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Dār al-ḥarb in early al-Andalus: a historiographical and legal analysis

The predominant narrative regarding the history of early al-Andalus tells of how the Muslims managed to conquer most of the territory of the Iberian Peninsula, whereas some Christian nuclei resisted in the northern area (what is now Asturias and the Basque country) eventually establishing kingdoms that were free of Muslim control. This narrative was challenged by scholars – such as Mikel de Epalza and María Jesús Rubiera – who argued that for the Muslim conquerors, the north of the Peninsula was also subject territory, as pacts of protection (aman) had been granted to their population and tribute was paid. These lands would thus have had an intermediate status between the ‘land of islam’ and the ‘land of war’. Recent archaeological excavations in Basque territory have also shown the presence of Muslim-style burials, thus challenging previous understandings of the composition of the local population.

In this paper, an analysis of the use of the terms dār al-islām / dār al-ḥarb in the chronicles dealing with the early history of al-Andalus (Umayyad period) will be carried out. The digitalization of such chronicles (the result of a project on the historiography of al-Andalus undertaken by Luis Molina during the past decade) will allow the establishment of a reliable database of which historians resorted to the terminology, and in which contexts they used it. The aim is twofold. First, to check how extended the terminology is in historical works compared to its use in early Andalusi legal works – al-,Utbi’s compilation, and other legal materials dealing with 3rd/9th—4th/10th century al-Andalus will be consulted. Secondly, to analyze the meaning of those terms and which conceptions about territory, rule and religion can be discerned.