as a differentiated social group.⁷³

In the same light, legal sources such as *al-Muwatta* by Sahnūn b. Saʿīd (d. 854) are richer than scholars have realized. They include information about the legal difference between the Arabs who are known by their fathers and tribes (*nasab*) and non-Arabs who are not. Such an idea takes for granted the integration of the non-Arabs into the Muslim polity and their legal standing as clients (*mawālī*) or former slaves. Examples of defamation suits demonstrate the legal difference between a Barbarī slave and a Barbarī free Muslim who can press charges.⁷⁴ They also show how the preferential treatment of Arabs created distinctions between new Muslims and thus conferred a new meaning upon the category Barbar.

The lack of tribal affiliation of the Barbar in the east could not have been meaningless given that the issue of the lineages of the Arabs were of utmost political importance given Umayyad and anti-Umayyad, and subsequently ‘Abbāsīd and anti-‘Abbāsīd politics. As explained previously, this period witnessed coalitions of various groupings. Some of them were prevalently Arab, or conversely, mostly anti-Arab in character. Others, however, were based on alliances of Arabs and non-Arabs. The various ideological positions

73. Evidently, they did not completely disappear from learned knowledge.

74. See §227 and §232 in vol. 15.

they supported shaped the political scene and informed intellectual production. These struggles, known collectively as “*shu‘ūbiya*,” also explain why early Arabic authors have the tendency to inform their readers that the Kutāma or Sanhāja were “Barbar.” The addition of the moniker, or tagging, is part of *shu‘ūbiya* politics. It played a crucial part in reinforcing the Arab way of classifying peoples and tribes.

Furthermore, since the conversion of the slaves led to their immediate freedom, slave owners were not always eager to accept the conversion of their slaves. Hence, while the Barbar were valued slaves, they were also disparaged lest they claim equal status. Al-Bukhārī (810-870) included in his collection of statements and deeds of the prophet Muḥammad (*ḥadīth*) a number of unreliable and spurious ones. Among these, one captures the anxieties of slave owners in the early Islamic period: “I heard the prophet say that the faith of “al-Barbarī” does not go beyond his throat.”⁷⁵

Another aspect of the slave status of the Barbar in the Mashriq is the attitude of the learned and pious men who wrote many of the sources still extant. Another spurious *ḥadīth* states that the prophet said that “there are seventy parts to foul; sixty nine belong to the Barbar, and one to the *jinn* and men.”⁷⁶ These types of statements about the low moral qualities of the Barbar, definitely espoused by Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam,⁷⁷ are complementary to the descriptions of Barbar slave girls as being the best entertainers. The price of a single Barbar slave girl was reported to be 1,000 dinars.⁷⁸ Slavery and ideas about slaves among Arabs of property shaped the Arabs’ attitudes towards the Barbar, especially in this early period.

75. Al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-ta’rīkh al-kabīr*, (Haydarabad: Maṭba‘at Jam‘iyat Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-Uthmāniya, 1941) 4 vols in 8, vol. 4, part 2, § 3389, 878.

76. Ibn ‘Abd-al-Ḥakam, 287.

77. In the first page of his *Futuh*, the author cites a statement which describes the world as a bird and the Maghrib as its ugliest part, the tail.

78. Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 220.

More generally, preferences among wealthy Arabs for slaves from particular regions led to the formulation of a specific ideology tied to this activity and this period. The slave trade stemming from the conquests brought to the Mashriq individuals and groups new to the region. Their integration into the society produced ideas about human difference according to which the Arabs, as slave owners, belonged to the top of the social hierarchy. It is important not to confuse this ideology associated with medieval slavery with the modern concept of race. As I have also shown, the eventual integration of the descendants of slaves and their melting away into the general populace, as well as the drying up of the slave trade after the conversion and independence of slave-producing regions, are some obvious differences between modern and medieval practices. The incorporation of modern racial ideologies into the interpretation of medieval processes is sufficiently problematic to warrant separate treatment.

ANCESTORS TWICE REMOVED

As mentioned above, medieval authors fitted eastern and then western Barbar into a discourse of origins which assumed a biblical vision of the world.⁷⁹ Following this established practice, Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 871) recounts one of the most popular origin stories associated with the Barbar by fitting his narrative into a biblical referential universe:

“The Barbar were in Falastīn (Palestine) and Jālūt (Goliath) was their king. When the prophet Dāwūd (David) killed the

79. A more thorough examination is found in Maya Shatzmiller, “Le Mythe d’origine Berbère: Aspects historiographiques et sociaux,” *Revue de l’Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, No. 35, (1983), 147. Cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, 1: 206, 207, 210, 604; Ibn Khordādhbeh (d. 912), *al-masālik wa’l mamālik*, 80, 91.

latter, the Barbar left in direction of the Maghrib until they reached Lūbiya and Marāqīya”⁸⁰

The melting away of the distant past into mythological time and the concomitant collapse of linear time typically mark these origin stories. More importantly, medieval origin stories assume a biblical chronology, which organizes time from Adam to the present with Noah being an important node, a second genetic moment. According to this view, Noah was a true patriarch.

In asserting such a view, medieval authors could not, and did not, believe that any particular people were “indigenous” to a particular geographic region. The idea was not germane to their vision of the world and its past. The earth was empty before the settlement of known peoples, and thus all of them were migrants who came to the land after the Biblical flood. As a rule, ninth-century authors did not diverge from this general view: all of humanity was native to heaven, then after the fall came to possess guardianship of the earth. In other words, the question of origins was answered fully by the story of the genesis. Interestingly, Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam’s story does not link the Barbar genealogically to Goliath. He was not their father but their king. In fact, his account assumes that the Barbar exiles found Romans and Afāriq already settled in northwestern Africa.

As far as northwest Africans’ own genealogies, the historian al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 897) mentions that some groups of “Barbar” and “Afāriqa” believed they were descendents of Bar b. Nizār, while others believed they belonged to Judhām (Yemenis who migrated to the Shām) and Lakhm (northern Arabs), or Yemeni exiles.⁸¹ Al-Ya‘qūbī also includes genealogies that tie the Barbar to Noah, then enumerating known Barbar tribes, and explaining that each had settled in that particular region of the Maghrib coming from the

80. Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 170.

81. Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 1: 215-6.

east. While these genealogies are not too different from those given by the Arabs, they definitely agree that the Barbar had migrated to the region from the east.

ANCIENT AND INDIGENOUS BERBERS

Categories such as “the Berbers” and “the Arabs” are historical. Their production, maintenance, and reproduction occur under particular circumstances. As circumstances change, so do these categories. Their representation as everlasting and immutable is part of ideological procedures rooted in a present.

In the early medieval period, the Arabs began a process of “Berberization” of northwest Africa, its peoples, and their pasts. Diverse social and political conditions in al-Andalus, al-Maghrib, and the Mashriq, as well as the evolution of literate writing in Arabic in the early medieval period, account for the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the Barbar in Arabic sources. The category was certainly not born fully formed. In fact, two centuries after the first raids, it was not stable, consistent, or uniform.

One of the ways early medieval authors secured the Berberization of northwest Africans was through “tagging.” This procedure classified the Kutāma, Zanāta, and Sanhāja as Barbar. Interestingly, modern historians have also used this technique to “produce” Berbers in ancient times. It is easy enough to show that ancient authors never described the Libyans, Numidians, or Mauretians as Berbers, and that modern historians have done so from the nineteenth century and still do today. This should invite an examination of the specific concerns of modern historians.

While historians have focused on the similarity between Moors and Berbers, the medieval authors’ recognition of the similarity between Arabs and Barbar requires further attention. Indeed, the pos-

sibility that the Arabs may have made the Barbar in their own image is replete with historiographic consequences.

The analysis of the historical sources also shows that as late as the ninth century the idea that the Barbar were the original inhabitants of northwest Africa was not firmly established. Hence, the idea was not the immediate product of the conquest, but rather of the gradual process of Berberization. When modern scholars use concepts such as “indigenous” to refer to the Berbers, they participate in a related, yet different and particularly modern “Berberization” of northwest Africa and its peoples. The success of this process explains, in part, why historians continue to imagine that the Arabs conquered a specific African people called the Berbers.

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