

ARE POSTCOLONIAL NARRATIVES USEFUL IN AL-ANDALUS ARCHAEOLOGY?

¿SON ÚTILES LAS NARRATIVAS POSCOLONIALES EN LA ARQUEOLOGÍA DE AL-ANDALUS?

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Abstract

Archaeological investigations of al-Andalus has become increasingly important in medieval studies, but it has traditionally been left out of the research agenda of European medieval archaeology. This is due to its exoticism and not fitting in well with the construction of a European identity and Spanish national history based on Christian expansion and the “Reconquest” process. At the same time, due to the geographical location and geopolitical position of the Iberian Peninsula within the “West”, scholars working on Islamic archaeology have dedicated less attention to al-Andalus than to other territories. Several factors pose a challenge for current research: the possibility of confrontation with feudal societies; the increasing importance given to technological transfer all along al-Andalus; religious, economic and institutional differences within Christian territories; the importance given in recent years to the identity construction of alterity; and the strong impact that the Andalusí period had on the creation of current landscapes, especially due to irrigated agriculture. This paper tries to reflect on and analyze the historiographical marginality of al-Andalus in both European medieval archaeology and Islamic archaeology. The aim is to understand how we have built an international narrative of the marginality of a territory that is theoretically outside Europe and outside the environment in which classical Islam developed, based mainly on literature produced in English on this matter. In short, this paper poses the question of whether post-colonial theory is a valid category of analysis for al-Andalus.

Keywords: Historiography, al-Andalus, Medieval Archaeology, Islamic Archaeology, Post-colonial theory

Resumen

El estudio arqueológico de al-Andalus se revela con una importancia creciente en las investigaciones medievales, pero ha sido tradicionalmente dejado de lado en la agenda de investigación de la arqueología medieval europea. Esto es debido a su exotismo y a no casar bien con la construcción de la identidad europea ni de la nación española basadas en la expansión del cristianismo y en el proceso de “Reconquista”. Al mismo tiempo, debido a la posición geográfica y geopolítica de la península ibérica dentro del “Occidente”, los académicos trabajando con la arqueología islámica han dedicado menos atención a al-Andalus que a otros territorios. Varios factores plantean un desafío para la investigación actual: la posibilidad de confrontación con las sociedades feudales, la creciente importancia dada a la transferencia tecnológica a través de al-Andalus, las diferencias religiosas, económicas e institucionales con los territorios cristianos, la importancia dada en los últimos años a la construcción identitaria de la alteridad o el fuerte impacto que tuvo el periodo andalusí en la creación de los paisajes actuales, especialmente debido a la agricultura de regadío. Este trabajo trata de reflejar y analizar la cierta marginalidad historiográfica de al-Andalus tanto en la arqueología medieval europea como en los estudios de arqueología islámica. El objetivo es comprender cómo hemos construido la narrativa de la marginalidad de un territorio que está teóricamente fuera de Europa y fuera del escenario en el que se desarrolló el Islam clásico, principalmente desde los estudios en Inglés sobre esta materia. En definitiva, este artículo se pregunta si la teoría poscolonial es una categoría válida de análisis para al-Andalus.

Palabras clave: *Historiografía, al-Andalus, Arqueología Medieval, Arqueología Islámica, teoría post-colonial*

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1. Introduction: Emerging postcolonial approaches to al-Andalus

The term Middle Ages is present today in popular culture as a mixture of kings and knights, castles, holy war, religious fanaticism, economic poverty and *filthy peasants*. Also with a very specific and territorial idea: Europe and the European people in an expansion process. It is an external expansion: territorial, cultural, religious and economic; but also internal, the process of internal development of the societies (Barlett, 1994). It is also the story of how a model of society triumphed throughout expansion and colonisation. The reason for all this is clear: 'Middle Ages' is an historiographical and 'romantic' invention born at the same time as the period ended with the beginning of modernity (Pernoud, 1998; Heers, 1999; Sergi, 2001).

These ideas are comfortable when it comes to Europe. But outside Europe there are serious problems to reflect historical reality with these parameters and chronology, as demonstrated by postcolonial theory (Spivak, 1990). Postcolonial history and particularly postcolonial archaeology (Lydon & Rizvi, 2010), have made us think on how we construct the narratives about the societies studied, and the importance that the alleged economic and cultural hegemony of Europe has in the way we write history (Patterson, 2008; González-Ruibal, 2010). Postcolonialism is, though, an ambiguous term to define, referring both to a contentious interpretation of the modern world (or parts of it) and to a rather diverse set of concepts and research projects which have sought to critique and challenge traditional Eurocentric history and other forms of representation. Indeed, the work of postcolonial scholars mostly provides critical responses to the histories and literatures that have shaped European colonialism since the fifteenth century, but not very often studies for earlier times, with the exception of works about Roman and Late Roman periods (Bowles, 2007; Gardner, 2013; Hingley, 2015). When postcolonial theory is applied to Medieval studies the result is a review of the concept of 'Middle Ages' itself, or the influence of these narratives in the image the world has of the history of Europe (see the studies gathered in Cohen, 2000; Kabir & Williams, 2005; Gaunt, 2009; and in David & Altschul, 2009). These approaches have given us powerful theoretical tools. But, what happens when we study societies inside Europe, and not outside? And what happens when we study historical societies that were not sub-alternate, even they were hegemonic at some point, but have rather been 'marginalized' in the present? We should be able to deconstruct how we do archaeology in Europe the same way in which colonial discourses have been deconstructed. In an excellent Trouillot's quote

Thus the presences and absences embodies in sources (artifacts and bodies that turn as even into fact) or archives (facts collected, thematized, and processed as documents and monuments) are neither neutral nor natural. They are created. As such, they are not mere presences or absences, but mentions or silences of various kinds and degrees. By silences, I mean an active and transitive process: one "silences" a fact or an individual as a silencer silences a gun. One engages in the practice of silencing. Mentions and silences are thus the active, dialectical counterparts of which history is the synthesis (Trouillot, 1995: 48).

In the Caribbean anthropologist's words, in any historiographic analysis it is not only necessary to take into account what is explicitly shown, but what is eliminated, what is not counted - these silences are conscious or unconscious - must also be investigated. As it has been explained by a british medieval archaeologist, John Moreland:

Any attempt to understand the Middle Ages must use the full range of evidence which exists from the past. This evidence must be situated within a theoretical framework which allows the humanity of the past to shine through and which does not smother that past with a reified present. It is true that we choose what does or does not count as evidence (Moreland, 2010: 57).

Without much difficulty it can be recognize that the cultural construct of what is commonly understood by the Middle Ages refers to the societies that occupied the regions of Europe between the 5th and 16th centuries. More or less the area occupied originally by the Carolingian Empire (800-888 AD) and the British Islands and the area beyond to the north and the eastern as a result of the Feudal expansion is the area where the Medieval scenarios are identified. However, the truth is that other regions and historical groups on the fringes of that Europe have been added to that “unique” medieval, such as the Vikings of the Scandinavian region. On the contrary, the Finno-Ugrian tribes of north eastern Russia, the Pechenegs and the Cumans of the steppe lands north of the Black Sea or the Tatars of the khanate of Kazan are marginal in terms of the current research agenda of medieval archaeologists and for the common perception of what the Middle Ages was (Curta, 2010). I must to recognize, however, that this is a very narrow perception informed by films, literature, videogames, national histories etc., but at the same time, to be even more precise, the Greek or the Polish views of the ‘Middle Ages’ is very different to the Scottish or Serbian views.

In a similar way, we can refer specifically to al-Andalus. Islamic Middle Ages in the Iberian Peninsula are seen as a break in comparison with other medieval European histories. One of the most prestigious medievalists of our time, Chris Wickham, pointed this out while saying the Arab period is a crucial focus of debate, for its legitimate position in the seamless narrative of (Christian) Spanish historical memory has always been contested (Wickham, 2005: 40-41) We should also be aware of the fact that Chris Wickham’s *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, which point toward the marginality of al-Andalus studies, notoriously neglected the Balkans and the entire central and eastern parts of the European continent. In my opinion, the origin of this is twofold: First of all, Christianization process at the roof of the Europe identity, which is behind the common idea of the Middle Ages. According to Robert Bartlett (1994), the Latinized establishment of Christendom between 1050 and 1500 has three significant dimension for the subsequent emergence of the European idea: The “ethnicization of Christianity”; secondly there was a “racializing trend” where Christians were defined against “alien peoples”; and thirdly, Christianity was territorialized, which represented it as a spiritual geographic location: Christendom (Bartlett, 1993: 252-253). On the other hand, the second origin of the marginalisation of some aspect of the Middle Ages is that the Nationalism coincided with the birth of archaeology as a discipline, during the 19th century, and still remains in many academic aspects (Kohl, 1998). All those groups cited above, Pechenegs, Cumans, Tatars or Andalusies have in common that none of those “barbarians” could be effectively claimed by any modern national States. In the case of Spain, the narrative about the emergence of the Nation is directly linked to the use of a key historical event, the so-called “Reconquest”. The historical process of the feudal expansion was reinterpreted through romantic historiography and became a key national narrative based on the loss of Spain to the Muslims and its subsequent recovery. Spanish national identity has been built upon this national narrative and the “Reconquest” is considered as the foundational event of the nation (Ríos Saloma, 2011; Hertel, 2015; García-Sanjuán 2020).

A third factor, directly attached to the last one, influences the case of Iberian Peninsula: the Orientalism, it means, the general patronizing Western attitude towards Middle Eastern, Asian and North African societies. According with Edward Said's analysis, the "West" essentializes these societies as static and undeveloped, thereby fabricating a view of Oriental culture that can be studied, depicted, and reproduced in service of imperial power when talking about British, French and North American scholars (Said, 1978). Basically, Said criticised contemporary scholars who perpetuated the tradition of outsider-interpretation of Arabo-Islamic cultures. Even acknowledging that the relationship between Spain (understood as a result of the misnamed Reconquest process) and Islam was not an imperialistic one, and the lack of connections with colonial history -with the exception of the Sahara- has marked the absence of post-colonial theory in Spanish scholars tradition (Omar, 2008: 19), we should recognize that al-Andalus has all the ingredients to project post-colonial discourses both in its (past) history and in its (present) historicity. As pointed out by Fernandez Parrilla (2018), Spanish academia did not pay much attention to Orientalism or Postcolonial studies until very recently. It seems that the postcolonial turn has arrived due to the increasing relevance of Hispanophone literatures and criticism and the political entanglements of colonization and its cultural legacies and interferences (Fernández Parrilla 2018: 12). However, Spanish Orientalism has been a practice almost limited to Arabic studies (Monroe, 1970; Gil, 2009; Marín, 2009; González Ferrín, 2011; López, 2016; Fernández Parrilla, 2018) but the subsequent post-colonial criticism has hardly developed in other fields such as antropological reflections (González Alcantud, 2017; 2018; González & Rojo, 2014) medievalism (exceptions are Altschul, 2009 and García Fernández, 2016); or even Medieval Archeology which is the main focus of this paper. But I agree with Nadia R. Altschul's words:

Postcolonial studies are a timely and intellectual exciting path to transcend the limits of the nationalist 19th-century discipline that still has a hold over medieval studies. As a theoretical field it fosters a complex and layered understanding of the intricacies of medieval Iberia while also offering Ibero-medievalism a means out of insularization and the "critical closet." While it presents us with the challenge of introducing a new critical vocabulary, it also provides us with meaningful ways to communicate with a broader audience and to influence the field by supplementing and redefining it with our insights and disciplinary concerns. Of ethical importance, postcolonial approaches can also foster nuanced recognition of the live connection that our scholarship and medieval Iberia have with the work at large, and prepare us to better understand and challenge the inequalities of our postcolonial present today (Altschul, 2009: 14)

Post-colonial theory is an excellent framework for studying the discourse of otherness, whether of an ideological nature or not, while also providing a wealth of information of how 'Self' or "We" is perceived and represented. In the case of Spanish orientalism, the construction of such discourses is particularly complex due to the nature of the topic under study: al-Andalus, the Arabic name given to those parts of the Iberian Peninsula governed by Muslims at various times in the period between 711 and 1492. Al-Andalus has always had two facets: the real and historical which ended in 1492, the other figurative and symbolic which has survived until today (González Alcantud, 2017). Al-Andalus is yet an alien and peripheral society in the perception of what the medieval societies were mainly because it was an Islamic society within (today's) Western Europe (Guichard, 1976). From 1492 onwards, at least until the nineteenth century, that logic of equivalence between Christendom and Europe, was inherited, elaborated and represented as self-identity in the modern/colonial distinctions

instituted and imagined between Our and the otherness. In Spain, the Islamic past was not incorporated into a nationalistic discourse at the time the archaeology was developed as a scientific discipline and the discussion about the essence of Spain was originated (Díaz-Andreu, 1996). During the 19th century, the liberal tradition always incorporates the artistic and scientific achievements of the Iberian Muslims as an integral part of the national heritage and this approach crystallized in the notion of “Muslim Spain”, which allowed integrating the Islamic period into the national historical narrative (García-Sanjuán, 2020: 140). Different reasons like Christian acculturation hegemony, Francoist censorship exile at this time and more interest in Visigoth or Christian ‘Reconquest’ relegated al-Andalus to an exotic image, close to Orientalism, as it has been explained before.

2. Materials and Methods: justifying a general overview of the archaeological publications on al-Andalus in English

What I propose in the following pages is an analysis based on the general works on al-Andalus archeology that have been written, preferably in English, to reflect on the way in which they are presented. And from there, discuss, as it is indicated in the title of this work, if postcolonial narratives are useful in the archeology of al-Andalus or if perhaps, other frameworks, as marginality, are better to be used. I try to deal with the potentiality of the application of Post-colonial theory to understand the role played by the archaeology of al-Andalus into the current situation of the Medieval Archaeology as a discipline. Despite the fact that this framework has been used in different medieval studies -many of which are cited in this work- we must recognize that there is a notable absence of this type of approach in the main treatises on theory applied to Medieval Archeology. Roberta Gilchrist argued that Post-Colonial theory has begun to influence archaeological discussion of medieval migration (Gilchrist, 2009: 392). But this is an isolated reference on a topic that does not appear in other similar works focuses on theory and Medieval Archaeology (i.e. Moreland, 2010; Johnson, 2010; McClain, 2013; O’Keeffe, 2018). On the other hand, al-Andalus does not appear included in the main works on Postcolonial Archeology (i.e. Lydon & Rizvi, 2010). Hence the interest aroused by the proposal that I am now making, which, however, is only intended as an introduction to the subject.

Nowadays, the publication of scientific research results is the highest challenge for researchers independently of the kind of science their works belongs. Be able to be in touch with the academic world and its followers seems to be a fundamental requirement to stand out into the academic environment and also to communicate research to the broadest international audience. Undoubtedly, and without going into moral considerations about whether this is right or not, English is the language that foster great opportunities to transmitter agents of a worldwide culture focused in a common goal. The impact of research as a factor able to improve the different societies cannot be ignored, and, at the same time, this language become to be essential for the development of any scientific career even when it is framed in very local contexts, as is often the case with the social sciences. Different scholars have been concerned with the sociolinguistic consequences of the use of English as a language of scientific communication, including the social sciences (Tapiador, 2004; Veiga, 2008). One of the main problems faced by those of us who use English as a language internationally to communicate research that has a very regional or local basis, as is often the case in History and Archeology, is that we must often give up the small details in favour of more general explanations. This is due to we are often aware that we are addressing audiences that do not have to know

the particularities of historiography at the local level. This occurs, above all, in articles published in high-impact journal. The enormous quantity and variety of works published in English on the archeology of al-Andalus makes it impossible to handle here an accurate statistic that could give a sample of all that has been said previously. Nor can we stop now to sketch an explanation of why so much work on al-Andalus is in English, but perhaps the role of Hispanic studies in the Anglophone world, which is evident particularly in medieval history in the United States, has a large part of responsibility.

Different is what happens with manuals or synthesis works (even when they are published in journals) that present themselves as general reflections on the state of the art of the discipline. They should be work that mark a turning point bringing together all the partial works elaborated to date and addressing a series of ideas that frame the general evolution of the social science addressed, allow us to carry out a historiographic examination like the one here is proposed. And in this way it is possible to carry out an analysis of the theoretical postulates that underlie the way of doing basic research, such as applied research or the necessary transfer and dissemination.

What I propose in the following pages is a very preliminar and general analysis based on the general works on al-Andalus archeology that have been written, preferably in English, to reflect on the way in which they are presented. As far as I know, it is the first attempt to do a similar approach. The idea is to make an introduction to the theme analysing how al-Andalus archaeology has been introduced and explained into the most general Medieval Archaeology. And from there, discuss, as we indicated in the title of our work, if postcolonial narratives are useful in the archeology of al-Andalus. Obviously, a work of these characteristics, in the space that I have here, forces us to be highly synthetic and to select only some of the most general works on archeology of al-Andalus, despite the effort I make so that my reflection covers everything published in English on the subject, at least in recent years.

3. Archeology of al-Andalus: on the fringes of medieval archeology

As I try to argue on the next pages, 'Marginality' seems to be the best concept to describe the historiographical situation in regards with the Archaeology of al-Andalus. Maybe it is a relative concept, because to be marginal depends of what we consider as hegemonic, but it serves us to focus attention on those lands or topics that are presented or ignored in the medieval archaeology studies we are going to discuss. I see 'marginality' as a better term than 'coloniality' because it refers to territories not only outside Europe, but also inside. In addition, marginality is a complex concept that allows us to adopt a variety of different perspectives (Svensson & Gardiner, 2009). Without being exhaustive, four possibilities are presented here:

- Historiographical marginality is due to a declining interest in this society and this 'country' (al-Andalus) because it is not considered a direct ancestor of our present society. Or at least it is not from the perspective of the dominant cultural (and even politically) point of view. Because the importance given to the cultural and ideological history has marginalized al-Andalus by not considering this history into the idea of Europe and its past. It can be appreciated, by opposition, when Moroccan migrants of those of Moroccan descent in Spain from the 1960s onwards have identified strongly with al-Andalus (Luque, 2017; Rogozen-Soltar, 2017; Calderwood, 2018).

- Marginality allow us to refer to those areas whose environmental conditions are not considered optimal, or where production quotas are not high, or it lies at a distance from the political, social or economic core. This notion adopts a variety of different perspectives arising from the different ecosystem and countries in the Middle Ages. This may mark the type of studies to be done, for example for the study of the relationships between human communities and their environments (Malpica, 2012).
- The concept of archaeological marginality also refers to the choice of research topics that we, as archaeologists, do. The choice of themes has to be compared with other archaeologies from other periods in the Iberian Peninsula itself, and with the themes chosen and presented by other medieval archaeologies in the rest of Europe.
- Finally, the investigation of al-Andalus also remains sidelined because we have not incorporated all the critical conceptual and methodological baggage of the last ten years theoretical proposal, including the postcolonial approaches themselves from which this notion of marginality is born. In part this is because we are still building the data. The archaeology of al-Andalus can be considered partially young not because the number of archaeological diggings or the studies of pottery, faunal, metal remains or paleoenvironmental research but due to the impact of this studies into the international audience, with the exception of its architecture (Anderson & Rosser-Owen, 2007).

Why I say al-Andalus is in the periphery of Medieval European and Islamic studies? I indicate a few pages before that the idealization of the general picture of what the Middle Ages in Europe was has various elements that made difficult to consider any Islamic society as part of it, if anything, as the otherness in confrontation. Al-Andalus is most of the time depicted as an Oriental culture, clearly different to the historically dominant idea of feudal Europe. Perhaps without taking into account that the homogeneity with which it is intended to characterize the millennium from the 5th to the 15th century was never in any way unique. There is no place for al-Andalus in this idea, though when it comes to give an European perspective we are lucky enough to have a chapter on Byzantium and Islam (with few words on the Iberian Peninsula, but we will come to that later).

Until very recently, when someone was looking for al-Andalus in 'historical archaeology' or 'medieval archaeology' handbooks it may appear as a difficult task (for example Funari, Hall & Jones 1999; Gerrard, 2003; or Burnouf et al. 2009). I am not referring to those books with misleading titles (proceedings of some congress about historical archaeology where a theoretical paper may be found with some contents on Africa or Pacific islands) but to actual Medieval Archaeology books from a supposedly European perspective (Quirós, 2009). The famous One World Archaeology Series, from the 1986 World Archaeology Congress edited by Peter J. Ucko, contains highly interesting books with topics from all around the world with a remarkable absence of any mention to the Iberian Peninsula (<http://www.worldarchaeologicalcongress.org>). Timothy Champion in his concept, boundaries and cultural definition of Europe set it out clearly:

After the collapse of the Roman Empire and the fragmentation of political power, the prevailing perception of the world centred on the notion of Christendom, for it was Christianity that provided the unifying ideology and the institutions for transmitting it in the early medieval world (Champion, 1990: 80).

For Champion and many others, Europe is a mixture of traditions that melt in Christianity. It was exposed thirty years ago, but it is a persistent topic that finds it difficult to change, although somehow its updating in the 21st century is inevitable. We should not forget, though, that the Visigoths converted to Christianity and that they happen to be the very early medieval population in the Iberian Peninsula. In the same book, David Austin came up with 'the "proper study" of medieval archaeology', an interesting study of how medieval archaeology relates to the documentary sources. But he states 'I can speak only for medieval archaeology in north western Europe, and the further I get from the shores of Britain the less sure of my understanding I become' (Austin, 1990: 11). The same happens for Gerrard in his book *Medieval archaeology. Understanding traditions and contemporary approaches*, claiming 'a coherent map of how and why later medieval archaeology developed, to tell the story of its origins, how it matured and to explain how contemporary approaches have evolved', but unlike this 'the book is concerned primarily with events in England, Scotland and Wales' (Gerrard, 2003: XII).

Very recently, the current idea of Europe has made many countries appear in the European map of the Middle Ages (for example Davis, Halsall and Reynolds, 2006), but there is still a need for integration. Yet, the question is always unanswered: is al-Andalus part of that idea of Europe in the Middle Ages? A great effort to trespass old limits in the conceptualization of the Middle Ages, trying to include all territories of the current idea of Europe (i.e. Europe Union) can be found in the recent two volumes handbook *The archaeology of Medieval Europe* (Graham-Campbell & Valor, 2007; Carver & Klápšte, 2011). Most topics are included in the book though not all in the same way and actually with a lack of cohesion. There is a plenty of coverage of al-Andalus in both volumes, including many vignettes on cities, agriculture and pottery. The effort is commendable although we expect better results in the future because there still being important absences. Of course, to be honest, it must be into consideration that these types of books are dependent on who is willing to write for them. Many who could have written on topics from other European countries refused or did not have time. In other words these books should not be seen as comprehensive overviews, but rather as the possibilities and limitations dealt with by the editors. But since this phenomenon repeats itself, and is not an exception, we must examine it as a fact. Two examples can be seen in the second and third chapter. In the second one, called 'peoples and environments' little is said about the south and not really bound with the northern stories. In the third, 'Rural settlement', there is not a single line about al-Andalus. Jan Klápšte and Anne Nissen Jaubert could have got into this area in which rural archaeology studies have increased in importance over the last fifteen years or more (Klápšte & Nissen-Jaubert, 2007). The same scheme could have been used: building trends, economic spaces, religious ones... questioning, for example, why many areas went back to building in perishable materials while the Islamic regions kept a different trend. If the topics are the same, why not include everything in the debate?

European Medieval archaeology is now a subject which integrates (more or less) all territories across Europe. This is evidence since the existence of MERC- the Medieval European Research Community- and the fact that it represents a substantial branded strand at EAA annual meetings -the bigger European Association of Archaeologists congress- (more information about both on this links: <https://www.e-a-a.org/> and https://www.e-a-a.org/EAA/Navigation_Communities/MERC.aspx). But it seems to be difficult to to make a tie and coherent discourse using data from all countries, and manuals about Medieval Archaeology by each country are more common than

any general overview about Europe in general or any specific topic at this time. As far as I know there is a vast amount of information from many countries, divided by State or Nation, despite the fact that they did not existed during the Middle Ages or their territories can be recognized as unique with many difficulties (examples can be provide for Italy, Poland, Germany or Portugal and obviously Spain among others: Gelichi, 1997; Buko, 2008; Fehring, 2014; Tente, 2018; Valor & Gutiérrez, 2014). Al-Andalus, in particular, has produced a wide array of literature on most topics being comparable with the rest of the European studies: transitioning from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages, rural and urban settlements, landscape, housing techniques and so forth (the bibliography is too large to be summarized here, but a good selection of studies is available in Valor & Gutiérrez, 2014). If we look at the main problems discussed in Europe, a way can be easily found to bind together all the information.

According to Anderson, Sholkmann and Kristiansen in *Medieval Archaeology* there are three main fields:

- the formation of the medieval world, i.e. the transition from Late Antique or prehistoric structures and societies to those of the European Middle Ages
- the developments and changes to the conditions that existed during the Middle Ages, related to structures, societies and material culture; and
- the transformation from the late medieval to the post-medieval world. (Anderson, Sholkmann & Kristiansen, 2007: 23-24)

In all fields integration seems (and is actually) possible. It has been done by historians like Chris Wickham for the Early Middle Ages (Wickham, 2005). In fact, the transition debate has been a hard one in the last thirty years but involving mainly Italy (and surroundings) and the 'barbaric' populations. The *Mohammed and Charlemagne* issue that Henri Pirenne raised some 80 years ago (Pirenne, 1937) not to be forgotten since changes in Europe can be understood from a wider perspective including archaeological perspectives (Hodges & Whitehouse, 1983; McCormick, 2001). In fact, trade and exchanges are two of the elements changing historiography in the last decade, and one in which archaeology has much to say: introduction of new technologies, changes in the way of producing, knowledge transmission and so on. Something that has worked very well for the transition period and it has been done for the early and late Middle Ages (see for example García & Fábregas, 2010). Moreover, it must to be mention that the transition is often connected with the 'frontier' and the Christian conquests, which have begun to be studied more comprehensively from an archaeological perspective (see for example García-Contreras et al. 2020; for a postcolonial theory applied to frontiers see: Naum, 2010).

4. The archaeology of al-Andalus, an Islamic Archaeology?

The issue with al-Andalus has been not only neglected and marginalized by European medieval archaeology but also by, in our opinion, the so-called, 'Islamic archaeology' (Insoll, 1999; Millwright, 2010; Eiroa, 2011). The truth is that the Iberian Peninsula is far cultural or geographically from both the European core of feudalism and from the Islamic side of the Mediterranean Sea.

It is quite difficult to define what Islamic archaeology is. For Millwright it is 'historical labels indicating that the subjects in question deal with aspects of the past in regions where the ruling elite has professed the faith of Islam' (Millwright, 2010: 6).

In other words, it shouldn't be archaeology of religion. Or, at least, the religion must be understood through its embedding in daily routines rather than by the study of the ritual aspects only (Insoll, 2004). In this way, and following Carvajal's words, 'Islamization can be conceptualized as the change in social conditions brought about by the inclusion in any acknowledged form of Islam of a significant social segment of the regional population' (Carvajal, 2013: 111). Those definitions are very similar to the one used in the recently launched *Journal of Islamic Archaeology*, publication in which "Islamic archaeology" refers to the archaeological study of Islamic societies, polities, and communities, wherever they are found. It may be considered a type of "historical" archaeology, in which the study of historically (textually) known societies can be studied through a combination of "texts and tell" (<https://journals.equinoxpub.com/index.php/JIA>). Furthermore, there is also another concept, 'Islamicate archaeology', popularised by Chloe Duckworth, David Govantes-Edwards and others in the Anglophone world (Duckworth & Govantes-Edwards, in press), which has been one of the main reactions to classic 'Islamic archaeology' consideration, defended by archaeologists as Corisande Fenwick (2020). The general argument is that religious identity here maps onto social identity, which is also the case with 'medieval Jewish archaeology'. In short, how could it be otherwise, the use of the label with which we decided to name the archaeological practice is loaded with meaning.

Although most archaeologists would answer positively to the question "is the archaeology of al-Andalus part of Islamic Archaeology?", for the archaeologists of al-Andalus the answer is less clear (Carvajal, 2014: 332). For example, Jorge Eiroa argues that the tag of Islamic archaeology should simply be dropped, as it is reminiscent of an obsolete and Eurocentric perspective (Eiroa, 2011: 188).

Islamic archaeology was born out of an art-historical approach to monumental buildings. Originally, for most of the history of Islamic archaeology, it has been conducted overwhelmingly by non-Muslims, often from nations with a political and sometimes an openly colonial interest in the region which contained the archaeological subject matter of their choice (Hull, 2014).

It is arguable the Islamic archaeology has been particularly susceptible to the influence of the colonial thought and practice, with Islam and its influence regarded as an exotic "other", separate and distinct from the majority of those investigating it, and depicted in opposition to an apparently superior "West" (Hull, 2014: 5615).

Islamic archaeology came relatively late to the attentions of European and American archaeologists. Although a rise in Orientalist literature and study had begun during the early eighteenth century, it was not until the end of the 19th century that significant research avenues and funding structures for Islamic art, architecture, and archaeology developed (Vernoit 1997: 1-2). The development of Islamic archaeology in Spain had a close relationship with art historians, arabists and restorer architects of the monumental heritage. All this, together with the taste for the orientalist aesthetics of the decorations, for example in ceramics, determined the type of archeology of al-Andalus that was carried out until the middle of the 20th century (Cressier, 2009; García, 2018). After the Francoist regime, during the last decades the discipline has rapidly matured and it is being made key contribution to the study of medieval society. The new way to understand the discipline was from the 1970s and 1980s heavily influenced by French researchers like Pierre Guichard, André Bazzana, Patrice Cressier or Philippe Sénac among others, at the time that internally the Medieval Archaeology was growth very quickly. At this time, the debate, which had until then hinged upon issues of national identity, shifted to a discussion of the role of feudal versus "tribal"

or segmentary structures in medieval history of Iberian Peninsula. This was primarily the result of Pierre Guichard's work, strongly inspired by the structuralist theories in social anthropology (Guichard, 1976), which had an immediate effect on the development of medieval archaeology, given that the refocused research on rural settlement patterns including the study of castles, rural sites, pottery production and productive areas, mainly by irrigation (Glick & Kirchner, 2000; Carvajal & Jiménez, 2011; Eiroa, 2012; Carvajal, 2014; García, 2018).

It seems to be clear that archaeology of al-Andalus has nothing to envy other European medieval archaeologies, in terms of development, projects or results. However, the accounts of Rogers in 1974, Vernot in 1997, Insoll in 1999 and Milwright in 2010 to mention the main international treaties regarding the archaeology of Islam although well informed in some areas (especially the Near East central area or the African lands) lacks a wider insight on al-Andalus. Its has been attempted more recently with general works written in English by Meulemeester, 2005; Anderson & Rosser-Owen, 2007; Carvajal, 2014; Valor & Gutiérrez, 2014; but not many more can be included, leaving aside papers concerning very particular aspects. In this case, cultural differences cannot be the matter of this absence, nor the data available. Is it then our own peripheral approach? Does al-Andalus historiography try to 'marginalize' itself to be more European? Or could it be a matter of language? Florin Curta argues that the amazing development of Medieval Archaeology in Spain is poorly known outside Spain because no survey has been published at the time we wrote his words (Curta, 2011: 377). Despite the efforts of Spanish academics to integrate into the international scientific domain mostly through English, there does not seem to be the same effort towards Spanish or other languages, which affects the impact and integration of studies on al-Andalus, such as has been pointed out by Jorge Eiroa (2011). On the same basis, it can be pointed out that there is limited engagement with North African medieval archaeology from Spanish archaeologists, but much more with Italian, British and French medieval archaeology. So we can argue that archaeology of al-Andalus is not marginal but marginalized by the general Islamic Archaeology Historiography, in the same way that has been considered exotic by the most general European Medieval Archaeology. At least, this has been the case until well into the beginning of the 21st century, when this whole situation is beginning to change.

5. Final remarks: claiming post-colonial and post-marginal narratives for al-Andalus

In 2004, José María Aznar, the former prime minister and member of the Conservative Popular Party (PP), gave a lecture at Washington's Georgetown University. His party's defeat in the election in favour of the Socialist came three days after 191 Madrid railway commuters were killed in the West's worst Islamic terror attack since September 11. To understand the circumstances surrounding that defeat, Aznar told the Georgetown students, they should wind the clock back to 711. This, Spanish school-children are meant to know, was the moment when a Berber called Tarik Bin Ziyad crossed the Mediterranean with a small army and began a swift "invasion" of Iberia. So, according with Aznar, Spain's problem with Al-Qaida starts in the eighth century, when a Spain recently invaded by the Moors refused to become just another piece in the Islamic world and began a long battle to reconquer its identity. As Alejandro García Sanjuán explains, who alludes to and remembers exactly the same anecdote reproducing Aznar's verbatim words, this "Aznarian" vision of 711 as a proto-terrorist act is a contemporary and updated version of one of the key concepts of the classical

paradigm of the *Reconquista*: the historical illegitimacy of al-Andalus since the beginning (García Sanjuán, 2018: 133-134). Aznar's words synthesize, to a great extent, a traditional vision of the Middle Ages based on a cultural confrontation that is in part a consequence of a colonial vision of the medieval history of the Iberian Peninsula.

This paper has sought to evaluate two strands of theoretical archaeology of al-Andalus that have emerged over the last years, postcolonialism and marginality. Certainly, there are other themes which have gradually become integrated into the mainstream of general Islamic Archaeology, such as Identity, minorities, cultural changes, landscape perception... but these two perhaps most encapsulate shifting ideas about the kind of archaeology we are dealing of. All theories have strengths and weaknesses, and the wider literature on both postcolonialism and marginality is itself replete with divergent views, critiques and counter-arguments. Thus, it should be no surprise that certain problems of coherence, particularly to do with reconciling description, analysis and judgement, and the handling of multiple scales of phenomena, become manifest not so much in the work of individuals, but in the big picture of where al-Andalus archaeology is heading. Fragmentation of narratives about the western medieval Islamic world is in some sense desirable, and indeed inevitable, as we increasingly unpick the great complexity of that world. Critics of theoretical archaeology sometimes point to the perception that new ideas or terminologies rarely seem to make much difference to the bread-and-butter descriptive categories of empirical data (Johnson, 2010: 224) but this is really only a symptom of the level of inertia that has accumulated in all areas of archaeology over the last century or more. Really significant change in the practice and theory of archaeology takes patience and demands that sub-disciplines with a broad range of evidential resources play their part in theory-building at every level, from site formation studies to analyses of major phenomena like, for example, the Islamicization or Islamicizations (Carvajal, 2013).

As I tried to show in the previous pages, «Marginality» in al-Andalus is in fact more historiographical than real, exactly the same that has been argued for North Africa especially during early Islam period (Garcea 2005; Corisande, 2020: 1-6). It depends entirely upon the perception of where the «centre» -or the main areas- is (Svensson & Gardiner, 2009: 23). In general, classic medievalism sees the expansion of feudalism and the spread of Christianity as the heart of these studies. The categorization of medieval times emerges, basically, from the ideology of the nineteenth century and until the end of the twentieth century we have not changed many of these topics: feudalism, Christian expansion, origins of the nations or Orientalism and exotic Islamic arts. Something similar happens for Islamic Archaeology which in many case still being written under the similar precepts of those defined prior the mid 20th century: essentially art-historical, set by western Orientalist, and continuing to define Islam as a decisive break with the past and a divisive influence on the Mediterranean and wider region (i.e. Anderson & Rosser-Owen, 2007). I can cite an example that shows this very clearly from the strict archaeological point of view. After several years closed for renovation, in 2014 the National Archaeological Museum located in Madrid reopened. In its permanent exhibition, al-Andalus appears to be a break from the normal course of events in the history of Spain, showing only exotic elements of its architecture or its decorative arts as it has been analyzed in detail in detail (García-Contreras, 2015).

All these have marginalized the archaeology of al-Andalus from the outside, while from the inside, researchers have marginalized some issues giving priority to others. In fact, the archaeology of al-Andalus could very well be compared with other archaeologies. For example, with the archaeology of Byzantium in many ways, from the exaggerated preoccupation with cities to the fascination with beautiful *objets d'art* or the influence

of western techniques productions (Lock & Sanders, 1996; Bintliff & Stöger, 2009). The Orientalism that I argue for the current situation in al-Andalus studies definitely exists in the case of Byzantine archaeology, although we must recognize that there is a very rapid change in recent years (Bintliff, 2019). However, in the Greek case, that is less the result of internal (in the case of Spain, nationalist or Francoist) factors, and more the consequence of the imagining (mainly by English-speaking authors) of an exotic space (al-Andalus or Byzantium) to be populated only with selected topics and objects of study (Decker, 2018).

A few years ago, José Cristóbal Carvajal argued that:

The failure of the archaeology of al-Andalus to become a recognised field of academic research is related to the role that it has been forced to play since the development of medieval archaeology in Spain. Instead of developing research directions that take into account multiple lines of evidence, scholars chose to focus on parts of the material record that they thought significant for their narratives. While there is no doubt that some research can be written in this way, it is not a sustainable archaeological strategy in the long term. Hence the first and most fundamental problem of medieval archaeology in Spain is the lack of an autonomous research agenda. Here I wish to emphasise the word 'autonomous' as opposed to 'independent'. I am not contending that medieval archaeologists should be absolutely independent of medieval historians; rather, I am arguing for the creation of a pluridisciplinary research framework. In the field of al-Andalus this has been achieved by orientalists and historians, for example, but archaeologists have not been able to develop the potential of their discipline because they have been subordinated to the research priorities of others. It is important to clarify that the problem here is not so much about establishing barriers between academic disciplines as about bringing them down. In other words, the problem of medieval archaeology is not that it has been practised by historians, but that it has been managed by people who conceived archaeological research as less complex than it actually is (Carvajal, 2014: 329).

In opinion of Antonio Malpica the solution is clear, there shouldn't be an archaeology of Islam in the Middle Ages, but an archaeology of the Middle Ages (Malpica, 2007). In this sense, and forgetting the obvious differences between a feudal society and the mercantile-tributary ones (if we use the marxist terminology initially applied to al-Andalus by Pierre Guichard influenced by Samir Amin's ideas), the historical problems have to be solved by eliminating boundaries, not creating more of them, as Carvajal pointed out. Al-Andalus was part of the Islamic countries in the Middle Ages, and like the feudal ones they were not a single big empire. But they were also part of both the European and North African communities, trading with them, fighting each other, etc. It is our task now to continue the work in this direction and incorporate al-Andalus to the European debate, but taking account that European Middle Ages does not mean one single things and we should take into consideration the big differences between societies before the alleged homogenization that Capitalism has imposed since the 16th century. Date that, not by chance, comes to coincide with the end of al-Andalus in the Iberian Peninsula. In fact, when postcolonial theory had reviewed these ideas about what the Middle Ages were, and had chosen to 'destabilize hegemonic identities' and to 'decenter' Europe (Cohen, 2000; Gaunt, 2009) al-Andalus archaeology was not part of their studies, despite the fact it seems to be a perfect field to develop this kind of approaches. However, al-Andalus archaeologists are also guilty (and here, I am as guilty as anyone) because they rarely have worried about transcending borders and publish in English or participate in international events. This situation is

changing in the last decade (see for example Carvajal, 2014, 2016, Valor & Gutiérrez, 2014), so the situation could be different in a few years.

In a very provocative essay, Kathleen Biddick argued that “a postcolonial society has a historical specificity and density that is not easily translated into premodern worlds” (Biddick, 1998: 250), suggesting thereby that the use of postcolonial theory to analyse medieval text verges on crude anachronism. According with this view, the Middle Ages cannot be postcolonial since the term by definition refers to historical circumstances and to cultures that emerged only after the disintegration of the global empires that were formed after the medieval period. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Middle Ages are often treated by some modern theorists as

an undifferentiated, homogenous “Other,” sometimes simple, innocent, and tolerant, as opposed to complex, knowing, and intolerant; sometimes unremittingly brutal and violent, as opposed to having the potential at least for enlightenment and liberation. For these theorists the Middle Ages are implicitly the marker of a degree zero of alterity (Gaunt, 2009: 161)

Al-Andalus, as an Islamic territory on the West, offers a perfect field to study nationhood roots, hybridities identities, minorities resistances, borders cultural exchanges, oriental essentialism characterizations, States formation processes, different waves of colonization and acculturation, or the role of feudal conquests at the origins of the Modern capitalist world characterization. In short, almost all the topics addressed by postcolonial theory.

That is why I call for post-marginal studies in al-Andalus studies. We do not intend to present all possible studies. It depends on each historian or archaeologist, his/her questions and possibilities into the research programs. But I want to refer to some aspects that must be taken into account in order to renew the historical narratives of al-Andalus:

- We cannot consider the Arab and Berber conquest and colonizations (8th c.) very different from the expansion of the Anglo-Saxons or the Vikings (even though they are not equal societies). We should integrate them in medieval migration studies like the ones done for other parts of Europe (Wickham, 2005). To do this we need to compare historical processes. But compare is not enough without a theoretical background which allows to focus the research.
- From the point of view of social and economic relations, we cannot consider al-Andalus as a marginal area. At least, not all through the Middle Ages. In the Earlier times (9th-11th centuries) or during the Almohad Empire (12th-13th c.), al-Andalus was part of a hegemonic place in Europe and the occidental Mediterranean. Historians that have been already mentioned in this paper, such as McCormick (2001) or Wickham (2005) argued that the Umayyad Caliphate was a sophisticated political and fiscal entity with a more developed economy than any other contemporary European state. Even, when al-Andalus was reduced to a small kingdom in south eastern Iberia (the Nasrid kingdom), its pottery arrived in Italy and England (García, 2011) and not only to the North African Islamic territories. Therefore, we cannot speak of a marginalization when talking about the past itself, but when we refer to the current historical narratives created from the different research agendas.
- Religion seems to be one of the main problematic issues to integrated al-Andalus into the national historical discourses. But according with Tim Insoll (1999) and José Cristobal Carvajal (2013; 2014), archaeology of Islam is not only archaeology

of a religion but the analysis of how the religious dimension of human existence is manifested in the practices of daily life including lived experience of religion. So archaeology of the land called al-Andalus -where were Christians and Jews as minorities as well as Berbers and Arabs- should aspire to understand the connection of belief and practice in historical societies but developing in any case a solid archaeological ground far from the narratives of Islam-Christian confrontation and the victory of the last one as the root of the Spanish Nation and more focuses on economic, social, environmental and heritage values to be comparable with the rest of European and Mediterranean archaeologies.

In conclusion, al-Andalus archaeologists may have a tendency to marginalize their own research not publishing in English or not attending international conferences, but at the same time the look from the outside to the work that has been done in the Iberian peninsula has been quite limited due to Spanish is not a common language of exchange in international medieval archeology forums. Nevertheless, both seem to be changing in recent years. We will need some lead time to re-examine the situation in the light of the analysis we proposed in this paper. In any case, the current projects about al-Andalus are being framed within a European context. We should not forget that most topics can be compared between different societies: Housing structures, productive activities, trade, and so forth.

Fortunately, these new ways of understanding the archaeology of al-Andalus have already started. Thus, with the very same lack of integration for the whole al-Andalus and more towards Europe and the Mediterranean including North Africa. However, we need to understand marginality as a first step to overcome this. From now on, it is a must to start writing a post-marginal narratives when talking about archaeology of al-Andalus.

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