

SÁNCHEZ-ALBORNOZ, EL PELIGRO DE LA *FITNA* Y EL PROBLEMA DE LA UNIDAD Y LA HISTORIA DE ESPAÑA: *BEN AMMAR DE SEVILLA. UNA TRAGEDIA EN LA ESPAÑA DE LOS TAIFAS*

Sánchez-Albornoz, the Danger of the *Fitna*, and the Problem of Spanish Unity and History: *Ben Ammar de Sevilla. Una tragedia en la España de los taifas*

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Abstract

This article focuses on the almost unknown novel *Ben Ammar de Sevilla. Una tragedia en la España de los taifas*, written by the famous medievalist Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz (d. 1984), who while paradoxically contributing greatly for the knowledge on the Muslim Iberia and its historiography, at the same time consolidated the 19th century discourses of the Reconquis-

Resumen

Este trabajo se centra en la casi desconocida novela *Ben Ammar de Sevilla. Una tragedia en la España de los taifas*, escrita por el célebre medievalista Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz (m. 1984), quien al tiempo que paradójicamente contribuyó en gran medida al conocimiento de la Iberia musulmana y su historiografía, consolidó los discursos decimonónicos

ta and the «Hispanized» al-Andalus. The aim of this article is to study, on the one hand, how al-Andalus is depicted on Sánchez-Albornoz's novel, and, on the other, to interpret why he wrote this book and how it blends with his general way of thinking the history of Spain and his own present. The paper argues that this novel must be read through Sánchez-Albornoz's experience of civil war and exile, in which the problem of the unity of the Spanish people throughout its history becomes crucial in his historical thought. The Taifa period, in which the novel focuses, and the consequences of the *fitna* and disintegration of the Andalusí unity, are a mirror in which Sánchez-Albornoz reflects his own reality and his patriotic longings. Thus, the main characters of his novel, such as the exiled king of Seville al-Mu'tamid, become (in)direct parallels of the author's life. Ideas such as that of the *homo hispanus*, the concern for union and the avoidance of the *fitna* are fundamental for a global understanding of Sánchez-Albornoz's historical proposal. These perspectives can explain the apparent contradictions in his approach on the history of al-Andalus, and can also explain how the Middle Ages consisted of a way to address his own present.

Keywords

Sánchez-Albornoz, *fitna*, al-Andalus, al-Mu'tamid, Taifa Kingdoms, exile, Reconquista, Muslim Spain

de la Reconquista y el al-Andalus «hispanizado». El objetivo es estudiar, por un lado, cómo se representa al-Andalus en la novela de Sánchez-Albornoz y, por otro, tratar de descifrar por qué escribió este libro y cómo se funde con su forma general de pensar la historia de España y su propio presente. El trabajo argumenta que esta novela debe leerse a través de la experiencia de Sánchez-Albornoz en la guerra civil y el exilio, donde el problema de la unidad del pueblo español a lo largo de su historia se vuelve crucial en su pensamiento histórico. Por ello, la época taifa, en la que se centra la novela, y las consecuencias de la *fitna* y la desintegración de la unidad andalusí, son un magnífico espejo en el que Sánchez-Albornoz puede reflejar su propia realidad y sus anhelos patrióticos. Así, protagonistas de su novela como el exiliado rey de Sevilla al-Mu'tamid se convierten en paralelos (in)directos del propio autor. Junto a ideas como la del *homo hispanus*, la preocupación por la unión y, por tanto, por evitar la *fitna*, son fundamentales para una comprensión global de la propuesta histórica de Sánchez-Albornoz, una perspectiva que puede explicar las aparentes contradicciones que presenta en su aproximación, por ejemplo, a la historia de al-Andalus, y que también puede explicar cómo la Edad Media le sirvió para pensar su propio presente.

Palabras clave

Sánchez-Albornoz, *fitna*, al-Andalus, al-Mu'tamid, reinos de taifa, exilio, Reconquista, España musulmana

Introduction

Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz was born in Madrid in the year 1893¹. At the age of twenty-one he obtained his PhD in history in the Central University of Madrid with a dissertation titled *La Monarquía en Asturias, León y Castilla durante los siglos VIII al XIII. La Potestad Real y los Señoríos*, and he quickly established himself as the country's preeminent young scholar on medieval Spanish history. In 1915 he was appointed archivist of the National Historical Archive, where he got a close knowledge of the medieval documents kept there, and in 1918 he earned the chair of History of Spain at the University of Barcelona, although he never took possession of it, as he returned to Madrid in 1920 with the same chair, after a brief stay in Valladolid.

Don Claudio, as he is often known, carried out an intense academic activity, which resulted in the creation of a new and pioneer journal, the *Anuario de historia del derecho español*², which was described as «the first specialized journal of Spanish historiography». Along with this, in 1922, he received the award granted by the Royal Academy of History and Language to commemorate the centenary of the Battle of Covadonga for his first great scientific work, part of which was published fifty years later with the title of *Orígenes de la nación Española. Estudios críticos sobre la historia del reino de Asturias*. After that, in 1925, he was elected as member of the Royal Academy of History, becoming the youngest member of that corporation.

In 1931 he was appointed dean of the School of Philosophy and Arts and served as president of the Central University the following year. Around this time, he took a hiatus from his academic pursuits to join the newly established republican government of the 2nd Spanish Republic (1931-1939), serving in parliament as a representative from Ávila, and later in several other prominent posts, including Minister of Foreign Affairs. In October 1936 he was appointed ambassador of Spain in Lisbon, Portugal, where he was sent to fix the deteriorated relations of the Republic with the Portuguese dictator, Salazar. This Portuguese stay coincided with the outbreak of the Civil War, a circumstance that prevented Sánchez-Albornoz from participating directly in the conflict. When the government in Lisbon declared its support to the perpetrator of the *coup d'état*, the dictator Francisco Franco, Sánchez-Albor-

1. On Sánchez-Albornoz's biography, see, e.g., Martín, 2005, pp. 149-170; Ruiz de la Peña Solar, 2009, pp. 193-203; Pérez Prendes, 1986, pp. 19-52; Domínguez, 2010.

2. Devoto, 2001-2002, pp. 225-231.

noz was dismissed from his post and fled with his family to France, where he obtained a chair at the University of Bordeaux. In 1940, he searched for exile in Argentina. After a brief stay at the University of Cuyo in the northern province of Mendoza, near the Andes Mountains, Sánchez-Albornoz was offered a position at the University of Buenos Aires where he created a centre for Iberian medieval studies and founded a journal, the *Cuadernos de historia de España*³. He spent more than four decades in exile as both a scholar and a member of the democratic anti-Franco movement abroad. In this sense, between 1962 and 1970, he served as president of the Spanish Republican Government in Exile. In April 1976, six months after the death of Franco, Sánchez-Albornoz returned to his homeland for the first time after more than forty years, and finally moved back to Ávila in July 1983. He died one year later, on 8 July 1984, at the age of 91. Just a month before, he had been awarded the Premio Príncipe de Asturias of Communication and Humanities.

This biography is well known. What is not so well remembered is that in 1972, twelve years before his death, Sánchez-Albornoz published a small work that has gone unnoticed by those who have been interested in the figure of the medievalist: *Ben Ammar de Sevilla. Una tragedia en la España de los taifas*, a book that has the particularity of being the only fictional work written by the Spanish historian. This dramatized novel, which takes place throughout the 11th century, after the fragmentation of the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba in multiple small kingdoms, the so-called Taifa kingdoms, tells the story of al-Mu'tamid (d. 1095), last king of the taifa of Seville, of his vizier Ibn 'Ammār (d. 1086), and of I'timād or al-Rumaykiyya (d. c. 1091), al-Mu'tamid's wife⁴.

The taifa of Seville and its most famous inhabitants and rulers was a topic that had continually captivated Sánchez-Albornoz, and he always considered it worthy of a good literary plot. For example, in his anthology *La España musulmana: según los autores islamitas y cristianos medievales*, published in two volumes in 1946, he said the following about Ibn 'Ammār: «The real life of many public men has been a fantastic adventure novel. Few of these lives have reached the contours of existence of the poor young man from Algarve who was Ben Ammar»⁵. He also considered him as a perfect historical character through whom the Iberian 11th century could be drawn. In this sense, the aim of this article is to study, on the one hand, how al-Andalus is depicted on Sánchez-Albornoz's dramatized novel *Ben Ammar de Sevilla. Una tragedia en la España de los taifas*, and, on the other hand, to interpret why he wrote this book and how it blends with his way of thinking the history of Spain and his own time⁶.

3. Ríos Saloma, 2018, pp. 235–270. On the development of Medieval studies in Argentina see: González De Fauve, 2002, pp. 273-289; Carzorlio, 2002-2003, pp. 99-112; González De Fauve, 2001-2002, pp. 207-211; Lida, 2020, pp. 509-539.

4. Benaboud, 1992; Lirola, 2011.

5. «La vida real de muchos hombres públicos ha sido una fantástica novela de aventuras. Pocas de esas vidas peregrinas han alcanzado los contornos de la existencia del pobre joven del Algarve que fue Ben Ammar». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1960, vol. 2, pp. 66-67. English translations through the article are my own.

6. On this issue, see Pastor de Togneri, 1998, pp. 117-131; Guiance, 2011, pp. 25-58.

Depicting the Taifa period

Despite presenting his novel as a fiction, in the prologue Sánchez-Albornoz warns the reader that most of the events referred to did happen, and that others should or could have also happened, thus conveying the perception that the perspective shown is fully historical⁷. In this sense, the view he offers of Taifa al-Andalus is the same that can be observed in his scientific works⁸. This anthological paragraph of his *La España musulmana* describes it in a clear way:

Taifa kingdoms! Sensuality and poetry, blood and lust, perversion and cruelty; the wine cheering the minds of sultans and magnates and the flame of knowledge illuminating the souls of men of letters and science; spiritual refinement and tolerance and, at the same time wildness of passions; princely crimes and fiscal oppression; luxurious and brilliant courts that move through arbitrariness and impotence, and people burdened by taxes and defenceless against the evildoers⁹.

There are several features about his representation of the Taifa era that I would like to highlight in order to connect them to his broad interpretation of the history of Spain. In the first place, the fragmentation and political decline that took place during the Taifa era. Sánchez-Albornoz states in his novel:

Numerous taifa kings assumed political power in various regions of al-Andalus, that is, of Muslim Spain, at the fall of the Caliphate of Cordoba. Poetry and science flourished in those little kingdoms. The most powerful of these taifa kingdoms, Seville, was ruled by a king who devoted his existence to poetry and love (al-Mu'tamid). In his shadow, a man of great and tragic destiny (Ibn Ammār) triumphed¹⁰.

Likewise, he also says that these were bad times for the Andalusis, in which «Christians are getting stronger every day and hatred between the sovereigns of al-Andalus is growing

7. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, p. 9.

8. See, for example, García Sanjuán, 2005, pp. 143-153.

9. «¡Reinos de taifas! Sensualidad y poesía, sangre y lujuria, perversión y crueldad; el vino alegrando las mentes de sultanes y magnates y la llama del saber alumbrando las almas de los hombres de letras y de ciencias; refinamiento espiritual y tolerancia y a la par desenfreno de las más torpes pasiones; crímenes principescos y explotación fiscal; cortes lujosas y brillantes que se mueven entre la arbitrariedad y la impotencia y pueblos agobiados por las cargas tributarias e indefensos frente a los malhechores». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1960, vol. 2, p. 117.

10. «Numerosos reyes de taifas o banderías se arrogaron el poder político en diversas regiones de al-Andalus, es decir, de la España musulmana, a la caída del califato de Córdoba. En esos reinos floreció la poesía y la ciencia. El más poderoso de estos reinos de taifas, Sevilla, fue regido por un rey que consagró su existencia a la poesía y al amor. A su sombra triunfó un hombre de grandes y trágicos destinos». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, p. 15.

every day»¹¹. This is an idea that can be found not only in his other books¹², but also in all the contemporary historiography devoted to the study of al-Andalus since Reinhart Dozy (d. 1883), which derives from the image conveyed by the medieval chroniclers themselves, who wrote in the shadow of the powers that replaced the Taifa kingdoms. For example, ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī states that «the situation of the kings of al-Andalus, after the *fitna*, was similar to the situation of the Taifa kings of Persia after the death of Darius, son of Darius. They continued to do so and the situation of al-Andalus continue to weaken and its borders to be disturbed and its Christian neighbours to grow in their appetites and strengthen their preparations...»¹³. Likewise, Ibn al-Kardabūs reports that «the name of the caliphate was extinguished in the Peninsula [...], the situation of the rulers and the governed was ruined [...], the rebels rose up and in every place the fire was lit; then the enemy appeared frequently, especially at the borders and in the frontiers»¹⁴.

In his novel, Sánchez-Albornoz reproduces a providentialist and pejorative understanding of the Taifa period that also comes from Andalusī and Maghrebi sources¹⁵. In this view, the progressive loss of al-Andalus is due to the sins of the Andalusis. For example, Sánchez-Albornoz reproduces the following dialogue between al-Mu‘tamid and Ibn ‘Ammār:

- May Allah will it; bad times will befall them; the Christians are getting stronger every day and the hatred between the rulers of al-Andalus is growing every day.
- Allah cannot abandon his people.
- Our sins are many.
- Allah is the Most Gracious and Merciful¹⁶.

All these issues are summarized in the Andalusī sources through the notion of *fitna*, a Qur’anic word with strong political and religious connotations chosen by the Andalusī authors of this period to describe the breakdown of the caliphate. It is a concept defining a situation of «civil turmoil», which represents the greatest risk that the Muslim community can face, since internal division is considered the worst danger for the faith of the believers. Likewise, the denomination of Taifa kingdoms must be understood as a negative depiction of that time. If the caliphate had been the moment of formation of a *jamā‘a*, a concept that implies the idea of unity, the Taifa period, on the other hand, designates the opposite¹⁷.

11. «...los cristianos son cada día más fuertes y cada día es mayor el odio entre los soberanos de al-Andalus». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, p. 109.

12. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1960, vol. 2, p. 7.

13. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī, 2005, pp. 65-66.

14. Ibn al-Kardabūs, 1971, p. 68.

15. Albarrán, 2019, pp. 233-257; Albarrán, 2024, pp. 27-53.

16. «-Alá lo quiera; malos tiempos les tocará vivir; los cristianos son cada día más fuertes y cada día es mayor el odio entre los soberanos de al-Andalus / -Alá no puede abandonar a su pueblo / -Son muchos nuestros pecados / -Alá es el Clemente y Misericordioso». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, 109.

17. On this issue see García Sanjuán, 2020a, pp. 64-88.

This vision, provided by some of the Arabic sources of the Islamic West, would be reproduced centuries later in contemporary historiography, which focused on establishing a clear distinction between caliphate legitimacy and taifa illegitimacy. This was one of the greatest contributions of Spanish Arabism to the strengthening of the liberal project of forming a homogeneous national identity adapted to the designs of a centralist state¹⁸. But it was not only Spanish Arabism that disseminated this perspective. Dozy already adhered to it, even though he also saw positive aspects in this period, especially in terms of its cultural production and in contrast to the Almoravid Empire. On the political level, however, his view was that of a period of decline:

For many years the provinces of Muslim Spain had been involuntarily abandoned to themselves - The people were generally distressed by this, they thought with dread of the future and felt nostalgia for the past - The foreign captains were the only ones who profited from the dismemberment of the Peninsula¹⁹.

The rest of Muslim Spain was no calmer than the south; everywhere the ruins of the caliphate were fiercely disputed, while in the north a torrent was swelling, threatening to swallow up all the Muslim states of the Peninsula²⁰.

This is the path that Sánchez-Albornoz followed in his historiographical work as well as in his novel. In fact, the great majority of anecdotes he quotes about the life of al-Mu'tamid and Ibn 'Ammār appear in Dozy's work, taken from Arabic sources²¹. On the other hand, it should be remembered that Sánchez-Albornoz was not the only one to write a literary work on al-Mu'tamid and his times. Rafael Ramírez de Arellano (d. 1921) had done so in two issues of the *Revista de Almería*, with a historical-legendary account titled *La Corte de Al-Motamid*²², or the Portuguese António Maria de Oliveira Parreira (d. 1918) in his *Os luso-arabes*:

18. Ortega, 2021.

19. «Hacia muchos años que las provincias de la España musulmana se hallaban involuntariamente abandonadas a sí mismas. En general, el pueblo se afligía de esto, pensaba con espanto en el porvenir y sentía nostalgia del pasado. Los capitanes extranjeros fueron los únicos que se aprovecharon de la desmembración de la península». Dozy, 1920, vol. 4, p. 5.

20. «El resto de la España musulmana no estaba más tranquilo que el Mediodía; en todas partes se disputaban encarnizadamente las ruinas del califato, mientras se veía engrosar en el Norte un torrente que amenazaba tragarse todos los Estados musulmanes de la península». Dozy, 1920, vol. 4, p. 106.

21. See, for example, Dozy, 1920, vol. 4, pp. 119 ff., 127, 147. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, pp. 41, 73-76, 79-83. Some of these anecdotes were not only narrated in Andalusí and Maghrebi chronicles, but also in Christian sources such as Don Juan Manuel's *El Conde Lucanor*, of which Sánchez-Albornoz was undoubtedly aware: 'El rey, por le fazer plazer, fizo poner almendrales por toda la xierra de Córdoba; porque, pues Córdoba es tierra caliente e non nieva y cada año, que en 'l febrero pareciesen los almendrales floridos, que semejan nieve, por la fazer perder el deseo de la nieve.' Don Juan Manuel, 1990, p. 210.

22. Ramírez de Arellano, 1879.

Scenas da vida musulmana no nosso país, also following Dozy's work²³. Likewise, so did Blas Infante (d. 1936), «father of the Andalusian homeland»²⁴, who at the end of his *Motamid*, último *Rey de Sevilla*, confesses that «the narrative is inspired by the story of Abu-l-Qasim [al-Mu'tamid] offered by the Dutch historian Dozy»²⁵.

In addition, this is an image about the Taifa period that continues to dominate the Spanish collective imagination: its use is very common, for example, to describe in a pejorative way the current territorial structure of the Spanish state, divided into autonomous regions. Felipe González, former Spanish Prime Minister of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) recently stated: «We have a governance problem of political decentralization, which is our constitutional framework. We confuse decentralization with centrifugation of power, which leads us to the behaviour of the Taifa kingdoms»²⁶.

The second image that I want to highlight in Sánchez-Albornoz's novel is that of the Taifa period as one of uncontrolled pleasure, an orientalist perspective of the Muslim courts that is particularly highlighted in the Taifa kingdoms²⁷. One example is a particular description of a court party in Silves: «In Silves, in an *almunia* or garden. At night. Fountains, magnolias, orange blossoms. Over the garden the full moon. Music. Dancers, singers ... The cup-bearer serves wine with courteous formulas»²⁸. For Sánchez-Albornoz this hedonism was a symptom of the existential crisis that al-Andalus was experiencing in the Taifa era, as he made it clear in his *La España musulmana*: «But in the critical crisis of devitalisation, loss of life, that al-Andalus suffered at the time of the Taifa kingdoms, sexual perversion reached extreme limits...»²⁹. Undoubtedly, this image, which is also reflected in the Andalusian and

23. Oliveira Parreira, 1898. On this author and his work, see Cardoso, forthcoming. See also Sidarus, 1986, pp. 37-54; Machado, 1997, pp. 109-144; Vakil, 2003, pp. 255-294; Cardeira da Silva, 2005, pp. 781-806; Branco Correia, 2009, pp. 163-181; Lopes de Barros, 2014, pp. 29-40.

24. Iniesta Coullaut-Valera, 1998.

25. «...la narración se inspira en la historia de Abu-l-Qasim [al-Mutamid] ofrecida por el historiador holandés Dozy». Infante Pérez, 1983, p. 185. See Ruiz Lagos, 1987, pp. 43-62; Esquerrà I Nonell, 2013, pp. 143-162.

26. «Tenemos un problema de gobernanza de la descentralización política, que es nuestro marco constitucional. Confundimos descentralización con centrifugación del poder, lo cual nos lleva a comportamientos de reinos de taifas». <https://www.europapress.es/nacional/noticia-felipe-gonzalez-cuestiona-reinos-taifas-cogobernanza-sea-respuesta-situacion-pandemia-20201002184947.html>

27. This orientalist perspective on the Islamic courts can be seen in other historians such as Arnold Toynbee. See, for example, Toynbee, 1973. For a renewed and critical perspective on this topic see, e.g., Mernissi, 2001; Gordon and Hain, 2017; Cardoso, 2023.

28. «En Silves, en una *almunia* o jardín. De noche. Surtidores, magnolias, azahares. Sobre el jardín la luna llena. Músicas. Danzarinas, cantadoras [...] El copero sirve vino con fórmulas cortesanas». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, p. 41. See also pp. 47-49.

29. «Pero en la crisis aguda de desvitalización que padeció al-Andalus en la época de los reinos de taifas, la perversión sexual alcanzó límites extremos...» Sánchez-Albornoz, 1960, vol. II, p. 110.

Maghrebi sources criticizing the Taifa period³⁰, is also widespread in historiography and in the collective imagination³¹.

Closely related to this is the situation of women. In both his novel and his historiographical work Sánchez-Albornoz presents women's situation in a negative way regarding the Andalusí context, and in a positive one regarding the Castilian *milieu*³². For example, al-Rumaykiyya is depicted as saying to al-Mu'tamid: «Yes, my grandmother was Castilian, she was taken captive by Almanzor. Her daughter, my mother, bore me from a Muslim, but she died when I was born. My grandmother raised me and told me a lot about her country and its customs. The women there are masters and not servants in their homes»³³. Furthermore, in one of his last texts, he warned Andalusians – i.e. the inhabitants of the modern region of Andalusia – nostalgic for the Andalusí past about how women would have been treated at that time: «I would also like to remind Andalusians nostalgic for Islamic Spain of the slave markets to which women of their harems ended up when their masters get tired of them [...]. And the sad life of those who made the harems of princes and magnates happy: often their slaves and always subjected to their excesses»³⁴. And, once again, this is an image that remains very much alive in the collective imagination, especially used in conservative propaganda. Esperanza Aguirre, one of the most influential members of the Spanish conservative party, the Partido Popular, celebrated in 2017 the Christian conquest of Granada by asserting:

30. See, for example, 'Abd al-Wāhid al-Marrākushī, 2005, pp. 114-115.

31. See for example the novel by Lasala, 2007.

32. García Sanjuán, 2005, pp. 143-153. The Castilian context appears in some of his texts as a paradise of freedom. See, for example, Sánchez-Albornoz, 1949, pp. 139-152, where he states the following about the Castilian people: «A people of free men, small landowners, they lived in a semi-collective system of agricultural exploitation, grouped in small rural communities that very soon achieved political freedom and became embryonic municipalities». In fact, the struggle of this people against the Muslims increased this freedom, which became a national enterprise: «A people in continuous frontier conflict, the struggle of more than a century with the Moors had created in them an overflowing vitality, because war, which when it is for conquest exhausts and stiffens, revives when it is maintained in defence of national freedom...» / «Pueblo de hombres libres, pequeños propietarios, vivían en régimen semi-colectivo de explotación agraria, agrupado en pequeñas comunidades rurales que muy pronto alcanzaron la libertad política y se trocaban en embrionarios municipios [...] Pueblo en continua contienda fronteriza, la lucha de más de un siglo con los moros había creado en él una desbordante vitalidad, pues la guerra, que cuando es de conquista agota y anquilosa, vivifica cuando se mantiene en defensa de la libertad nacional». This issue will be discussed afterwards in this article.

33. «Sí, mi abuela era castellana, fue cautivada por Almanzor. Su hija, mi madre, me tuvo de un musulmán, pero murió cuando yo nací. Mi abuela me ha criado y me ha hablado mucho de su país y de sus costumbres. Las mujeres son allí señoras y no siervas en sus hogares». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, p. 42.

34. «Quiero recordar también a los andaluces nostálgicos de la España islámica los mercados de esclavas a los que iban a parar las mujeres de sus harenes cuando sus amos se cansaban de ellas [...] Y la triste vida de las que alegraban los serrallos de príncipes y magnates: muchas veces sus esclavas y siempre sometidas a sus excesos». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1983, p. 20.

«Today 525 years have passed since the capture of Granada by the Catholic Monarchs. It is a day of glory for Spanish women. With Islam we would not have freedom»³⁵.

The third image I want to highlight is the extremely negative perspective he presents of the Berbers in general and the Almoravids in particular, whom, compared to the Andalusis, are seen as alien to the Iberian territory, as well as an uncivilized and fanatical people. About the Zirids of Granada, for example, Sánchez-Albornoz states through Ibn 'Ammār: «Those Berbers who reign in Granada are barbarian strangers to Spain. They must be expelled from it»³⁶. Authors such as Helena de Felipe or Alejandro García-Sanjuán have shown that this image of the Berber was, and still is, widely extended in Spanish historiography, as well as in Arabism³⁷. Emilio García Gómez (d. 1995), for example, did not hesitate to affirm that «the true Arab-Spanish civilization» had ended with al-Mu'tamid,³⁸ a perception shared by Sánchez-Albornoz, which can be observed in this novel.

In this sense, Dozy is once again the primary reference for this historiographical perspective. In one of his writings, he is quite eloquent when describing the arrival of the Almoravids to the Iberian Peninsula:

Civilisation gave way to barbarism, intelligence to superstition, tolerance to fanaticism. The country groaned under the overwhelming rule of the clergy and the soldiery, and instead of the wise and spiritual discussions of the academies, the profound discourses of the philosophers and the harmonious songs of the poets, there was only the monotonous voice of the priests and the rattle of the sabres dragging on the pavement³⁹.

His view was echoed by Spanish Arabists⁴⁰, but also by other historians such as Henri Pérès (d. 1983), who in his work clearly contrasted the «Hispano-Muslim race» with the Berbers, who, according to him, did not make any cultural contribution worth mentioning⁴¹.

35. «Hoy hace 525 años de la Toma de Granada por los Reyes Católicos. Es un día de gloria para las españolas. Con el Islam no tendríamos libertad» https://www.eldiario.es/politica/esperanza-aguirre-toma-granada-islam_1_3655735.html

36. «Esos beréberes que reinan en Granada son bárbaros extraños a España. Hay que expulsarlos de ella». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, p. 47.

37. Felipe, 2009, pp. 105-117; García Sanjuán, 2020b, pp. 27-49.

38. García Gómez, 1945, p. 22. See also García Gómez, 1976.

39. «La civilización cedió su puesto a la barbarie, la inteligencia a la superstición, la tolerancia al fanatismo. El país gemía bajo el régimen abrumador del clero y de la soldadesca y en vez de las sabias y espirituales discusiones de las academias, de los profundos discursos de los filósofos y los armoniosos cantares de los poetas, sólo se oía la voz monótona de los sacerdotes y el ruido de los sables arrastrándose por el pavimento». Dozy, 1872, vol. 1, pp. 433-434.

40. Helena de Felipe has pointed out a few exceptions to this trend, such as Francisco Codera (d. 1917) or Ambrosio Huici Miranda (d. 1973). Felipe, 2009, pp. 105-117.

41. Boumahdi, 2009, pp. 83-104.

Sánchez-Albornoz adhered to this view⁴², as did other authors *a priori* far removed from his historiographical position, such as Américo Castro (d. 1972)⁴³. This has to do with a movement I will discuss below: the tendency to racially «Hispanicize» al-Andalus, a process that would have ended with the arrival of the Almoravids and Almohads⁴⁴.

Al-Andalus, the Taifa kingdoms, and Sánchez-Albornoz's idea of the history of Spain

The general vision that Sánchez-Albornoz had of al-Andalus was quite polyphonic⁴⁵. In works such as *El Islam de España y el Occidente*, published in 1965 collecting previous materials, he states: «Few events in history have been more fruitful in decisive consequences for the making of Europe than the triumph and the roots of Islam in Spain. It returned to being what it had been many times: a crossroads of cultures»⁴⁶. In order to understand this position, it is crucial to take into account the notion of «Muslim Spain (España musulmana)», a notion that was promoted by Spanish Arabism since the 19th century and through which al-Andalus was «Hispanicized»⁴⁷. The main axis of this idea relates with the Islamic conquest, seen as the foreign element which penetrated the Iberian territory very lightly, and thus the Andalusis continued to be «Spanish».

As Juan Pablo Domínguez has pointed out⁴⁸, the deeply racist idea of «Muslim Spain» came to replace that of «Arab Spain» from the mid-19th century onwards, when the new theories on Aryans and Semites became ubiquitous and the tendency to downgrade the «oriental

42. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1960, vol. II, p. 87: «But in the middle of the 11th century, the Almoravid storm began to form up in Africa, which was to unload in Spain and devastate the brilliant Arab-Andalusian civilisation – the fruit of four centuries of effort and trial and error – and to halt the Reconquest (Reconquista), whose end seemed to be near in 1085» / «Pero a mediados del siglo XI comenzó a formarse en África la tormenta almorávide, que iba a descargar en España y a arrasarse la brillante civilización árabe-andaluza – fruto de cuatro centurias de esfuerzos y tanteos – y a detener la Reconquista, cuyo fin parecía acercarse en 1085».

43. Castro, 1989, p. 64.

44. Domínguez, 2016, pp. 231-249.

45. García Sanjuán, 2017a, pp. 189-208; Manzano, 2009, pp. 213-230; Guance, 2011a, pp. 25-58; Domínguez, 2016, pp. 231-249; García Sanjuán, 2005, pp. 143-153.

46. «Pocos acontecimientos de la historia han sido más fecundos en consecuencias decisivas para el hacer de Europa que el triunfo y el arraigo del islam en España. Volvió esta a ser lo que había sido muchas veces: encrucijada de caminos y de culturas». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1965, p. 10.

47. Monroe, 1970; Manzanares de Cirre, 1972; López García, 1983-1984, pp. 119-129; López García, 1990, pp. 35-69; Marín, 1992, pp. 379-393; Manzano, 2000, pp. 23-37; Rivière Gómez, 2000; Marín et al., 2009; Viguera, 2009, pp. 67-81; Manzano, 2009, pp. 213-230; García Sanjuán, 2012, pp. 65-104; Hertel, 2015, pp. 44-59; García Sanjuán, 2017b, pp. 305-328; Bornstein, 2020.

48. Domínguez, 2021.

element» of European civilisation and of Andalusí culture itself spread⁴⁹. In other words, there was a de-orientalization of al-Andalus common to Arabists of different ideologies through the gaze of anti-Semitic racialism. The rise of the idea of race made it very difficult to regard Arabs as Spanish. This new epistemological framework made necessary the construction of the notion that the architects of Andalusí culture had been racially Spanish, resorting to the widespread notion of Semitic inferiority: Andalusí cultural achievements could only be explained through the intervention of indigenous people of Aryan race⁵⁰. Thus, Arabists such as Francisco Javier Simonet (d. 1897), Julián Ribera (d. 1934), Miguel Asín Palacios (d. 1944) and, later, García Gómez – and also some foreigners such as the aforementioned Henri Pérès and Henri Terrasse (d. 1971) – argued that the Arab and foreign contribution in al-Andalus was very small, with the majority of the population remaining Spanish by race⁵¹. This idea arose, at the beginning, to counterbalance the national-Catholic discourse of the «Reconquista» and to integrate this «Muslim Spain» and its scholars – the Arabists – into the construction of the national narrative⁵², although the two proposals soon became compatible, as it will be discussed in the case of Sánchez-Albornoz.

These ideas, that emerged from the school of Spanish Arabists, were adopted by other intellectuals such as the medievalist Ramón Menéndez Pidal (d. 1968), for whom it was necessary to vindicate Spain as a link between Christianity and Islam⁵³. The same idea also appears in some of Sánchez-Albornoz's writings, mixed with that of the «Reconquista»:

This reality does not make it necessary to record in detail the other cultural services that the struggle between Christianity and Islam in my homeland rendered to the culture of the West. And I have said the struggle between Islam and Christianity because it is often forgotten, firstly,

49. On the issue of race and scientific racialization see, for example, Olender, 1989; Hannaford, 1996; Arvidsson, 2006. On antisemitism in Spain see Álvarez Chillida, 2002.

50. However, there was also another tendency, although not predominant in the school of Spanish Arabists, which defended the existence of a «Mediterranean race» common to both shores of the Strait of Gibraltar. See, e.g., Cañete, 2021; Bravo López, 2021.

51. Dozy had already begun to explore this trend. Martínez-Gros, 2001, pp. 113-126; Azraai Jamsari and Mohd Talib, 2014, pp. 74-80. Dozy's centrality in all these processes and historiographical visions deserves an independent study. On the history of Arabism in the Netherlands, see Brugman, 1979.

52. «The ignorance of the value of our Muslim and Hebraic thinkers, on the one hand, and the secular hatred engendered by the struggles of the reconquest, on the other, has not allowed them to know and confess that in those remote epochs of our history we Spaniards were the creators of science, if not indigenous by its origins, at least nationalised, and above all true and almost unique transmitters of classical culture to medieval Europe» / «Es que la ignorancia del valor de nuestros pensadores musulmanes y hebraicos, de una parte, y el odio secular engendrado por las luchas de la reconquista, de otra, no les ha permitido conocer y confesar que en aquellas remotas épocas de nuestra historia fuimos los españoles creadores de ciencia, si no indígena por sus orígenes, nacionalizada al menos, y sobre todo verdaderos y casi únicos transmisores de la cultura clásica a la Europa medieval» Asín Palacios, 1914, p. 129. See García Sanjuán, 2017a, pp. 189-208; Marín, 2009, pp. xi-xvii; Domínguez, 2021.

53. Menéndez Pidal, 1929, pp. 111-114.

that the contacts between Spaniards of the two religious faiths – Spaniards because even the Muslims, for the most part, were Hispanic in race and temperament. And because it is also forgotten that without the warlike resistance of the Christian kingdoms against the Saracen kingdoms – a basic resistance for understanding the very essence of Spain – my homeland would not have been able to play its role as an intermediary between East and West⁵⁴.

Sánchez-Albornoz unequivocally embraced the racist and anti-Semitic view of «Muslim Spain», arguing that «the Arab people did not know how to create, but how to conserve; the Aryan Spaniards took advantage of the teachings of the Orientals and created a philosophy, an art and a science»⁵⁵. He also argued that the West was indebted to Spain for having stopped the «Semitic invasion» and saved Aryan culture⁵⁶. It is, thus, understandable that he lashed out with virulent force against Américo Castro when he argued that Muslims and Jews had given Spain a «Semitic configuration»⁵⁷. Paradoxically, for Sánchez-Albornoz it was Castro who defended a racist stance by not acknowledging any people as Spaniards:

I take this opportunity to speak out against the racial discrimination that Américo Castro practises in the History of Spain. The Goths are not Spanish, the Muslims are not Spanish, the Jews and all those who had a Hebrew ancestry, however distant and however unique, must be placed apart from the Hispanics and cannot be confused with them. Fortunately, we Spaniards have not made similar discriminatory distinctions for decades and decades. And no one has denied Hispanic citizenship to those illustrious grandparents, whatever their race or creed⁵⁸.

54. «Esa realidad no hace necesario el registro detallado de los otros servicios culturales de la pugna de la cristiandad y del Islam en mi patria prestó a la cultura de Occidente. Y he dicho la pugna entre islamitas y cristianos porque suele olvidarse, primero, que fueron de ordinario pugnaces los contactos entre los españoles de los dos credos religiosos – españoles porque incluso los musulmanes, en su gran mayoría eran por su raza y por su herencia temperamental hispanos. Y porque se olvida también que sin la resistencia bélica de los reinos cristianos frente a los reinos sarracenos – resistencia básica para comprender la esencia misma de España – no habría podido mi patria desempeñar su papel de intermediaria entre Oriente y Occidente». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1965, p. 222.

55. «El pueblo árabe no supo crear, sino conservar; los españoles arios aprovecharon las enseñanzas de los orientales y crearon una filosofía, un arte y una ciencia». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1933, pp. 519-539. This extremely racist and anti-Semitic perspective of Sánchez-Albornoz is usually forgotten by his contemporary apologists. See, for example, Rodríguez de la Peña, 2021.

56. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1919. See Domínguez, 2016, pp. 231-249.

57. Domínguez, 2021. On this debate see, e.g., Catlos, 2015, pp. 1-16.

58. «Y aprovecho esta ocasión para alzarme contra la discriminación racial que Américo Castro practica en la Historia de España. Los godos no son españoles, los musulmanes no son españoles, los judíos y cuantos tuvieron un ascendiente hebreo, por lejano que fuera y aunque fuese único, deben ser colocados al margen de los hispanos y no pueden ser confundidos con ellos. Afortunadamente que desde hace décadas y décadas los españoles no hemos hecho distinción discriminatoria parecida. Y nadie ha negado carta de ciudadanía hispánica a esos ilustres abuelos cualquiera que fuera su raza o credo». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1965, p. 188.

Sánchez-Albornoz developed the idea of «Muslim Spain» in a systematic way through the alleged predominance of what he calls «pre-Muslim» in al-Andalus⁵⁹. For example, he states that «for centuries the Peninsulars lived strongly rooted in their pre-Muslim past. The inheritance received by al-Andalus from Hispano-Gothic Christian Spain was extremely varied and multiform. It spread to language, art, culture, daily life, customs, institutions, economy, mood, religiosity...»⁶⁰.

Following the postulates of the school of Arabists, this idea was based on the assertion that «the number of Orientals who set foot in Spain was very small», and that, quoting directly from Ribera and his studies on the «race of the Islamites of Spain», «they were Spaniards those who boasted of being Orientals and would have fabricated a genealogy for themselves». In this way, «the Arabic cultural and vital [element] was therefore insignificant for decades and decades in a Spain of Western race, life and culture»⁶¹.

He overstated this idea in such a way that he even asserted that⁶², for example, the predominant haircut in al-Andalus was also pre-Muslim, as well as the Andalusí fondness for brothels, of Spanish-Roman tradition, or the frequent drinking of wine, an image that we have seen widely spread in his novel⁶³. This perspective is also clearly seen in the «non-Spanishness» of the Berbers that I mentioned earlier, and, indeed, that reality would have ended with the Almoravids. For example, in his *El Islam de España y el Occidente* he says that «is more than evident the enormous wealth of Hispanism that overflowed through Islamic Spain for four long centuries, perhaps until it was burned by the African locust clouds that the Almoravids and Almohads spread over it...»⁶⁴. Or, as he states in another of his books:

59. On this issue, see, for example, García Sanjuán, 2005, 143-153; García Sanjuán, 2012, pp. 65-104.

60. «Durante siglos los peninsulares vivieron fuertemente enraizados en su pasado premuslim. Fue variadísima y multiforme la herencia recibida por al-Andalus de la España cristiana hispano-goda. Se extendió a la lengua, las letras, el arte, la cultura, la vida diaria, las costumbres, las instituciones, la economía, el talento, la religiosidad...» Sánchez-Albornoz, 1965, p. 52.

61. «Ningún historiador digno de tal nombre ignora que el número de orientales que pusieron pie en España fue muy reducido [...] El gran arabista Ribera, después de estudiar la raza de los islamitas de España, afirma – y Así ha aceptado su juicio – que solo puede darse patente de orientalismo a quienes de entre aquellos aleguen pruebas seguras de tal origen, pues incluso eran españoles muchos que se jactaban de orientales y se habrían fabricado una genealogía [...] Lo arábigo cultural y vital hubo por tanto de ser insignificante durante décadas y décadas en una España de raza, de vida y de cultura occidentales». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1965, pp. 41, 46 y 50. That is, the Andalusis, due to their «Western race», were «good Muslims», according to Mahmood Mamdani's definition: secular, flexible, liberal and modern, in contrast to the «bad Muslims», characterised by their fanaticism. Mamdani, 2005. For a Medieval focused analysis of this perspective see Balbale, 2022.

62. Sánchez-Albornoz took this view to such an extreme that Pierre Guichard would characterise these ideas as «albornocianas». Guichard, 1980, pp. 423-428.

63. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1965, pp. 88-92.

64. «Basta de sobra a lo que creo para que sea evidente el enorme caudal de hispanismo que rezumó la España islámica durante cuatro siglos largos, tal vez hasta que fue abrasada por las nubes de langosta africana que almorávides y almohades vertieron sobre ella». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1965, p. 116.

It was the Spanish converts to Islam who created the Hispano-Arabic civilization. The Spaniards who slowly converted to the new faith kept alive, decades and even centuries, their old beliefs in a sometimes martyrial conflict with the Islamic rulership. But, little by little, they accepted Islam, attracted by the tax advantages that their conversion provided them⁶⁵.

This last idea, that the Islam professed by these Muslim Spaniards was only an Islam of convenience, is also reflected in his novel. Speaking of the Andalusis, Ibn ‘Ammār states: «They are Spaniards, grandchildren of infidel slaves, who have professed Islam to get rid of *chizia* and *jarach*»⁶⁶.

This whole notion of the pre-Muslim and of the Muslim Spain is part of a broader concept coined by Sánchez-Albornoz, that of the *homo hispanus*⁶⁷. It conveys the sense of the existence of an essentialist and continuous «Spanish being» who, with certain features, would have travelled the centuries of Iberian history. An invisible chain that, for example, linked, according to him, four great figures of Spanish thought and literature: Seneca, Ibn Ḥazm⁶⁸, Quevedo and Unamuno⁶⁹.

And, precisely, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), an Andalusī scholar that lived during the same Taifa period, is for Sánchez-Albornoz one of the archetypes of the *homo hispanus*⁷⁰. In his *La España musulmana*, he states the following about the Cordovan scholar:

65. «Fueron los españoles conversos al islam quienes crearon la civilización hispano-árabe. Los españoles que se convirtieron despaciosamente a la nueva fe mantuvieron vivas, décadas y aun siglos, sus viejas creencias en pugna a veces martirial con el señorío islámico. Pero poco a poco fueron aceptando el islamismo atraídos por las ventajas fiscales que con su conversión les procuraba». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1983, p. 15. The *jizya* and the *kharāj* were taxes paid by non-Muslims under Islamic rule.

66. «Ni siquiera son de nuestra raza; son españoles, nietos de esclavos infieles, que han profesado el islamismo por librarse de la *chizia* y el *jarach*». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, p. 85.

67. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1965, p. 223.

68. Common throughout his work is the tendency to «Hispanicize» great Andalusī intellectuals. For example, in one of his many works on Andalusī historiography, he placed the Cordovan Aḥmad al-Rāzī among the great Spanish historians of all times. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1939, pp. 5-59.

69. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1960, vol. 2, p. 23. In this regard, Joaquín Guichot’s *Historia general de Andalucía* (1869-70), could be mentioned. Guichot, in the second volume of the work, presents a panegyric of the greatness of the Muslim period, as a forerunner of the Renaissance: «The Senecas and Lucans of Cordoba; the Isidors and Leanders of Seville reappeared in the Averroes, the Ibn-Haiyans and the Ibn-Kaldun, under another form, with another literary school and another religious dogma, but with the same wealth of science and knowledge» / «Los Sénecas y los Lucanos de Córdoba; los Isidoros y los Leandros de Sevilla reaparecieron en los Averroes, los Ibn-Haiyans y los Ibn-Kaldun, bajo otra forma, con otra escuela literaria y otro dogma religioso, pero con el mismo caudal de ciencia y de saber». García Sanjuán, 2012, pp. 65-104.

70. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1965, pp. 113-114: «Perhaps unconsciously Ibn Hazm felt in himself the ancestral mood of his Spanish grandparents throbbing within him. Although literarily philo-Arabic, his Hispanic nationalism sometimes moved his pen» / «Tal vez inconscientemente Ibn Hazm sentía palpitar en sí mismo el talante ancestral de sus abuelos españoles. Aunque literariamente filoárabe, su nacionalismo hispano movía a veces su pluma».

In the psychological characteristics attributed to him by his biographers and in his autobiographical pages, the depth of his Hispanism stands out: pride, passion, vehemence, verbalism, acrimony of speech, loyalty, flight of the soul towards God, hypercriticism against his own country, love for the truth, ethical rigor [...] This Hispanism allows us to appreciate the gigantic contribution of the Spaniards of blood to the formation of Islamic culture [...] In front of the spectacle of al-Andalus bleeding because of discord he wrote: «The flower of civil war is sterile». And although he criticized many times his homeland, his are these words: «Far from me, oh pearl of China! The Spanish ruby is enough for me»⁷¹.

Interestingly, these last two quotes, two of the Spanish medievalist favourite sentences repeated all over his books, also appear in his novel⁷². I will come back to this later.

One of those features of the *homo hispanus*, that of vehemence⁷³, would have led to a consequence: the tendency to disunity, clearly evidenced in the Taifa period of the novel. Another passage from *El Islam de España y el Occidente* shows this idea:

And if, as Strabo pointed out, the Hispanics faced Rome divided as a consequence of that ancestral temperamental weakness, it often produced the splitting of Muslim Spain. During the Hispanic Muladí⁷⁴ revolts of the 9th century, the many chieftains they followed never got together in a joint initiative against the emir. In the 11th century, at the fall of the Caliphate, al-Andalus was divided into a dozen of independent and enemy petty kings⁷⁵.

The problem of the unity of the *homo hispanus* and, ultimately, of Spain, was arguably the great concern Sánchez-Albornoz showed throughout his life and work. This is the reason why, although he acknowledged the importance of al-Andalus, he could only describe the Islamic conquest of the Iberian Peninsula from a tragic and catastrophic perspective⁷⁶. As he

71. «En los rasgos psicológicos que le atribuyen sus biógrafos y en sus páginas autobiográficas destaca lo profundo de su hispanismo: orgullo, pasión, vehemencia, verbalismo, acritud de palabra, lealtad, vuelo del alma hacia Dios, hipercriticismo contra su propia patria, amor a la verdad, rigor ético [...] Ese hispanismo permite valorar la gigantesca aportación de los españoles de sangre a la formación de la cultura islámica [...] Ante el espectáculo de al-Andalus ensangrentada por la discordia escribió: ‘La flor de la guerra civil es infecunda’. Y aunque fustigó muchas veces a su patria, tuyas son estas palabras: ‘Lejos de mí, ¡oh perla de la China!, me basta con el rubí de España’». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1960, vol. 2, p. 23; Sánchez-Albornoz, 1965, p. 114; Sánchez-Albornoz, 1975, p. 58; Sánchez-Albornoz, 1983, p. 71.

72. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, pp. 49, 123.

73. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1965, pp. 104-105.

74. Native population converted to Islam.

75. «Y si, según señaló Estrabón, los hispanos enfrentaron a Roma divididos y desarticulados como consecuencia de aquella ancestral flaqueza temperamental primigenia, ella produjo muchas veces el fraccionamiento de la España musulmana. Durante las revueltas de los muladíes hispanos del siglo IX, nunca llegaron a aliarse frente al emir los muchos caudillos a quienes seguían. En el siglo XI, a la caída del califato, al-Andalus se dividió en una docena de reinicillos independientes y enemigos». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1965, pp. 106-107.

76. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1975, p. 81.

said in one of his books, «the old state unity of the Peninsula – I have dared, and with good reason, to call it national – created by Rome and restored by the Gothic kings, disappeared for centuries»⁷⁷. The conquest of al-Andalus created what he calls the «Iberian particularism», «the regional particularism of medieval and modern Spain», which includes Portugal⁷⁸, a country whose creation he also saw as a result of «a fragmentation in the peninsula created by the clash between Christianity and Islam»⁷⁹.

This is the reason why the idea of «Reconquista» – in combination with that of «Muslim Spain» – played such an important role in his conception of the history of Spain, in a particularly virulent way in his latest writings, where he was also greatly influenced by the strong resurgence of local nationalisms in Spain, among them the Andalusian and its nostalgic vision of the Andalusian past⁸⁰, an issue that, without a doubt, he understood as a new example of Hispanic fragmentation⁸¹. As he states in his *Testamento histórico-político*,

77. «La vieja unidad estatal de la Península – yo me he atrevido, y con fundamento, a llamarla nacional – creada por Roma y restaurada en el siglo VIII por los reyes godos, desapareció por siglos». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1929, pp. 1-30; Sánchez-Albornoz, 1973, p. 31; Sánchez-Albornoz, 1974, pp. 21-23.

78. Guance, 2011b, pp. 109-130. Sánchez-Albornoz, in his conception of (Iberian) peninsular evolution as a whole, saw in the independent formation of Portugal a «marginal historical chance» of negative results for his ideal Hispanic unity. His disdain for those who saw a different path on either side of the border is therefore understandable. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1977, vol. 2, pp. 404 ff. Quoting once again Ibn Ḥazm and the famous phrase he used so much, Don Claudio stated that «if, as Ibn Ḥazm wrote, the flower of civil war is always infertile, it sometimes becomes poisonous [...]. And it was so, albeit to a lesser degree, during the first third of the 12th century, when it favoured the separation of Portugal» / «si, como escribió Ibn Ḥazm, la flor de la guerra civil siempre es infecunda, a veces llega a ser ponzoñosa. Lo fue cuando la disputa de rodriguistas y vizitanos [...]. Y lo fue, aunque en menor grado, durante el primer tercio del siglo XII, al favorecer la separación de Portugal». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1977, vol. 2, p. 429. Similarly, in his *Testamento histórico-político*, he stated: «“Castilians and Portuguese, because we are all Spaniards”, Camoens had written. But his righteous thought did not take root among the inhabitants of Portugal» / «‘Castellanos y portugueses, porque españoles lo somos todos’, había escrito Camoens. Pero su justo pensamiento no arraigó entre los moradores en Portugal». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1975, p. 190.

79. García Sanjuán, 2005, pp. 143-153.

80. Sánchez-Albornoz, 1983, p. 9: «news reached me from Spain about the attitude of many Andalusians who let themselves be seduced by the Islamic past of their lands and put their integral Spanishness in parenthesis» / «...las noticias que me llegaban de España acerca de la actitud de muchos andaluces que se dejaban seducir por el pasado islámico de sus tierras y ponen en paréntesis su integral española». On this issue, see Venegas, 2018, pp. 130 ff.

81. Sánchez-Albornoz's reaction to this phenomenon was the publication, in August 1980 in the Catalan newspaper *La Vanguardia*, of a text entitled «Veleidades islamizantes en Andalucía. Reconquista de la Reconquista», dedicated «to his Andalusian friends» and which constituted an inflammatory pamphlet in favour of the «Reconquista» ideology and, to a large extent, a polemic against Islam and al-Andalus. This text was, later on, reproduced and popularised in the book *De la Andalucía islámica a la de hoy*. Ríos Saloma, 2020, pp. 263-282; García Sanjuán, 2017b, pp. 305-328; Ríos Saloma, 2021, pp. 269-287; García Sanjuán, 2020c, pp. 133-162; García Sanjuán, 2012, pp. 65-104; Ríos Saloma, 2019. It is curious to see how, in previous works, Sánchez-Albornoz had criticised the presentism carried out by Arabists such as Simonet

the historical reality testifies to the forging of the Spanish people in the open battle between Moors and Christians [...] It explains the survival and even the accentuation of our temperamental heritage and our mood [...] Our Middle Ages, the great drama of centuries-old fierce battle against Islam [...] forged the modern *homo hispanus*, with rough edges and as unsupportive of his brothers as the primitive peninsular was [...] would we have conquered America and fought for the Catholic unity of Europe until we fell exhausted?⁸²

In other words, the «Reconquista» further shaped the *homo hispanus*, emphasizing its features, and defining its future. But, above all, the «Reconquista» unified the *homo hispanus* again, at least regarding some of its features, such as religion⁸³. In this sense, it could be discussed whether for Sánchez-Albornoz Christianity became an essential feature of the «pre-Muslim», an idea, I believe, indirectly seen in his texts⁸⁴, which was of course shared by some of his contemporaries, such as Asín Palacios⁸⁵.

Conclusion. Al-Mu'tamid and Sánchez-Albornoz: parallel histories

In conclusion, let us return to the main question of this article: why did Sánchez-Albornoz write this novel? A fragment of its prologue can help us find the answer:

After having written this revealing historical fresco, I was ashamed, however, of my spawn, and I put it away [...]. I was afraid that its publication would stain my scientific status [...]. I was in exile, far away from my homeland [...]. After a quarter of a century, I have casually found, within my old papers, this narrative fruit of my summer retreat near a lake at the foot of the Andes⁸⁶.

in his treatment of al-Andalus: «Simonet writes viciously against the Muslims. The political problems of his time disturbed the serenity of his judgement and moved him to use words and concepts of his own day. For him, Pelayo is, for example, the leader of the Catholic party. How this epithet echoes the polemics of the Restoration and the Regency!» / «Simonet escribe con saña contra los musulmanes. Los problemas políticos de su época perturbaban la serenidad de su juicio y le mueven a emplear palabras y conceptos de sus días. Pelayo es para él, por ejemplo, el jefe del partido católico. ¡Cómo resuena en ese calificativo el eco de las polémicas de la Restauración y de la Regencia!» Sánchez-Albornoz, 1944, pp. 11-114.

82. «La realidad histórica atestigua la forja del pueblo español en la batalla abierta entre moros y cristianos [...] Explica la pervivencia e incluso la acentuación de nuestra herencia temperamental y de nuestro talante [...] Nuestro medievo, el gran drama de la multiseccular y feroz batalla contra el islam [...] forjó al *homo hispanus* moderno, de ásperas aristas y tan insolidario de sus hermanos como eran los primitivos peninsulares [...] ¿habríamos conquistado América y habríamos combatido por la unidad católica de Europa hasta caer exhaustos?» Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, p. 91.

83. The idea of the «Reconquista» as a «civil war» between Spaniards of different religions was one of the consequences of these tendencies. See Bravo López, 2021.

84. For example Sánchez-Albornoz, 1965, p. 52.

85. Asín Palacios, 1931.

86. «Después de haber escrito este anovelado fresco histórico, me avergoncé, empero, de mi engendro, y lo archivé [...] Temí que su publicación manchase mi crédito científico [...] Estaba en el destierro, lejos

In other words, and although it was published in 1972, Sánchez-Albornoz wrote the manuscript of the novel in the 1940s, in his first years of exile, during a summer retreat in Los Andes. It seems that he wrote it as a personal and intimate exercise, the publication of which was not then considered, while deeply influenced by his new situation of exile, «far away from my homeland». Thus, he used a literary genre like the novel, always less static, to unleash the thoughts that undoubtedly haunted him in those first years after his departure from Spain. As he says in his *Testamento histórico-político*, «not a single one of the thousands and thousands of days I have spent in exile has passed without meditating on the historical causes of the crisis tearing Spain apart in 1936»⁸⁷.

Let us return to Ibn Ḥazm with another quote from his *Testamento histórico-político*:

I came to a lapidary phrase from the great Cordovan thinker of Spanish-pre-Muslim origin Ibn Hazm. Faced with the vision of his homeland torn by internal discord he wrote: «the flower of civil war is sterile». This beautiful metaphor strongly hurt my sensitivity... Reading the lyrical definition deeply moved me in the midst of the psychic shocks that the thunderstorm of civil war produced in my soul⁸⁸.

This phrase, so often repeated by the medievalist in his different books, reflects Sánchez-Albornoz's view of himself, his time, his wishes and concerns reflected in the Taifa context in which Ibn Ḥazm lived.

In his various works, Sánchez-Albornoz always tries to find those connections between past and present that help him to explain the fate of the Spanish people and its ever-threatened unity, in order to «thus understand the pains of Spain [and of himself, it should be added] through its History»⁸⁹. As he says in his *Testamento histórico-político*: «I have not thought of myself as exempt from presenting brief pictures of the remote and near past of those processes of Spain's past that have led to the problems of today and of the Hispanic future»⁹⁰. Following this exercise, in *La España musulmana*, for example, he states:

de la patria [...] Al cabo de un cuarto de siglo, he tropezado casualmente entre mis viejos papeles con esta narración fruto de mi encierro estival junto a un lago al pie de los Andes». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, p. 12.

87. «No ha transcurrido uno solo de los miles y miles de días que llevo en el destierro sin que haya dejado de meditar sobre las causas históricas de la crisis que desgarró a España en 1936 y de reflexionar sobre el futuro de la patria». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1975, p. 13.

88. «En mi lectura de los autores hispano-musulmanes para escribir mi obra *En torno a los orígenes del feudalismo*, tropecé además con una frase lapidaria del gran pensador cordobés de origen español-premuslim Ibn Hazm. Ante el espectáculo de su patria desgarrada por la discordia intestina escribí: 'la flor de la guerra civil es infecunda'. Esta bella metáfora hirió fuertemente mi sensibilidad [...] La lectura de la lírica definición me conmovió profundamente en medio de las sacudidas psíquicas que la tronada de la guerra civil producía en mi alma». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, p. 49.

89. «...comprender los dolores de España a través de su Historia». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1975, p. 27.

90. «No me he creído exento de presentar breves cuadros del pasado remoto y cercano de aquellos procesos del ayer de España que han desembocado en problemas del hoy y del futuro hispanos». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1975, p. 15.

After the Cordovan revolutions, and the crisis of caliphal authority, which was their immediate corollary, as has always happened in Spain – in Moorish Spain and in Christian Spain – when the central power has fallen into impotence, anarchy dominated the Peninsula and secessionism triumphed. Bold, ambitious and fortunate men seized power in several important cities and in small secondary towns and carved out kingdoms or petty kingdoms of varying size and vitality⁹¹.

In this sense, looking for the causes of the situation of his contemporary Spain, he stated that «it is well known that the republicans had reached total fragmentation [...], it was impossible to put the hordes of so many different chieftains in agreement»⁹². And, I believe, he found, within what he understood to be part of the history of the *homo hispanus*, no better parallelism for that reality than the Taifa period. And that is why this novel must be understood as a metaphor for his own personal experience, as well as a fitting synthesis, as has been shown, of all his historical thought. It is curious, or perhaps revealing, that Sánchez-Albornoz, the great defender of the idea and triumph of the «Reconquista», but also of the idea of «Muslim Spain», found in al-Andalus the mirror in which to reflect his own existence. Although this may seem paradoxical and even contradictory⁹³, in reality it is not, since it is based on the essentialist continuity of the Hispanic element and the search for its unity as a primary objective.

What better than the story of al-Mu'tamid, a learned man involved in politics and circumstantially in rulership, and who ended his days in exile, far from his «homeland», to parallel Sánchez-Albornoz's own life?⁹⁴ The historian stated on many occasions that this exile was not only a burden from the point of view of his personal experience, but also from the

91. «...tras las revoluciones cordobesas y la crisis de autoridad califal que fue su inmediato corolario, como siempre ha ocurrido en España – en la España mora y en la España cristiana – cuando el poder central ha caído en la impotencia, la anarquía dominó la Península y triunfó el secesionismo. Hombres audaces, ambiciosos y afortunados se arrogaron el poder en diversas ciudades importantes y en pequeñas poblaciones secundarias y se tallaron reinos o reinecillos de extensión y vitalidad diversas». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1960, vol. 2, p. 7.

92. «...es notorio que los republicanos habíamos llegado al integral fraccionamiento...fue imposible poner de acuerdo a las huestes de tantos caudillos distintos y perdimos las elecciones». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1975, p. 42.

93. Alejandro García Sanjuán and Juan Pablo Domínguez have written on this. See García Sanjuán, 2017b, pp. 305-328; García Sanjuán, 2012, pp. 65-104; Domínguez, 2016, pp. 231-249.

94. It is paradoxical to see how Blas Infante, one of the creators of the Andalusian nationalism that greatly concerned Sánchez-Albornoz in the last years of his life, also identified himself with al-Mu'tamid and used the figure of the poet-king to illustrate his nostalgia for the Andalusian past and for this supposedly free-thinking Andalusia, to the point of making a pilgrimage in 1924 to the tomb of the king of Seville in Aghmat to reconnect with «the spirit of our land». Venegas, 2018, pp. 130 ff. It should not be forgotten that Blas Infante, in his *Motamid*, último *Rey de Sevilla*, used the theatrical genre as the most appropriate method for the pedagogical purposes of his work, and that Sánchez-Albornoz's work is a dramatized novel. Without aiming to give an answer here, I would like to raise the following question: could the medievalist's short text be an indirect response to Blas Infante's work which, it is worth remembering, proposed the rupture of the precious – for Sánchez-Albornoz – Hispanic unity?

perspective of his intellectual activity, from his position as a humanist. Thus, in one of his articles in the journal *Cuadernos de Historia de España*, he grieved:

But since I have been teaching and working in Argentina for eight years now, the lack of modern legal-historical bibliography concerning the Middle Ages, which I am unable to remedy, has confined me to themes of a very narrow scope; and I only venture outside them when the sources allow me to do so without too great a risk. I don't know when I will be able to overcome the present difficulties of work...⁹⁵

And, in contrast to a human being like al-Mu'tamid, a litterateur, a learned man, prisoner of politics who ends up paying the toll of exile, he placed Ibn 'Ammār in his novel, again, with a parallel to his own present:

I let myself be won over by my personal antipathy towards unscrupulous intellectuals and politicians, careerists, ambitious for power and wealth, zigzagging, disloyal, envious, superstitious and cruel, capable of going from flattery to espionage and lies, proud and violent towards the masses [...]. For what the Arabian histories tell of him (of Ibn 'Ammār), he deserves to be equated with many present-day politicians we have all met and known⁹⁶.

Sánchez-Albornoz finished his novel with an evocative and eloquent image: «A Berber village, in the mountains, between prickly pears and palm trees. In the courtyard of a miserable house, al-Mu'tamid, very poorly dressed, with chains on his feet, writes...»⁹⁷ How can we not see Sánchez-Albornoz reflected in this image, if we change our vision of the Atlas Mountains for that of the Andes after his escape from the Civil War, from the *fitna*, the great danger that for the medievalist – as for the medieval Muslim authors – threatened his community?

95. «Pero desde que, hace ya ocho años – escribía en 1948 –, enseñé y trabajé en la Argentina, la falta que padezco, y que no puedo subsanar, de la bibliografía histórico-jurídica moderna concerniente a la Edad Media, me tiene confinado en temas de ámbito muy ceñido; y sólo me aventuro fuera de ellos cuando las fuentes me lo permiten sin demasiado grave riesgo. No sé cuándo podré vencer las actuales dificultades de trabajo [...]» Sánchez-Albornoz, 1948, pp. 142-179.

96. «Me dejé ganar por mi personal antipatía hacia los intelectuales y políticos sin escrúpulos, arribistas, ambiciosos de mando y de riquezas, zigzagueantes, desleales, envidiosos, a la par supersticiosos y crueles, capaces de pasar de la adulación al espionaje y la mentira, orgullosos y violentos con las masas [...] Por lo que de él cuentan las historias arábigas merece ser equiparado a muchos políticos de hoy que todos hemos conocido y conocemos». Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, pp. 11.

97. «Una aldea berberisca, en la montaña, entre chumberas y palmeras. En el patio de una casa miserable, al-Mútamid, pobrísimamente vestido, con grillos en los pies, escribe junto a Rumaykiya, que teje a su lado...» Sánchez-Albornoz, 1972, p. 139.

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