Map 1. The Iberian peninsula, 711–1031.
6. TWO ACCOUNTS OF THE MUSLIM CONQUEST (711)

A. Chronicle of 754
Translated from Latin by Kenneth B. Wolf

The anonymous Latin Chronicle of 754 was written by a Christian living in al-Andalus during the second generation after the conquest of 711. It was designed as an installment in the ongoing “universal chronicle” begun by Eusebius and Jerome in the fourth century and continued by John of Biclaro and Isidore of Seville. Because the extant Arab histories postdate the Muslim conquest of Spain by hundreds of years, the Chronicle of 754 is the single most important source of information on the “settling in” period of Muslim rule—from the invasion to the eve of the establishment of the Umayyad emirate (750). The following selection describes the conquest itself. It is important to realize that, despite its rhetorical expressions of horror and grief, the chronicle as a whole treats the Muslim governors as legitimate rulers, evaluating them in terms of their ability to promote peace and order on the peninsula rather than dismissing them altogether as non-Christians. The dates in the translation reflect the usage in the original, and are not always accurate. (KBW)

In Justinian’s time, in the aforesaid year, the first year of his rule and the eighty-ninth of the Arabs, Walid held the kingship among the Arabs. In Spain, Witiza continued to rule for his fifteenth year.

In Justinian’s time, in the era 747 (709), in his fourth year [sic] as emperor and the ninety-first of the Arabs, Walid received the sceptre of the kingdom of the Saracens, as his father had arranged, and fought various peoples for four years. He was victorious and, endowed with great honours, exercised his rule for nine years. He was a man of great prudence in deploying his armies to the extent that, though lacking in divine favour, he crushed the forces of almost all neighbouring peoples, made Romania especially weak with constant raiding, nearly brought the islands to their destruction, raided and subdued the territory of India, brought cities to utter destitution, besieged fortresses, and, from the twisted paths of Libya, subdued all of Mauretania. In the western regions, Walid, through a general of his army by the name of Musa, attacked

1. The Byzantine emperor Justinian II (r.705–711).
2. Walid I, Umayyad caliph in Damascus (r.705–715).
3. Asia Minor.
4. Muslim armies had crossed North Africa to Morocco by 705.
5. Mūsā ibn Nuṣair was appointed governor of Ifriqiya (roughly modern Tunisia) in 707.
and conquered the kingdom of the Goths—which had been established with ancient solidity almost 350 years ago from its foundation in the era 400 (362) and which had been extended peacefully throughout Spain from the time of LeoVigild for almost 140 years up to the era 750 (712) — and having seized the kingdom, he made it pay tribute.

In Justinian’s time, in the era 749 (711), in his fourth year as emperor and the ninety-second of the Arabs, with Walid retaining the sceptre of the kingdom for the fifth year, Roderic rebelliously seized the kingdom at the instigation of the senate.6 He ruled for only one year. Mustering his forces, he directed armies against the Arabs and the Moors sent by Musa, that is against Tariq ibn Ziyad7 and the others, who had long been raiding the province consigned to them and simultaneously devastating many cities. In the fifth year of Justinian’s rule, the ninety-third of the Arabs, and the sixth of Walid, in the era 750 (712), Roderic headed for the Transductine mountains8 to fight them and in that battle the entire army of the Goths, which had come with him fraudulently and in rivalry out of ambition for the kingship, fled and he was killed. Thus Roderic wretchedly lost not only his rule but his homeland, his rivals also being killed, as Walid was completing his sixth year of rule.

* * *

In Justinian’s time, in the era 749 (711), in his fourth year as emperor, the ninety-second of the Arabs, and the fifth of Walid, while Spain was being devastated by the aforesaid forces and was greatly afflicted not only by the enemy but also by domestic fury, Musa himself, approaching this wretched land across the straits of Cádiz and pressing on to the pillars of Hercules—which reveal the entrance to the port like an index to a book or like keys in his hand revealing and unlocking the passage to Spain—entered the long plundered and godlessly invaded Spain to destroy it.9 After forcing his way to Toledo, the royal city, he imposed on the adjacent regions an evil and fraudulent peace. He decapitated on a scaffold those noble lords who had remained, arresting them in their flight from Toledo with the help of Oppa, King Egica’s son. With Oppa’s support, he killed them all with the sword. Thus he devasted not only Hispania Ulterior, but Hispania Citerior10 up to and beyond

---

6. Roderic (r.710–711). The term “senate” probably refers to the palace officials.
7. Tariq ibn Ziyad, governor of Tangiers, had been appointed by Mūsā ibn Nuṣair to lead a force to Spain in 711.
8. Location unknown, but perhaps in the region of Medina Sidonia.
9. Mūsā entered Spain in 712 and, after taking Seville and Mérida, joined up with Tariq in Toledo in 713.
10. Hispania Ulterior and Hispania Citerior refer, respectively, to the Roman division of
the ancient and once flourishing city of Zaragoza, now, by the judgement of God, openly exposed to the sword, famine, and captivity. He ruined beautiful cities, burning them with fire; condemned lords and powerful men to the cross; and butchered youths and infants with the sword. While he terrorized everyone in this way, some of the cities that remained sued for peace under duress and, after persuading and mocking them with a certain craftiness, the Saracens granted their requests without delay. When the citizens subsequently rejected what they had accepted out of fear and terror, they tried to flee to the mountains where they risked hunger and various forms of death. The Saracens set up their savage kingdom in Spain, specifically in Córdoba, formerly a patrician see and always the most opulent in comparison to the rest of the cities, giving its first fruits to the kingdom of the Visigoths.

* * *

In the era 750 (712), in Justinian's sixth year as emperor and the ninety-fourth of the Arabs, Musa, after fifteen months had elapsed, was summoned by order of the princes and, leaving his son Abd al-Aziz in his place, he returned to his homeland and presented himself to the king Walid in the last year of his reign. Musa brought with him from Spain some noblemen who had escaped the sword; gold and silver, assayed with zeal by the bankers; a large quantity of valuable ornaments, precious stones, and pearls; ointments to kindle women's desire; and many other things from the length and breadth of Spain that would be tedious to record. When he arrived, by God's will he found Walid angry. Musa was ignominiously removed from the prince's presence and paraded with a rope around his neck.

* * *

At the same time, in the era 753 (715), in Justinian's ninth year as emperor and the ninety-seventh of the Arabs, Abd al-Aziz pacified all of Spain for three years under the yoke of tribute. After he had taken all the riches and positions of honour in Seville, as well as the queen of Spain, whom he joined in marriage, and the daughters of kings and princes, whom he treated western and eastern Spain. The division did not run exactly north-south and thus much of the southern peninsula was in Hispania Ulterior.

11. Actually, Walid was ill and died shortly after the return of Mūsā and Tāriq (who left Spain in 714), leaving his successor, Sulaymān, to deal with the conquerors of Spain.

12. To humiliate him publicly.

13. 'Abd al-'Aziz, the son of Mūsā, ruled 714–716. His capital was in Seville. The Andalusi capital moved to Córdoba a few years later.
as concubines and then rashly repudiated, he was eventually killed on the advice of Ayub by a revolt of his own men while he was in prayer. After Ayub had held Spain for a full month, Al-Hurr succeeded to the throne of Hesperia by order of the prince, who was informed about the death of Abd al-Aziz in this way: that on the advice of queen Egilona, wife of the late king Roderic, whom he had joined to himself, he tried to throw off the Arab yoke from his neck and retain the conquered kingdom of Iberia for himself.

B. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (d.871), Narrative of the Conquest of al-Andalus
Translated from Arabic by David A. Cohen

The earliest surviving accounts of the Islamic conquest of Spain in Arabic date from the mid- to late ninth century. The best known of these is a collection of stories and legends contained in the Futūḥ Misr [Conquest of Egypt] of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (d.871), a member of a prominent Arab family of religious and legal scholars from Egypt.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam's life and writing are typical of the Islamic culture of his time. The most characteristic feature of this culture was the transmission of ideas, religious rules, prophecies, and other knowledge in the form of anecdotes or narratives called ḥadīth. The most important ḥadīth were tales about the prophet Muhammad, which were used as the basis of Islamic religious law, but stories about profane historical events were told in the form of ḥadīth as well. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam's history is essentially a collection of ḥadīth. In the first centuries of Islam, oral recitation was the principal means of transmission of the ḥadīth. Since devout Muslims wanted trustworthy reports of actual events, it became customary to preface the ḥadīth with authenticating sequences or chains of oral sources called isnād. This selection from the Futūḥ Misr includes several isnād.

A modern reader should keep in mind the pious atmosphere of oral storytelling in which Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam gathered his material. The ḥadīth were often told by holy men inside the mosque, and hearing and learning them were considered forms of religious devotion, as well as instruction and entertainment. A history written from such stories may jar modern tastes, which are accustomed to a very different notion of the relevance of events. Historians in recent decades have tended to discount the usefulness of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam and accounts like his for the study of the Islamic conquest of Spain. Some have doubted whether many of the persons mentioned, such as Julian and Tārīq, even existed. Nevertheless Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam's moralizing tales offer a telling glimpse into the world of mainstream, pious Muslims as they reflected on Islam's experience of conquest. (DAC)

14. Ayyūb ibn Ḥabīb al-Lakhmī ruled briefly in 716, then was succeeded by al-Ḥurr ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīm al-Thaqafī (r.716–718) by order of the Muslim governor of Ifriqiya.

He said: Mūsā ibn Nuṣair sent his son Marwān ibn Mūsā to Tangiers, stationing him on the coast. When he and his friends became tired, he left, and he bestowed the command of his army on Tāriq ibn ʿAmrū. There were 1,700 men, but it is also said there were 12,000 Berbers and 16 Arabs, though this is not true. . . .

There was a strait between [Tangiers] and the people of al-Andalus, and [ruling] over it was a non-Arab man called Julian [Arabic Yulyān], lord of Ceuta and of a city on the passage to al-Andalus called Algeciras [al-Khaḍrāʾu]. Algeciras was one of the cities adjacent to Tangiers [i.e., on the Spanish coast opposite Tangiers], and it was Julian’s. He was accustomed to obey Roderic [Ludhrīq], lord of al-Andalus, who lived in Toledo. Tāriq wrote to Julian and flattered him, until they exchanged presents. Now Julian had sent his daughter to Roderic, lord of al-Andalus, for her education and instruction, and Roderic made her pregnant. When this news reached Julian he said, “I do not see how I can punish him or pay him back except by sending the Arabs against him.” So he sent word to Tāriq, saying, “It is I who will take you to al-Andalus.” At that time Tāriq was in Tlemcen and Mūsā ibn Nuṣair was in Qairawan. Tāriq answered, “I will not trust you until you send me a hostage,” so Julian sent him his two daughters. He had no children other than these two. Tāriq put them under secure guard in Tlemcen, and then he went out to Julian, who was in Ceuta on the straits. Julian rejoiced at his arrival and said to him, “I will take you over to al-Andalus.” Now there was in the straits, between the two coasts, a mountain lying between Ceuta and al-Andalus called today Gibraltar [Jabal Tāriq].

When it was evening, Julian came to him with ships, and he carried him across the strait, and he lay in wait there during the day. The next evening he sent the ships back to the rest of his companions, and they were all brought to him. The people of al-Andalus did not know about them, nor did they think anything except that the ships going back and forth were similar to the [merchant] ships that [usually] went back and forth in the straits for their profit.

Tāriq was in the last group of riders, and when he went over to his companions, Julian and the merchants who were with him stayed behind in Alge-

1. The “he” of this and similar phrases throughout the text refers to the author. Such constructions recall the circumstances of oral recitation. The Arabic word translated as “narrative” in the title, ḍhibār, can also mean oral relating, remembrance, or recitation.

2. Arab general who lived 640–716 or 717. He is known principally for his leading role in the Islamic conquest of North Africa and for his subsequent rivalry with his onetime subordinate Tāriq.

3. The identity of this Arabic place-name and a number of others in the text are disputed by scholars.
circas, which was better for their spirit. The report of Ta'riq and those who were with him reached the people of al-Andalus and the places where they lived. Meanwhile Ta'riq, followed by his companions, went his way over a bridge from the mountains to a village called Qartājanna [Carteya, a Roman town now in ruins], and they marched heading for Córdoba.

He said: As my father, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, and Hishām ibn Ishāq told me, there was a house of [many] locks in al-Andalus, and no king could hold power over them unless he added a lock of his own, until there came the king who was attacked by the Muslims. They [the people of al-Andalus] urged him to place a lock on the house just as the kings before him had done, but he refused. “I will not put anything on the house until I know what is inside,” he declared, and he commanded that it be opened. In it were drawn pictures of the Arabs, and also there was writing, which said, “When this door is opened, these people will conquer this country.”

Then he returned to the Ḥadīth of 'Uthmān and of others. He said: As Ta'riq marched, the warriors of Córdoba came out against him, and they were emboldened when they saw how few were his companions. They fought, and their fight increased in intensity until they were defeated. Then [the Muslims] did not stop killing them until they reached the city of Córdoba. When Roderic heard this, he marched out against them from Toledo. They met at a place called Sidonia [Shadūna] at a river called today Wādi Umm Ḥakīm. They fought a fierce battle, and God, glory and greatness upon him, killed Roderic and those who were with him. . . . Ta'riq then advanced to Toledo, and he entered it and asked after the table. He had no thought other than for this table, for it was the table of Sulaimān ibn Dā‘ūd, as is alleged by the People of the Book. Yahyā ibn Bukair told us that al-Laith ibn Sa‘d told him that when al-Andalus was conquered by Mūsā ibn Nuṣair, the table and crown of Sulaimān ibn Dā‘ūd, prayers and blessings of God be upon him, were seized. Ta'riq was informed that the table was in a fortress called Firās, two days' journey from Toledo, and the lord of the fortress was the son of Roderic's sister. So Ta'riq sent to him a guarantee of his safety and the safety of the people of his

4. This phrase probably means that it was better for the morale of the Muslim soldiers if Julian and the ships remained on the Iberian side to provide a way of escape.
5. The Arabic word translated here as bridge, gantara, can mean an arched bridge or a viaduct supported by arches. Ruins of a Moorish viaduct exist today at Algeciras, and in the eighteenth century remains of a viaduct could be found at Gibraltar.
6. According to Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, Umm Ḥakīm was the name of a slave girl of Ta'riq. An island off the coast of southern Spain captured by Ta'riq is also said to have been named after her.
7. The term “People of the Book” in Islam refers to Christians and Jews, i.e., those who follow religions founded on the Bible. Sulaimān ibn Dā‘ūd is the Arabic name for the biblical Solomon, son of David. The story of the finding of Solomon's table caught the imagination of medieval Islamic writers and was subsequently much embellished. It appears in the Thousand and One Nights.
house, whereupon he surrendered to Tāriq, who kept him safe and carried out all he had promised him. Then Tāriq said to him, “Hand over the table,” and he did so. On it were gold and gems such as had never been seen. Tāriq tore off one of the legs together with its gems and gold, and put in its place a similar one. The value of the table was estimated at 200,000 dinars, because of the gems that were on it. Tāriq then took what was his from the gems, weapons, gold, silver, and table service, and it amounted to the same value in money, the like of which had never been seen. So he gathered it all up and returned to Córdoba and stayed there. He wrote to Mūsā ibn Nuṣair and told him of the conquest of al-Andalus and the booty he had won. Mūsā then wrote to al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik informing him of this, and he threw himself on his mercy. Mūsā also wrote to Tāriq saying that he should not move beyond Córdoba until he should come to him, and he reviled him bitterly.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam continues his account with various stories in which Mūsā, Tāriq, and members of the caliphal family in Syria quarrel and intrigue over sharing the vast spoils from al-Andalus. Both Tāriq and Mūsā are obliged to travel to the caliphal court to protect their claims and their lives.

... it is also said that Mūsā ibn Nuṣair came to al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik when al-Walīd was sick, and Mūsā gave the table [of Solomon] to him as a present. But Tāriq declared, “It is I who won the table!” Mūsā called him a liar. So Tāriq said to al-Walīd, “Call for the table, and see whether any of the gold from it is missing.” Al-Walīd called for it, and he saw how one of the legs was not the same as the others. And Tāriq said to him, “Ask him, O Commander of the Faithful, and if he can tell you truthfully about what you seek to know, then he is right.” So al-Walīd asked him about the table leg, and he said, “I found it like this.” Then Tāriq brought out the leg he had taken when he found [the table], and he said, “The Commander of the Faithful asked you about it in order to find the truth about what I have said, and indeed it is I who found it.” So al-Walīd trusted him, graciously accepted his account, and valued his prize highly.

Neither Mūsā nor Tāriq ever returned to Spain. Before his departure, Mūsā, as governor of Islamic North Africa, appointed his son ‘Abd al-‘Azīz to rule as governor over Spain.

8. Al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik was caliph of Damascus at the time of the conquest; his reign lasted from 705 to 715.
9. Literally, “he gave him his life,” i.e., he gave the caliph the right to decide whether he should live or die.
Then he returned to the ḥadīth of ‘Uthmān and others, and he said: After his father departed, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz married a Christian princess, daughter of a king of al-Andalus. It is said she was the daughter of Roderic, king of al-Andalus, whom Tāriq killed. She brought him a great fortune in worldly things, such as cannot be described. When she came to him, she said, “Why do I not see the people of your kingdom glorifying you? They do not prostrate themselves before you as the people of my father’s kingdom glorified him and prostrated themselves before him.” He did not know what to say to her, so he commanded that the side of his palace be pierced with a small door. He used to give audience to the people, and for this purpose he would come to the inside of the door, so that someone entering to see him would have to lower his head on account of the smallness of the door. She was in a [hidden] spot watching the people, and when she saw this, she said to ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, “Now you are a great king!” The people heard, however, that he had constructed the door for this purpose, and some believed that she had made him a Christian. So Ḥabīb ibn Abī ‘Ubaida al-Fihrī and Ziyād ibn al-Nābigha al-Tamīmī and their friends from the Arab tribes, when they heard about it, stirred up rebellion against him. They decided to kill ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. They went to his muezzin and said, “Give the call to prayer at night so that we may come out for prayers.” So the muezzin called out and intoned the call to prayer, and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz came out and said to his muezzin, “You have rushed indeed, giving the call to prayer at night!” Then he went to the mosque. Those of the [rebel] party had already gathered there, as well as others who were present for the prayers. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz went to the front and began to recite, “When the event happens—and there is no lie to the event—casting [some] low and raising [others] high,”10 whereupon Ḥabīb struck his sword at ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s head. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz turned away in flight until he came to his house, and he went into his garden and hid there under a bush. Ḥabīb ibn Abī ‘Ubaida and his companions fled, but Ziyād ibn al-Nābigha followed him. He came upon his tracks and found him under the bush. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz said to him, “Be merciful, Ibn al-Nābigha, and I will give you whatever you ask.” But he answered, “You may not taste life after this!” and finished him off, and he cut off his head.

Ḥabīb and Ziyād took the head to Syria and presented it to the caliph in the presence of Mūsā, the murdered man’s father. The caliph asked Mūsā if he knew the victim. Mūsā’s reply was laconic: “Yes, I knew him for his fasting and his praying, and upon him be the curse of God if the man who killed him was better than he.”

7. A MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN TREATY

The Treaty of Tudmir (713)
Translated from Arabic by Olivia R. Constable

There are no contemporary descriptions of the Muslim conquest (the earliest account comes from the Latin Chronicle of 754, translated above), but we do have a record of an Arabic document that appears to date from 713, two years after the first Muslim arrival. This document records a peace treaty between 'Abd al-'Azīz, the son of Mūsā ibn Nuṣair, and Theodemir (called Tudmir in Arabic), the local ruler of Murcia. In contrast to the accounts of the events of 711 provided by chronicles, which describe a quick and violent military victory, this document suggests that the Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula may have been a more gradual and piecemeal endeavor. In fact, it is possible that two different processes worked to bring the former Visigothic realm under Muslim rule. Some cities, including Toledo, the seat of Visigothic power, appear to have capitulated quickly in the face of military force. Other areas, however, may have been won by more peaceful means, using treaties such as this one to enlist the cooperation of local administrators and inhabitants. This treaty establishes the local Christian population as a protected group under Muslim rule. As with any dhimmī group, they were guaranteed personal safety and allowed to retain their religion in return for their loyalty to the Muslim regime and payment of an annual tax. (ORC)

In the name of God, the merciful and the compassionate.

This is a document [granted] by 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Mūsā ibn Nuṣair to Tudmir, son of Ghabdūsh, establishing a treaty of peace and the promise and protection of God and his Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace). We ['Abd al-'Azīz] will not set special conditions for him or for any among his men, nor harass him, nor remove him from power. His followers will not be killed or taken prisoner, nor will they be separated from their women and children. They will not be coerced in matters of religion, their churches will not be burned, nor will sacred objects be taken from the realm, [so long as] he [Tudmir] remains sincere and fulfills the [following] conditions that we have set for him. He has reached a settlement concerning seven towns: Orihuela, Valentina, Alicante, Mula, Bigastro, Ello, and Lorca. He will not give shelter to fugitives, nor to our enemies, nor encourage any protected person to fear us, nor conceal news of our enemies. He and [each of] his men shall [also] pay one dinar every year, together with four measures of wheat, four measures of barley, four liquid measures of concentrated fruit juice, four liquid measures

of vinegar, four of honey, and four of olive oil. Slaves must each pay half of this amount.

Names of four witnesses follow, and the document is dated from the Muslim month of Rajab, in the year 94 of the Hijra (April 713).
8. CHRISTIAN RESISTANCE IN THE NORTH (ca. 718)

Chronicle of Alfonso III (866–910)
Translated from Latin by Kenneth B. Wolf

Under Alfonso III (r. 866–910), the kingdom of Asturias achieved a political and military stature that expressed itself, among other ways, in the production of historical literature. The Chronicle of Alfonso III was designed as a continuation of Isidore's History of the Goths, Vandals, and Suevi. Its purpose, in narrative terms, was to show, first, how the Catholic Visigothic kings who had united Spain under their rule by the late sixth century lost it all to the Arabs in the early eighth century and, second, how the Christians of Asturias, self-described heirs to the Visigoths, were able to make good their claims to Spain at the expense of the Arabs. The chronicle was apparently written in the early 880s, when the Asturian monarchy under Alfonso III was taking advantage of a period of political instability in the Cordoban emirate and thinking—prematurely, as it turned out—that the days of Arab rule in Spain were numbered. Its author is unknown, although traditionally it has been ascribed to Alfonso III himself.

The selection below describes the Arab invasion of 711 and Pelayo's rise as a leader of the Christian resistance in Asturias shortly after. The self-confidence and sense of purpose that pervade the text belong more to the late ninth century than to the early eighth. (K BW)

But let us return to that time when the Saracens entered Spain on the third day before the Ides of November, era 752 (November 11, 714).

The Arabs, after oppressing the region along with the kingdom, killed many with the sword and subdued the rest to themselves by mollifying them with a covenant of peace. The city of Toledo, victor over all peoples, succumbed, vanquished by the victories of the Ishmaelites; subjected, it served them. They placed prefects throughout all the provinces of Spain and paid tribute to the Babylonian king¹ for many years until they elected their own king and established for themselves a kingdom in the patrician city of Córdoba.² At almost the same time, in this region of the Asturians, there was in the city of Gijón a prefect by the name of Munnuzza, a companion of Tariq. While he held the prefecture, a certain Pelayo, the swordbearer of the kings

1. That is, the Umayyad caliph in Damascus.
2. After the Abbasid revolution in 750, one of the few remaining members of the Umayyad family, 'Abd al-Rahmân, made his way to Spain where he established an independent Umayyad emirate with its capital in Córdoba.
Witiza and Roderic, oppressed by the dominion of the Ishmaelites, had come to Asturias along with his sister. On account of her, Munnuza sent Pelayo to Córdoba as his envoy. Before Pelayo returned, Munnuza married his sister through some stratagem. When Pelayo returned he by no means consented to it. Since he had already been thinking about the salvation of the church, he hastened to bring this about with all of his courage. Then the evil Tariq sent soldiers to Munnuza, who were to apprehend Pelayo and lead him back to Córdoba, bound in chains. When they came to Asturias, seeking to apprehend him treacherously in a village called Brece,³ the plan of the Chaldeans was made known to Pelayo by a friend. Seeing that it would be impossible for him to resist the Saracens because they were so numerous, Pelayo escaped from among them, rushed off and came to the edge of the river Piloña.⁴ He found it overflowing its banks, but by swimming with the help of the horse upon which he sat, he crossed to the opposite side and climbed a mountain. The Saracens stopped pursuing him. As he was heading into the mountains, Pelayo joined himself to as many people as he found hastening to assemble. He climbed a high mountain called Auseva and headed for a cave on the side of the mountain which he knew to be very safe.⁵ From this great cave flows a stream called the Enna. After Pelayo sent an order to all of the Asturians, they gathered together in one group and elected him their leader.⁶ Hearing this, the soldiers who had come to apprehend him returned to Córdoba and related everything to their king, saying that Pelayo, as Munnuza had suggested, was clearly a rebel. Hearing this, the king, moved by an insane fury, ordered a very large army from all over Spain to go forth and he placed Alqamah, his companion, in charge of it. He ordered Oppa, a certain bishop of the see of Toledo and son of King Witiza—on account of whose treachery the Goths had perished—to go with Alqamah and the army to Asturias. Alqamah was advised by his colleague Tariq that if Pelayo refused to come to terms with the bishop, he should be taken by force in battle and brought to Córdoba. Coming with an army of almost 187,000 soldiers, they entered Asturias.

Pelayo was on Mt. Auseva with his allies. The army advanced to him and set up countless tents before the mouth of the cave. Bishop Oppa ascended the hill in front of Covadonga and spoke to Pelayo, saying, “Pelayo, Pelayo, where are you?”

The bishop said to him, “I think that it is not unknown to you, brother

³. Location unknown.
⁴. Near Cangas de Onís.
⁵. Covadonga, a spot a few miles to the east of Cangas de Onís.
⁶. Pelayo (r. 718–737).
and son, how all of Spain a short time ago was organized according to one order under the rule of the Goths, and that it outshone all other lands in learning and knowledge. If when the entire army of the Goths was assembled, it was unable to sustain the attack of the Ishmaelites, how much better will you be able to defend yourself on this mountain top? To me it seems difficult. Rather, heed my warning and recall your soul from this decision, so that you may take advantage of many good things and enjoy the partnership of the Chaldeans.”

To this Pelayo responded, “Have you not read in the divine scriptures that the church of God is compared to a mustard seed and that it will be raised up again through divine mercy?”

The bishop responded, “It is indeed written thus.”

Pelayo said, “Christ is our hope that through this little mountain, which you see, the well-being of Spain and the army of the Gothic people will be restored. I have faith that the promise of the Lord which was spoken through David will be fulfilled in us: ‘I will visit their iniquities with the rod and their sins with scourges; but I will not remove my mercy from them.’ Now, therefore, trusting in the mercy of Jesus Christ, I despise this multitude and am not afraid of it. As for the battle with which you threaten us, we have for ourselves an advocate in the presence of the Father, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is capable of liberating us from these few.”

And the bishop turned to the army and said, “Go forth and fight. You heard how he responded to me. I can see by his determination that you will never have a covenant of peace with him unless it be achieved through the vengeance of the sword.”

Then Alqamah ordered his men to engage in battle. They took up arms. The catapults were set up. The slings were prepared. Swords flashed. Spears were brandished. Arrows were shot incessantly. But on this occasion the power of the Lord was not absent. For when stones were launched from the catapults and they neared the shrine of the holy virgin Mary, which is inside the cave, they turned back on those who shot them and violently cut down the Chaldeans. And because the Lord does not count spears, but offers the palm of victory to whomsoever he will, when the Asturians came out of the cave to fight, the Chaldeans turned in flight and were divided into two groups. There Bishop Oppa was immediately captured and Alqamah was killed. In that same place 124,000 of the Chaldeans were killed. But the 63,000 who were left alive

8. Ps. 89:32–33.
ascended to the summit of Mt. Auseva and came down to Liebana through Amuesa. But they could not escape the vengeance of the Lord. For when they had reached the summit of the mountain, which is over the bank of a river called the Deva, next to a village called Cosgaya, it happened, by a judgment of God, that the mountain, quaking from its very base, hurled the 63,000 men into the river and crushed them all. There even now, when this river fills beyond its limit, it reveals many visible signs of these events. Do not think this to be unfounded or fictitious. Remember that he who parted the waters of the Red Sea so that the children of Israel might cross, also crushed, with an immense mass of mountain, the Arabs who were persecuting the church of God.

When Munnuza learned what had happened, he sprang from the same coastal city of Gijón and fled. In a certain village called Olalies he was captured and killed along with his men. Then the country was populated, the church restored, and everyone together gave thanks to God, saying, “Blessed be the name of the Lord who strengthens those who believe in him and destroys wicked peoples.” Within a short time, Alfonso, the son of Peter, who was the leader of the Cantabrians and was from the royal line, came to Asturias. He received in marriage the daughter of Pelayo named Ernesinda and he brought about many victories with his father-in-law and also afterward. Finally peace was restored to the land. To the extent that the dignity of the name of Christ grew, the derisive calamity of the Chaldeans wasted away. Pelayo lived as king for nineteen years. His life came to an end with a natural death at Cangas de Onís in the era 775 (737).

9. The Muslims apparently fled through the heart of the mountainous Picos de Europa region of eastern Asturias and western Cantabria.