The Caliphate of Córdoba:

Cultural exchange through tenth-century Mediterranean politics

Dionís Baixeras i Verdaguer, *La civilització del califat de Còrdova en temps d'Abd-al-Rahman III*, painting, Universitat de Barcelona, 1885, https://museuvirtual.ub.edu/objecte/792a/.

Bachelor's Thesis Comparative European History

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15/06/2025

Word count: 9.077

Introduction

Expecting barbarity, John of Gorze (c. 900-974) arrives at the great Madīnat al-Zahrā' and recites his first reaction to his overdue visit to Córdoba in 953;

> "[...] *but that the monks of Gorze, who were dedicated to asceticism, were provided with food and worldly expenses to an extent unheard of for them* - praeter usum - *with the kind of opulence that one imagines a king would be provided as a guest* [...]"[1]

In place of hostility, John of Gorze and his embassy are met with the strict but welcoming party of 'Abd al-Rahmān III (emir: r. 912-929; caliph: r. 929-961). The unlikely meeting of this Ottonian monk and the reigning caliph of Córdoba didn't occur in a void and spurred several interesting developments. Why did a meeting such as this transpire during a time when, aside from war, little contact between powers of differing religions took place? It is possible that tenth-century interreligious diplomatic relations were not as hostile as previously believed. The interconnectivity of the tenth century transcended religious rivalries; rather, it was a time of great developments and change.

Tenth-century Mediterranean politics involved several powers in various stages of strength and weakness. The Byzantine Empire under Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos (r. 913-959) was often at odds with the Ottonian Empire under Otto I (king: r. 936-973; emperor: r. 962-973).[2] Both claimed to be the rightful heirs to the Roman Empire and followers of Christianity. Throughout the tenth century, the Ottonian Empire spread its influence in the north and gained the favor of the papacy in Rome. In 962, Otto I was crowned by Pope John XII (c. 930/937-964) in Rome as Roman Emperor, much to the dismay of Constantine VII.[3] Efforts to quell these tensions would occur through diplomatic missions, such as the offer to wed the heir of the Ottonian Empire and a Byzantine princess.

Tensions between powers were not contained to Christian empires, however. Toward the south, three rulers of dynastic Arab families claimed the title of caliph. In 909, 'Abd Allāh

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[1] Johannes, Abt des Klosters St. Arnulf, *Die Geschichte vom Leben de Johannes, Abt des Klosters Gorze*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi LXXXI, ed. and trans. by Peter Christian Jacobsen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), 57.

[2] Thomas E. Burman, Brian A. Catlos, and Mark D. Meyerson, *The Sea in the Middle: The Mediterranean World, 650–1650*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), 30.

[3] Burman, Catlos, and Meyerson, *The Sea in the Middle*, 29.

al-Mahdī bi'llāh (r. 909-934) established the Fatimid Caliphate and challenged the existing Abbasid Caliphate. This was excused because the Fatimids followed Shi'i Islam, in contrast to the Abbasid Sunnism. Under 'Abd al-Rahmān III, the Umayyad territory in al-'Andalus was proclaimed a Sunni caliphate, which was possible due to the weak state of the Abbasids and the different sect of Islam that the Fatimids proclaimed.[4] Despite this, tensions flared between the Umayyads and the Fatimids, making for several interesting interactions between the Arab powers.

It is difficult to imagine that significant cultural and social developments occurred in this environment. These being the reigning powers of the Mediterranean, it can be assumed that it was not a peaceful time. These tensions, however, meant that communication between the powers of rivaling religions took place. They had enough influence to stand up to each other but not enough strength to go to war with one another. Tensions were thus addressed through diplomatic relations and alliances conducted by emissaries.[5] Through these diplomatic relations between powers of differing religions, cultural exchange would take place. These non-violent interactions between Islamic and Christian powers spurred several cultural developments that impacted the region for centuries to come. Despite what tenth-century and contemporary sources suggest, interactions between these powers occurred that were not violent and produced permanent intercultural development.

In this context, the Umayyad Caliphate plays an interesting role. They were known to communicate with both the Byzantine and the Ottonian Empires regarding various topics. They exercised relative tolerance and incorporated several Christian cultural norms into their society. This makes them the perfect lens through which to examine what, if any, cultural developments took place between Islamic and Christian powers in the tenth century. For this reason, the newly formed Caliphate of Córdoba under 'Abd al-Rahmān III, and its role in tenth-century political and cultural developments, shall be the focus of this study.

Status quaestionis

Tenth-century historiography on the Caliphate of Córdoba can be approached in several ways. There are multiple debates surrounding the topic, which highlight the progress the field has made

[4] Thomas E. Burman, Brian A. Catlos, and Mark D. Meyerson, *The Sea in the Middle: The Mediterranean World, 650–1650*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), 30.
[5] Burman, Catlos, and Meyerson, *The Sea in the Middle*, 30.

over the centuries. The interpretation of Islamic-Christian relations in al-'Andalus by contemporary historians is one such debate. In this debate, a significant movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries argues that the Islamic presence in Spain did not impact its Christian nature. The centuries of Arab 'occupation' were an inferior time, devoid of cultural and social significance.[6] Évariste Lévi-Provençal (1894-1956) disagreed with this stance in his momentous book; *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane* (1950). He did not see the Arab world as inferior and considered al-'Andalus and its history as part of it.[7] Viewing Spanish history from this lens became more popular thereafter. In this space, Maribel Fierro and her work, *'Abd al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph* (2005), became invaluable for contextual information and position in the debate. *The Most Noble of People: Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Identity in Muslim Spain* (2017) by Jessica A. Coope provides various perspectives on life in the Caliphate of Córdoba.

A more specific debate arose in the latter half of the twentieth century in the context of Islamic-Christian relations. This is the role of the Arabs of Fraxinetum in interreligious relations between tenth-century powers. In 890, a small group of Arab pirates established Fraxinetum, a settlement in modern-day La Garde-Freinet in the region of Provence.[8] These Arabs would then proceed to raid and pillage the areas surrounding this settlement, causing distress amongst pilgrims until 973.[9] Their impact on the region caught the attention of Otto I, who was interested in ending their time. To do so, he contacted 'Abd al-Rahmān III through his emissary, John of Gorze, as it was thought the caliph was supporting the Arabs.[10] Their role in tenth-century cultural and religious exchange through fostering communication between these rulers is a topic of discussion in contemporary literature.

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[6] Jessica A. Coope, *The Most Noble of People: Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Identity in Muslim Spain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 5.

[7] Coope, *The Most Noble of People*, 6; Along with *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane* (1950), *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus* (1996) by Hugh Kennedy is a monumental book on the Arab history in Spain.

[8] Manfred W. Wenner, "The Arab/Muslim Presence in Medieval Central Europe," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 1 (August 1980): 59, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800027136.

[9] Liudprand of Cremona, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. by Paolo Squatriti (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 46; *Antapodosis* is translated to "Retribution" in this collection of works by Squatriti.

[10] Johannes, Abt des Klosters St. Arnulf, *Die Geschichte vom Leben de Johannes, Abt des Klosters Gorze*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi LXXXI, ed. and trans. by Peter Christian Jacobsen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), 46.

Although little is known about these Arabs, they are mentioned throughout tenth-century contemporary sources. Most important is *Antapodosis* by Liudprand of Cremona (c. 920-972), which often mentions African invaders in the south of France receiving instruction from the caliph of Córdoba.[11] The *Vita Joannis abbatis Gorziensis* by John, abbot of Saint Arnulf in Metz, is a hagiographical piece on John of Groze that outlines not only his life but his experience in Córdoba as an emissary.[12] This source has most recently been translated into German by Peter Christian Jacobsen, which I shall translate into English. Important Arab primary sources on the matter would include *Sūrat al-'Ard* by Ibn Hawqal, which outlined the geography of Córdoba and the location of *Ǧabal al-Fulāl*, or La Garde-Freinet.[13] The dependence of the Arabs on the Caliphate of Córdoba is further corroborated by *Muqtabis* from Ibn Hayyān (c. 987-1075).[14] These primary sources provide the platform from which modern scholars have debated the role of Córdoba in the short-lived success of Fraxinetum.

The role of the Arabs from Fraxinetum in tenth-century politics is approached from different angles. Manfred W. Wenner (1918-1966) extensively highlights the activities the Arabs took during their time in power. For many decades, they stood uncontested in their raids north.[15] Wenner argues that the Arabs were not as evil as contemporary sources suggest. He claims that they practiced calm and orderly business in the Alps, and only when Córdoba stopped supporting them under al-Hakam II (r. 961-976) did they become erratic.[16] Wenner presents a more positive light on the Arabs of the tenth century, a trend that is not often replicated. Kees Versteegh highlights more of the atrocities that the Arabs committed after they established their stronghold. He places a heavy link between the success of the Arabs with the support of the Caliphate of Córdoba, as did Wenner.[17] After the defeat and eventual dispersal of the Arabs in 973, Versteegh attributes the development of the feudal system in the south of France to the Arabs who became

[11] Liudprand of Cremona, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. by Paolo Squatriti (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 45.
[12] Roger Collins, *Caliphs and Kings: Spain, 796-1031* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 84.
[13] Kees Versteegh, "The Arab Presence in France and Switzerland in the 10th Century," *Arabica* 37, no. 3 (November 1990): 363, https://doi.org/10.1163/157005890X00041.
[14] Versteegh, "The Arab Presence," 363.
[15] Manfred W. Wenner, "The Arab/Muslim Presence in Medieval Central Europe," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 1 (August 1980): 60, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800027136.
[16] Wenner, "The Arab/Muslim Presence," 71.
[17] Versteegh, "The Arab Presence," 363.

serfs.[18] Despite his relatively negative overview of Arab's time in power, he does find some positive impact.

Various new perspectives contributed to this debate in the twenty-first century. Michael Frassetto argues that the religious rivalry between Christianity and Islam began in the eleventh century after the events of Fraxinetum.[19] Rose Walker states that because of the nature of the Arabs, tributary relationships between Córdoba and northern Christian powers were formed.[20] According to Thomas E. Burman, Brian A. Catlos, and Mark D. Meyerson, cultural exchange occurred through the exchange of gifts on diplomatic missions.[21] Johannes Fried attributes the flow of slavery to Spain to the capturing of traveling pilgrims by the Arabs.[22] Christian Paolella delves into the demand for slavery and eunuchs in Mediterranean relations.[23] Finally, Adriano Boschetti attributes the forced building of prototype architectural buildings of later castles to the Arabs of Fraxinetum.[24] A multitude of changes during the tenth century are attributed to the Arabs of Fraxinetum, both positive and negative.

Methodology & terminology

Within this historiographical frame, I will fit my work. In this paper, I will showcase the role that the Arabs of Fraxinetum played in promoting cultural exchange between Islamic and Christian powers. Although they received a negative reputation from both tenth-century and contemporary sources, they left a positive legacy on the region. Through the analysis of primary source literature such as *Antapodosis* and the *Vita Joannis abbatis Gorziensis*, the nature of tenth-century diplomatic missions will be examined. Since the Arabic sources lack English translations, I will rely on translations found in secondary literature. In doing so, I position

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[18] Kees Versteegh, "The Arab Presence in France and Switzerland in the 10th Century," *Arabica* 37, no. 3 (November 1990): 375-376, https://doi.org/10.1163/157005890X00041.
[19] Michael Frassetto, *Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages: From Muhammad to Dante* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022), 109.
[20] Rose Walker, *Art in Spain and Portugal from the Romans to the Early Middle Ages: Routes and Myths*, Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 218.
[21] Thomas E. Burman, Brian A. Catlos, and Mark D. Meyerson, *The Sea in the Middle: The Mediterranean World, 650–1650*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), 31; Anthony Cutler (1934-2024) delves extensively into the importance of gifts in tenth-century diplomatic relations.
[22] Johannes Fried, *The Middle Ages*, trans. by Peter Lewis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 89.
[23] Christopher Paolella, *Human Trafficking in Medieval Europe: Slavery, Sexual Exploitation, and Prostitution*, Social world of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 84.
[24] Adriano Boschetti, "The Beginnings of Medieval Fortifications in the Late Carolingian Period from a Swiss Perspective," in *Fortified Settlements in Early Medieval Europe: Defended Communities of the 8th-10th Centuries*, ed. by Neil Christie and Hajnalka Herold (Oxbow Books, 2016), 131.

myself within the existing body of work sculpted by the secondary source literature mentioned above. Thus, asking the question: How did political relations between the Caliphate of Córdoba and the Ottonian Empire impact cultural exchange in the tenth century?

To answer this question, I will be dividing my paper into two chapters, the first establishing the political context of the tenth century. The establishment of the Caliphate of Córdoba and the fortress at Fraxinetum, which led to the eventual meeting of John of Gorze with ‘Abd al-Rahmān III. Analyzing the role of diplomats in conveying the message of their sovereign to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome in the process. In the second chapter, the impact of these diplomatic relations will be analyzed through the lens of religion, trade, and cultural exchange. Islamic-Christian relations were impacted in the short and long term after the events of Fraxinetum. Potential religious tensions in the tenth century were usually quelled, and trade goods primarily took the form of slavery. This is significant in the case of the Arabs of Fraxinetum, who actively took part in the slave trade with Córdoba. Open communication became necessary for trade, which made cultural exchange possible through architecture, art, and material goods.

Before beginning this analysis, it is essential to establish the terminology that will be used throughout this study. An emirate, in this case, is ruled by an emir, a title that refers to a monarch in the Muslim world. In contrast to a caliphate, which assumes the position of a dual political-religious state led by a caliph, who becomes an authority over all Muslims. This definition implies that there should only be one caliphate at any given time, as there cannot be multiple authorities ruling over all Muslims simultaneously. During the tenth century, however, three caliphates emerged; an outcome that can be explained by the weakened state of the Abbasid Caliphate and the differing religious sects of the Fatimid and Umayyad Caliphates. It is also important to note that al-’Andalus encompassed the southern part of the Iberian Peninsula and bordered the northern Christian kingdoms. The capital of the caliphate was Córdoba, where ‘Abd al-Rahmān III resided.

When reading through the sources I had for this study, I found an etymological debate on the Arabs of Fraxinetum. In *Antapododis*, Liudprand negatively refers to them as Saracens coming from Africa.[25] In the *Vita Joannis abbatis Gorziensis*, John, abbot of Saint Arnulf, refers

[25] Liudprand of Cremona, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. by Paolo Squatriti (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 94-95.

to them as pirates on the Mediterranean coast.[26] Both of which are negative depictions of the Arabs. Arab sources rarely refer to them. It is the case that contemporary sources have employed the labels these primary sources used for the Arabs. They often cite them as Saracens, Africans, and pirates in their arguments. The term 'Saracen' refers specifically to Arab tribes in the Sinai, and by the Middle Ages, was used as an oversimplified, derogatory reference for all Muslims. For this reason, I will abstain from using the word 'Saracen' and will rather use the term 'Arabs of Fraxinetum' to refer to this band of Muslims.

[26] Johannes, Abt des Klosters St. Arnulf, *Die Geschichte vom Leben de Johannes, Abt des Klosters Gorze*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi LXXXI, ed. and trans. by Peter Christian Jacobsen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), 45.

1. The Caliphate of Córdoba in tenth-century politics

1.1. The establishment of the Caliphate of Córdoba

Since the Umayyads conquered al-'Andalus in 711, it has undergone centuries of evolution in architecture, religion, and administration. Despite the brutal collapse of Umayyad rule at the hands of the Abbasids in 750, it survived through its dominion over this region. After most of the Umayyads were killed, 'Abd al-Rahmān I (r. 756-788) fled from the Middle East to North Africa, eventually ending up in al-'Andalus.[27] An area that had experienced political turmoil since the collapse of the Umayyads. In 756, 'Abd al-Rahmān I, along with Umayyad allies, retained control over al-'Andalus as an emir. Continuing the Umayyad dynasty despite losing its title as a caliphate and rule over the Islamic lands.[28] Thus began an era in al-'Andalus as the Emirate of Córdoba, an autonomous Islamic state and reminder of the legacy of the Umayyads.[29] However, its position as an emirate was to be transformed by the confident 'Abd al-Rahmān III in 929.

Umayyad hegemony over al-'Andalus was often tested in the ninth century under 'Abd al-Rahmān II (r. 822-852). This led to a weak political situation wherein the emir struggled to consolidate his power over the area when local Arabs, Berbers, and Muwallads contested his rule.[30] Conflict continued in the region under the reign of 'Abd Allāh (r. 888-912), not only with the people of al-'Andalus but within the family itself.[31] During this time, the Abbasids also experienced a dip in their power. This unstable situation, along with the establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate in North Africa in 909, was not sustainable.[32] Thus, a strong leader was essential to maintaining the Emirate of Córdoba and the Umayyad presence in the region. On the day of 'Abd Allāh's death in 912, 'Abd al-Rahmān III ascended the *mihrāb* (seat in the place of honor in a mosque), marking the start of a new stage in Islamic Córdoba.

'Abd al-Rahmān III established a firm reign over his subjects and control over his territory during his time as emir. Through a strong hand and military prowess, he was able to

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[27] Jessica A. Coope, *The Most Noble of People: Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Identity in Muslim Spain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 21.
[28] Coope, *The Most Noble of People*, 22.
[29] Umayyad emirs of Córdoba: 'Abd al-Rahmān I (r. 756-788), Hishām I (r. 788-796), al-Hakam I (r. 796-822), 'Abd al-Rahmān II (r. 822-852), Muhammad I (r. 852-886), al-Mundhir (r. 886-888), 'Abd Allāh ibn Muhammad (r. 888-912), 'Abd al-Rahmān III (r. 912-929).
[30] Maribel Fierro, *'Abd al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 30-31; Muwallad in this context refers to a mixed indigenous group in al-'Andalus of Arab, Berber, and Iberian (converted) Christian descent.
[31] Fierro, *'Abd al-Rahman III*, 34.
[32] Coope, *The Most Noble of People*, 28.

subdue rebels throughout al-'Andalus and establish himself as a decisive leader.[33] Frontier governors who had been known to cause conflict amongst each other and with external Christian forces were asked to prove their allegiance to the emir.[34] As these allegiances were established, tensions and campaigns with the Christian kingdoms took place throughout the 910s, reaching a boiling point in 923 when the emir had to intervene. In doing so, he suppressed conflicts on several frontiers and claimed victory over Christians and Berbers alike.[35] Over less than two decades, 'Abd al-Rahmān III was able to establish a united emirate with stronger borders.

In the month of pilgrimage to Mecca in 929, 'Abd al-Rahmān III proclaims himself as *'amīr al-mu'minīn* (Commander of the Faithful).[36] In the face of the Abbasids experiencing adversity, he proclaims himself caliph and establishes the Caliphate of Córdoba.[37] This development presented several implications for the new caliph and the position of the caliphate in Mediterranean politics. He inherited the title *al-Nāsir li-Dīn Allāh* (he who brings victory to God's religion), and brings into question the legitimacy of both the Abbasid and Fatimid caliphates.[38] The caliph began minting *dīnārs* (gold coins), which was of further offense to the other caliphates, but also benefited the people of his state.[39] These actions strengthened the position of al-'Andalus, causing further tensions with the Fatimids and the declining Abbasids.

In the coming years, as caliph, 'Abd al-Rahmān III further secured his borders in the North and maintained his territory without being able to expand it.[40] During this period, the caliph sought to establish diplomatic relations with various leaders. Diplomats such as Hasdai ibn Shaprut (c. 915-970), a government employee and Jewish doctor, were key to these relations. He would be sent to Léon and Barcelona to negotiate hostage deals and treaties on behalf of the caliph. Hasdai was a trusted advisor and key figure in the foreign relations of 'Abd al-Rahmān III.[41] Another one of these emissaries was the Christian ambassador and later bishop of Elvira, Recemund. Recemund would prove to be highly important in negotiations as a representative of

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[33] Maribel Fierro, *'Abd al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 45.
[34] Fierro, *'Abd al-Rahman III*, 48.
[35] Ibid., 51-52.
[36] Ibid., 53.
[37] Umayyad caliphs of Córdoba: 'Abd al-Rahmān III (r. 929-961), al-Hakam II (r. 961-976), Hishām II (r. 976-1009), Muhammad II (r. 1009), Sulaymān (r. 1009-1010), Hishām II (r. 1010-1013), Sulaymān (r. 1013-1016), 'Abd al-Rahmān IV (r. 1017).
[38] Jessica A. Coope, *The Most Noble of People: Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Identity in Muslim Spain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 30.
[39] Fierro, *'Abd al-Rahman III*, 59.
[40] Coope, *The Most Noble of People*, 32.
[41] Fierro, *'Abd al-Rahman III*, 71.

the court of the caliph with Otto I and on a separate occasion with Constantine VII.[42] It is characters such as these that establish a crucial link between ʻAbd al-Rahmān III and the surrounding world leaders. Thus, providing a look into how these relations were handled and how they developed to reach mutually beneficial outcomes.

The Umayyad presence in al-'Andalus is long and tumultuous. ʻAbd al-Rahmān I was able to continue the Umayyad dynasty through this far-off corner of the former great caliphate. A united front in al-'Andalus had to consider the assimilation of multiple different groups of people and religions. Its location was a bridge between the northern Christian kingdoms and the southern Islamic states. Two fronts that proved problematic on various occasions. The ascension of ʻAbd al-Rahmān III brought relative unity to a state undergoing numerous internal conflicts. This unity led the caliph to focus more on establishing diplomatic relations with external parties, through, among others, Hasdai and Recemund. One of these diplomatic relations is with the King of East Francia and later Ottonian Emperor, Otto I. These relations concerned a small group of Arabs in southern France that proved more significant than originally thought.

1.2. The Arabs of Fraxinetum

Alongside the establishment of the Caliphate of Córdoba is the story of a group of Arabs who found their home in southern France. The Arabs of Fraxinetum are a largely mysterious group that became known in the region for their raiding and kidnapping expeditions. It is theorized that the fortress was established in 890 after a couple of Arabs of Spanish origin took advantage of the chaotic situation in Provence during the reign of ʻAbd Allāh.[43] Along with their arrival, their exact location also remains a mystery. It is most likely located near Saint-Tropez in modern-day La Garde-Freinet.[44] According to Arab geographer Ibn Hawqal in *Sūrat al-'Ard*, *Ǧabal al-Fulāl* (La Garde-Freinet) fell under the influence of the emirs of Mallorca, who were vassals of the eventual Caliphate of Córdoba.[45] From there, the Arabs built a reputation for themselves amongst Latin sources as the root of all evil and destruction when they went on their excursions.[46] These

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[42] Maribel Fierro, *'Abd al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 72-73.
[43] Liudprand of Cremona, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. by Paolo Squatriti (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 45 (mention of Spanish origin of Arabs); 46 (chaotic political situation in Provence).
[44] Kees Versteegh, "The Arab Presence in France and Switzerland in the 10th Century," *Arabica* 37, no. 3 (November 1990): 361, https://doi.org/10.1163/157005890X00041.
[45] Versteegh, "The Arab Presence," 363.
[46] Liudprand, *The Complete Works*, 142.

so-called pirates inadvertently enforced change in the region and were a topic of much controversy in the tenth century and contemporary debates.

These Arabs created quite a stir during their brief stay in southern France. Between 900 and 930, they were involved in various occupations, raids, and attacks. Events which lay congruent with the revival and transformation of the Emirate of Córdoba under ʻAbd al-Rahmān III. Starting with their connection to the occupation of Mallorca in 904. Due to the politically unstable situation in France, there was little resistance to their raiding expeditions on cities and monasteries. Resulting in more attacks in Italy and the Alpine region.[47] At this time, they managed to take control of several important passages to Rome from France.[48] Organized efforts against the Arabs of Fraxinetum only came to fruition in 931 due to their occupation of said passages. The biggest enforcer of measures against the Arabs was Hugh of Arles, King of Italy (r. 926-947). Through his aggressive policy and aid from the Byzantine fleet, he launched an ultimately unsuccessful attack against the Arabs.[49] A couple of years later, in 936, Hugh was forced to leave Provence and return to Italy to protect his political interests against the growing influence of Otto I.[50] This prompted the Arabs to run rampant in the region, entering the peak of their time in power.

In 939, the Arabs began focusing their raids northward, attacking the monastery at Saint Gall, in modern-day Switzerland.[51] A year later, they sacked and burned the monastery at Saint-Maurice and looted cities on the way.[52] The fate of these Arabs took a significant turn in 941, when Hugh cornered them, but instead of ending their time in power, he struck an agreement to serve his political interests in the region. In exchange for free passage through the Alps, the Arabs were to turn their focus against Berengar II, King of Italy (r. 950-961), a political rival that was backed by Otto I.[53] Thus, Hugh preserved his relations with ʻAbd al-Rahmān III

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[47] Liudprand of Cremona, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. by Paolo Squatriti (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 46.
[48] Manfred W. Wenner, "The Arab/Muslim Presence in Medieval Central Europe," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 1 (August 1980): 60, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800027136.
[49] Liudprand, *The Complete Works*, 176 (Hugh asking for help from the Byzantine Empire); 180 (Byzantine demolition of the fortress and supposed victory).
[50] Kees Versteegh, "The Arab Presence in France and Switzerland in the 10th Century," *Arabica* 37, no. 3 (November 1990): 368, https://doi.org/10.1163/157005890X00041.
[51] Versteegh, "The Arab Presence," 378.
[52] Adriano Boschetti, "The Beginnings of Medieval Fortifications in the Late Carolingian Period from a Swiss Perspective," in *Fortified Settlements in Early Medieval Europe: Defended Communities of the 8th-10th Centuries*, ed. by Neil Christie and Hajnalka Herold (Oxbow Books, 2016), 123.
[53] Liudprand, *The Complete Works*, 181.

and had one less foe to worry about when dealing with northern invasions from Otto I. This explanation implies a further connection between the Caliphate of Córdoba and the Arabs of Fraxinetum. A decision not taken kindly by Christian contemporaries such as Liudprand, which gave the Arabs further leeway to do as they pleased in the area.[54] Hugh died around 947, and with him, his agreement with the Arabs, as Otto I further grew his influence and interest in the region. Seeing the situation in Provence, Otto I sent an embassy to the Caliphate of Córdoba to try to find a way to quell the power of the Arabs in the south of France.[55]

ʻAbd al-Rahmān III and the Caliphate of Córdoba did not place much importance on the Arabs of Fraxinetum. The fortress, along with the events that surround it, are never mentioned in Arabic sources, implying that they did not believe it was a matter of high value, unlike the Ottonians.[56] Thus, the embassy sent by Otto I regarding the Arabs of Fraxinetum came to no avail. Nevertheless, the downfall of these Arabs had already been set in motion since the death of Hugh and the eventual death of ʻAbd al-Rahmān III in 961. This prompted the ascension of his son, al-Hakam II, as caliph. Al-Hakam II was naturally more peaceful and tolerant and did not support the harassment of northern Christian territories. It is theorized that because of this, he cut off support toward Fraxinetum, which further stimulated its degradation in the 960s and 70s.[57] These events led the Arabs of Fraxinetum to revert to more extreme methods of survival, namely kidnapping. The most famous and important of these cases was that of Maiolus, Abbot of Cluny (c. 906-994), in 972.[58] The Arabs asked for a ransom in exchange for his freedom and thus overplayed their hand.[59] This event marked the beginning of the end for the Arabs of Fraxinetum and their influence in southern France. Through this, William I of Provence (c. 956-993) was

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[54] Kees Versteegh, "The Arab Presence in France and Switzerland in the 10th Century," *Arabica* 37, no. 3 (November 1990): 369, https://doi.org/10.1163/157005890X00041; Liudprand of Cremona, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. by Paolo Squatriti (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 181 (Liudprand is highly critical of the Arabs of Fraxinetum).

[55] Versteegh, "The Arab Presence," 372-373; The embassy sent to the Caliphate of Córdoba was that of John of Gorze.

[56] Manfred W. Wenner, "The Arab/Muslim Presence in Medieval Central Europe," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 1 (August 1980): 63-64, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800027136; The reason that Arabic sources rarely mention the Arabs of Fraxinetum could be that they laid more focus on the Fatimids and Byzantines for example.

[57] Wenner, "The Arab/Muslim Presence," 64.

[58] Adriano Boschetti, "The Beginnings of Medieval Fortifications in the Late Carolingian Period from a Swiss Perspective," in *Fortified Settlements in Early Medieval Europe: Defended Communities of the 8th-10th Centuries*, ed. by Neil Christie and Hajnalka Herold (Oxbow Books, 2016), 124.

[59] Johannes Fried, *The Middle Ages*, trans. by Peter Lewis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 89.

instigated to finally put an end to the Arabs of Fraxinetum in 973.[60] Thus, a supposed era of terror comes to a close as the Arabs are vanquished from the region; however, were they as problematic as Liudprand suggests?

1.3. A mission for John of Gorze

The Ottonians certainly thought so. During this period, Otto I was well on his way to establishing the empire he envisioned for the area. By the time Hugh had passed in 947, Otto I was already King of East Francia and Duke of Saxony. His aspirations lay further south, as he sought to revive the great Roman Empire that the Franks once obtained under Charlemagne. To do this, however, he first had to establish his presence in Italy and, by extension, the south of France. After the death of Hugh, the main obstacle became the Arabs, as Otto I wanted to create free passage through to Italy and build monasteries along the way.[61] Otto I, dissatisfied with this situation, chooses John of Gorze to lead an embassy to Córdoba to deliver various gifts and letters. These letters contained multiple topics, namely, a religious dispute between the rulers, and a plea to cease support of, and aid against, the Arab settlement in the south of France.[62] Thus commence several interactions between these momentous rulers of the tenth century.

John of Gorze played a vital role in diplomatic relations between ʻAbd al-Rahmān III and Otto I. Along with being a strict Ottonian monk, John of Gorze was a diplomat under the employment of Otto I, similar to the roles that Hasdai and Recemund play for ʻAbd al-Rahmān III. He was an unwaveringly evocative and pious monk, a character that was sure to provoke the court in Córdoba and create a stir. His reformation of the monastery at Gorze and dedication to Catholicism made him the perfect candidate to represent the interests of Otto I and Christianity.[63] In 953, John of Gorze arrived in Córdoba with his embassy to deliver the gifts and words of Otto

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[60] Kees Versteegh, "The Arab Presence in France and Switzerland in the 10th Century," *Arabica* 37, no. 3 (November 1990): 373, https://doi.org/10.1163/157005890X00041; Liudprand of Cremona, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. by Paolo Squatriti (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 142 (Liudprand believes the end of the Arabs of Fraxinetum came at the hands of God).

[61] Versteegh, "The Arab Presence," 373.

[62] Maribel Fierro, *'Abd al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 71-72; Manfred W. Wenner, "The Arab/Muslim Presence in Medieval Central Europe," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 1 (August 1980): 64, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800027136.

[63] Johannes, Abt des Klosters St. Arnulf, *Die Geschichte vom Leben de Johannes, Abt des Klosters Gorze*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi LXXXI, ed. and trans. by Peter Christian Jacobsen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), 18-20.

I.[64] One of these letters was seemingly retaliatory to ‘Abd al-Rahmān III, who had previously insulted Christianity in letters to Otto I.[65]

Before delivering this message, however, John of Gorze was welcomed by Hasdai and John, Bishop of Córdoba. They advised John of Gorze not to deliver the letters, as it might entail fatal consequences to himself and the Christians of Córdoba.[66] John of Gorze rather welcomed martyrdom and scolded Bishop John for being circumcised and following Islamic food laws.[67] Although Christians and Jews were allowed to practice their faith in Córdoba under ‘Abd al-Rahmān III, they were advised to follow Islamic customs to be tolerated.[68] The caliph sent Recemund to the East Frankish court to urge him to withdraw the letters in exchange for gifts and the bishopric of Granada.[69] The effort was successful, and in 956, Otto I instructed John of Gorze not to deliver the letters and to return to East Francia, relieving him of his duties.[70] The case of John of Gorze and his time in al-’Andalus implies an array of customs and regularities in tenth-century diplomatic relations.

1.4. The role of tenth-century diplomats

Diplomats in the Middle Ages were not as we know them today. In this period, they often took up mediator positions with religious motives lying at the forefront of their goals.[71] The case of John of Gorze and his mission to Córdoba is indicative of multiple characteristics of diplomatic relations in the tenth century. The roles of Recemund and John of Gorze in delivering the word of their sovereign as they intend it can not be underestimated. John of Gorze translated the goal of Otto I, which was not only to respond to the insults of ‘Abd al-Rahmān III but to showcase the strength of Christianity. The strict John of Gorze exemplified this with his willingness to be martyred and open remarks against how Christians in Córdoba were living. He did not falter under the pressure of being in the presence of the caliph, showcasing his resolve and, by

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[64] Johannes, Abt des Klosters St. Arnulf, *Die Geschichte vom Leben de Johannes, Abt des Klosters Gorze*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi LXXXI, ed. and trans. by Peter Christian Jacobsen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), 39.
[65] Johannes, *Die Geschichte*, 39.
[66] Ibid., 49.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Jessica A. Coope, *The Most Noble of People: Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Identity in Muslim Spain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 80.
[69] Johannes, *Die Geschichte*, 44.
[70] Coope, *The Most Noble of People*, 80.
[71] Michael Frassetto, *Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages: From Muhammad to Dante* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022), 70.

extension, that of Otto I. Hasdai in this case represented the willingness of ‘Abd al-Rahmān III to avoid conflict and reach common ground. He played the role of an emissary who sought to advise John of Gorze in the name of the caliph, who had previously been informed of the contents of the letters. Recemund, on the other hand, to convey a message of peace by ‘Abd al-Rahmān III, had to incorporate his experience and diplomatic skills. As the outcome of the negotiation was successful and the situation was de-escalated, Recemund conveyed the word of ‘Abd al-Rahmān III without it being misinterpreted.

The choice of Hasdai and Recemund as the representatives of the court of ‘Abd al-Rahmān III, in contrast to that of John of Gorze as the representative of Otto I, is intriguing. The Caliphate of Córdoba under ‘Abd al-Rahmān III employed diplomats of various religions and exercised relative religious tolerance.[72] Christians and Jews, although able to reach high positions in the Córdoban court and gain the respect of the Umayyads, had to overcome several limitations. Christians, for example, had their court wherein Christian affairs were regulated; when Muslims were involved, however, they would be handed over to Umayyad courts.[73] These laws were set in place to create a distinction and hierarchy between Muslims and other minority religions. Religious minorities were often used as envoys when interacting with external parties, as they would take up this intermediary position.[74] This can certainly be seen in the case of Hasdai and Recemund, envoys who represent Jewish and Christian faiths, respectively. They can convey the demands of Otto I better while at the same time translating the words of ‘Abd al-Rahmān III. Effectively filling the role as an acceptable bridge between two otherwise seemingly alienated powers.

Assigning John of Gorze as the envoy of Otto I, on the other hand, is indicative of the goals that the King of East Francia had. Instead of assigning a more religiously neutral envoy, or one of Islamic or Jewish faith, Otto I chose an explicitly pious monk to convey his words. The hagiographical source from which these events are recounted is from the perspective of John of Gorze, however. Which begs the question: how did John of Gorze want to portray himself when recalling these events, in contrast to what he was sent to do by Otto I? John of Gorze aims to portray himself in the most righteous and pious light possible while simultaneously fulfilling the

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[72] Michael Frassetto, *Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages: From Muhammad to Dante* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022), 70.
[73] Frassetto, *Christians and Muslims*, 70.
[74] Thomas E. Burman, Brian A. Catlos, and Mark D. Meyerson, *The Sea in the Middle: The Mediterranean World, 650–1650*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), 31.

task he was sent to do. Although diplomats convey the word of their sovereign, they are not characters that act without agency or goals of their own. We can infer from this that John of Gorze placed more importance on the critiquing of Islam and the customs of the Caliphate of Córdoba. In contrast to Otto I, who would have placed more importance on asking for aid in his efforts to reduce the influence of the Arabs of Fraxinetum in Provence. The pitfalls of hagiographical sources that were transcribed from oral speech come to light when considering the validity of the events that took place.

We can see the differing roles diplomats played in the Caliphate of Córdoba in comparison to that of the Ottonian Empire. They were instrumental in establishing diplomatic relations between Mediterranean rulers and decisive in the eventual outcome of these relations. In this case study, the envoys of ʻAbd al-Rahmān III can be seen attempting to de-escalate the situation. Representing the wishes of the caliph, but also acting in their interest when it comes to safety and the perpetuation of religious tolerance in Córdoba. In the case of John of Gorze, he can be seen representing both the interests of the king and his own. They were key to establishing connections between the rulers and people of caliphates and kingdoms. After this connection is established, cultural exchange between these powers can take place in various ways.

The Umayyad presence in Córdoba was responsible for numerous relations with empires around the Mediterranean. The ascension of ʻAbd al-Rahmān III as caliph marked Córdoban relationships with the Ottonians and the Fatimids. Communications with the Franks spurred several cultural movements in the tenth century and played a greater role in medieval Islamic-Christian relations. Islamic-Christian relations in the Middle Ages are often portrayed as violent and lacking in communication. However, up to the tenth century, tensions amongst powers of differing religions had little to do with the religion itself. Rather, religious tensions usually transpired between powers of the same religion. In the tenth century, the greatest rivals to the Caliphate of Córdoba were the Fatimids and the Abbasids. Similarly, the Ottonians had several run-ins with the Byzantines.[75] These interactions reached a climax due to the events that transpired in La Garde-Freinet.

[75] Thomas E. Burman, Brian A. Catlos, and Mark D. Meyerson, *The Sea in the Middle: The Mediterranean World, 650–1650*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), 30.

The Arabs of Fraxinetum, which prompted Otto I to send John of Gorze on his mission to Córdoba, ushered in a new age in these relatively unproblematic relations. At the height of their power, they drew the attention of various rulers from caliphates, empires, and kingdoms, all seeking to determine how to respond to their presence. According to Liudprand, they were highly problematic in navigating the south of France and maintaining peace in the surrounding monastic regions. Later primary sources portray it as the reincarnation of evil and the origin of all that is evil. Did the Arabs of Fraxinetum have an ultimately positive impact on the region, or were they, as Liudprand suggests, evil incarnate? How did interreligious relations that were established through the means of diplomats manage to impact distinct aspects of tenth-century society? The answers to these questions are multifaceted and widely ranging amongst contemporary scholars. Answers which may suggest that the (indirect) role of the Arabs of Fraxinetum in tenth-century cultural exchange is more layered than one might think.

2. Multifaceted change in the south of France

2.1. Shifts in Islamic-Christian relations in the Mediterranean

Islamic-Christian relations in the tenth century were constantly fluctuating. Before the events of Fraxinetum, the Caliphate of Córdoba paid little attention to the empire that Otto I was building in the north. Empires of different faiths would align with each other to gain an upper hand against their rival of the same religion. In the case of the Caliphate of Córdoba, they often aligned with the Byzantine Empire against the Fatimids and the Ottonians, for example.[76] Despite this positive relation with the Byzantines, the Umayyads continued to pay little mind to the Ottonians. They did not see them as a direct threat, and they are sparingly mentioned in Arabic sources, similarly to the Arabs of Fraxinetum. Frassetto suggests that the treatment of these Arabs by Hugh when he offered them a deal rather than destroying them is indicative of tenth-century Islamic-Christian relations. Christian rulers in these centuries treated Muslims like any other political rival, not as a religious rival or the incarnation of the antichrist.[77] Hugh would rather work with the Arabs of Fraxinetum to defeat his Christian rival than to continue his attacks against them.

Muslim and Christian rulers treat each other similarly in that they don't see religion as a big enough obstacle to ignore the benefit of working with each other. Hugh exhibits this when he makes a deal with the Arabs of Fraxinetum, but also the Ottonians and the Byzantines, and their willingness to work with ʻAbd al-Rahmān III. The case of John of Gorze indicates the hardships that religious minorities have to undergo in Córdoba, however, it also showcases the will of these minorities to adapt to their environment.[78] ʻAbd al-Rahmān III exercised relative tolerance in his time as caliph and actively sought the employment of Christians and Jews in his court. In the case of the Jewish population in Córdoba, Umayyad policy helped them thrive under the leadership of Hasdai. Throughout the Umayyad reign in Córdoba, Jewish culture flourished in poetry, language, and academia. Eventually becoming a more integral part of the Umayyad court than the Christians.[79] Religion is not a big enough obstacle in the face of doing what is best for

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[76] Thomas E. Burman, Brian A. Catlos, and Mark D. Meyerson, *The Sea in the Middle: The Mediterranean World, 650–1650*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), 31.
[77] Michael Frassetto, *Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages: From Muhammad to Dante* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022), 107.
[78] Johannes, Abt des Klosters St. Arnulf, *Die Geschichte vom Leben de Johannes, Abt des Klosters Gorze*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi LXXXI, ed. and trans. by Peter Christian Jacobsen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), 49.
[79] Jessica A. Coope, *The Most Noble of People: Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Identity in Muslim Spain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 84.

his caliphate, similar to the mentality of these aforementioned Christian rulers. ʻAbd al-Rahmān III thus appointed non-Arabs in positions as governors and high-ranking military commanders.[80] We can see that although religious hierarchies are formed and incorporated in Córdoba, it does not mean that there was no choice in overcoming religious disparities to reach mutual goals.

Tenth-century Islamic-Christian relations can thus be defined as functional tolerance. They largely ignored each other unless there was a mutually beneficial deal to be made. Potential animosity usually stemmed from political or military reasons, not from religious ones. This is the case for much of the tenth century, a relationship that begins to shift at its closing. Burgundian monk Rodulfus Glaber (c. 985-1047), who chronicled the life of Maiolus, enforced this schism by depicting Arabs as the destroyers of Christianity.[81] Writing this in response to the kidnapping of the abbot, Glaber helped usher in a new phase of Islamic-Christian relations in the eleventh century. A phase that saw religious animosity become a more prominent aspect in interreligious relations. The Arabs of Fraxinetum left a lasting impact on interreligious relations from the tenth century onwards. The decline of these Arabs, which forced them to kidnap Maiolus to collect a healthy ransom, is what triggered Glaber's religious animosity. This new stage in Islamic-Christian relations impacts how eleventh-century contemporary sources view this relationship in the future and the past.

The existence of the Arabs of Fraxinetum in Provence, however, was not as negative as tenth-century contemporary sources suggest. On the contrary, some sources indicate that the Arabs, especially during their zenith, conducted business in the area in a calm and orderly manner.[82] A claim that contradicts Liudprand's account, which emphasizes their violence and barbarity. When supported and not threatened by external parties, the Arabs were able to conduct peaceful trade operations in the region. They established a peaceful administration and toll system in the Alpine passes as part of their agreement with Hugh. The tolls they instilled could take the form of specific items, and generally did not interfere with trade.[83] Through their tolls, they facilitated cultural exchange in the form of gifts and items, allowing trade to move freely. This is another indicator of how their behaviour depends on the treatment they get from third

[80] Maribel Fierro, *'Abd al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 95.
[81] Michael Frassetto, *Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages: From Muhammad to Dante* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022), xii.
[82] Manfred W. Wenner, "The Arab/Muslim Presence in Medieval Central Europe," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 1 (August 1980): 71, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800027136.
[83] Wenner, "The Arab/Muslim Presence," 71.

parties. During their agreement with Hugh and the support of ‘Abd al-Rahmān III, they were able to create a violence-free sphere. When the Arabs of Fraxinetum are treated like a dangerous threat, they act as such.

The events of Fraxinetum made a lasting impression on the evolution of Islamic-Christian relations in the tenth century. Their impact on the region and the relations between great powers and religions is not bound to the tenth century. Despite the negative representation they get in Christian sources, it is the case that they were not as violent as depicted, and rather promoted several positive developments. One of them is trade, and by extension, material objects. The role of the Arabs in trade is not limited to instilling tolls and allowing for open passages; rather, they actively participated in trade with both Muslim and Christian powers.

2.2. Breaking even ground

Although rivaling parties in tenth-century Mediterranean politics had many differences, slavery was not one of them. *Saqālibah* (slaves) were highly incorporated into Arab, Frankish, and Byzantine societies. The demand for slaves only grew once under the hegemony of ‘Abd al-Rahmān III, who expanded his workforce and military to keep up with his caliphal needs. Under the caliph, the majority of his army consisted of Berbers and slaves loyal to the ruler, rather than tribal Arabs.[84] Slaves in this role could even rise to become highly ranked officers or administrators, taking the place of previous Arab families that were known to take up these positions.[85] ‘Abd al-Rahmān III gave new importance to slaves in Córdoba and thus called for an increase in supply. Slaves during this time were mass-produced in Eastern Europe; therefore, the caliph would have to enter trading agreements with its neighbors to the north.

This was not unbeknownst to the Arabs of Fraxinetum. As soon as they established their fortress, the Arabs began capturing pilgrims in the area and selling slaves of their own, their biggest customer being al-’Andalus. From there, they would proceed to either be raised Muslim, become eunuchs, or fulfill the role of slave.[86] Slaves were also brought to Verdun, where they would then be castrated and made into eunuchs, eventually being sold to Córdoba in waves.[87]

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[84] Jessica A. Coope, *The Most Noble of People: Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Identity in Muslim Spain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 30; Tenth-century trade included a variety of products, but for the interest of this study, I will focus on slavery as it is most relevant in relation to the Arabs of Fraxinetum.
[85] Coope, *The Most Noble of People*, 30.
[86] Johannes Fried, *The Middle Ages*, trans. by Peter Lewis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 89.
[87] Christopher Paolella, *Human Trafficking in Medieval Europe: Slavery, Sexual Exploitation, and Prostitution*, Social world of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 88.

Verdun at this time fell under the hegemony of the East Frankish Empire, which indicates another clear point of contact. It could be the case that both the Umayyads and the Ottonians received slaves from the Arabs of Fraxinetum. The Ottonians would castrate them in Verdun and conduct further trading relations with the Umayyads, who had a clear need for eunuchs. The need for slaves as the driver for these decisions, and the systems that were put in place to make it happen, can be attributed to ʻAbd al-Rahmān III.

Jews administered the castration and exportation of slaves and eunuchs in al-ʼAndalus as well as Verdun.[88] Through the incorporation of Jews in administrative processes, having a positive relationship with the Franks, ʻAbd al-Rahmān III was able to develop slavery in al-ʼAndalus. The importance of Jews in this transaction, which is supported by the policy of ʻAbd al-Rahmān III, marks the benefit of the relative tolerance he instilled. The Arabs of Fraxinetum again play a role which inadvertently promotes this relationship between the Umayyads and the Ottonians. Through their involvement in slavery, the subsequent increase in demand for slaves created a beneficial environment for all three parties. The importance of slaves in tenth-century interterritorial trade and relations is significant. Not only were they used in matters of trade, but also as tokens of goodwill.

Córdoba would often exchange or present prisoners as gifts during their diplomatic missions abroad.[89] This is another characteristic of tenth-century diplomatic strategy to strengthen relations between powers. As was seen in interactions between ʻAbd al-Rahmān III and Otto I, gifts are an essential part of these communications, as well as the promotion of cultural exchange. This continued after their reigns when Emperor Otto II (r. 973-983) maintained a positive relationship with al-Hakam II, expressing this through gifting them slaves and various other objects.[90] Common characteristics of these relations transcended generations and influenced the region thereafter. The importance of slaves in breaking down barriers that might have existed between different tenth-century powers is strong. There was a great necessity for them in society, a necessity that only grew stronger with time. Rivalries were set aside in

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[88] Maribel Fierro, *ʻAbd al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 90.
[89] Rose Walker, *Art in Spain and Portugal from the Romans to the Early Middle Ages: Routes and Myths*, Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016) 182; Johannes, Abt des Klosters St. Arnulf, *Die Geschichte vom Leben de Johannes, Abt des Klosters Gorze*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi LXXXI, ed. and trans. by Peter Christian Jacobsen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), 41 (John of Gorze recounts how ʻAbd al-Rahmān III sent gifts along with Recemund on his way to Frankfurt to negotiate the terms of the letters).
[90] Walker, *Art in Spain and Portugal*, 219.

pursuit of slavery and diplomatic relations, which inadvertently paved the way for open communication. The exchange of gifts on diplomatic missions facilitated cultural exchange, as various foreign objects came into contact with different societies. This is the case between the Caliphate of Córdoba and the Byzantine Empire, and to a lesser extent, the Ottonian Empire.

2.3. A lasting impact of cultural exchange

In Córdoba, ‘Abd al-Rahmān III often used gifts to subdue his political opponents in the region. He would regularly bestow gifts onto his allies and supporters to obtain and maintain sovereignty and obedience in al-’Andalus.[91] Gifts, when considered in the context of internal politics, help the caliph assert his position of authority and quell potential adversaries. This role develops when considering external politics, however. In the case of the Byzantines, for example, Constantine VII sent ‘Abd al-Rahmān III an array of columns and the translation of the medical treatise of Dioscorides.[92] In this context, gifts fulfill the same role as they do when they are transmitted internally. They create positive relations between rulers while establishing a position of power through the decadence and importance of the gifted objects. With this type of contact, however, cultural exchange is also practiced. New architectural styles, art, and medical practices, which are then applied throughout the caliphate, have now been transferred. When ‘Abd al-Rahmān III and Otto I exchanged gifts along with their letters, various foreign objects reached far-off lands that were then employed or adapted to the surrounding environment.

> “*When the fame and great deeds of King Otto, now emperor, reached the various peoples, the lord of Spain Abderrahman also sent him an envoy and gifts such as befitted the generosity of a king.*”[93]

In this case, gifts become an agent of change, which, although meant for the political, have a great impact on culture and society.

One of these impacts is on architecture. Architecture drastically evolved during the hegemony of ‘Abd al-Rahmān III in Córdoba. This was in part due to his relations with the

[91] Maribel Fierro, *‘Abd al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 106.
[92] Thomas E. Burman, Brian A. Catlos, and Mark D. Meyerson, *The Sea in the Middle: The Mediterranean World, 650–1650*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), 31.
[93] Johannes, Abt des Klosters St. Arnulf, *Die Geschichte vom Leben de Johannes, Abt des Klosters Gorze*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi LXXXI, ed. and trans. by Peter Christian Jacobsen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), 41.

Byzantines, from whom they took great influence. The caliph was able to improve many aspects of Umayyad architecture in Córdoba during his reign. Namely, the improvement of the Great Mosque of Córdoba and the building of the Madīnat al-Zahrā'. The caliph ordered the refurbishing of the courtyard as well as the building of a new minaret at the Mosque.[94] Under al-Hakam II, the mosque was expanded to accommodate Córdoba's growing population. Byzantine influence can be seen straight away with the extension of the Mosque, including Byzantine-style architecture in the brickwork and mosaics.[95] The Mosque, having been built by 'Abd al-Rahmān I, had been successfully restored under the dominion of 'Abd al-Rahmān III and his son. The importance of gifts extends further than just material objects. In this context, it contributed to the transformation of the city under Umayyad rule.

This is even more so the case with the Madīnat al-Zahrā'. Built under the reign of 'Abd al-Rahmān III, this building was the physical representation of his new caliphal title. Byzantine influence can be seen in the marble carving of the palace, and sculpted ornaments which were believed to have come from Byzantium.[96] Constantine VII gifted 'Abd al-Ramhān III a portrait of the Emperor, presented in a silver casket and highly ornamented.[97] Displaying the power and wealth of the caliph while simultaneously making the position of the caliphate in Islam explicit. The court was moved to the palace, and was also used as a greeting point for envoys of both internal and external parties.[98] Even the critical John of Gorze, awed at the magnificence of the palace when he arrived in Córdoba.[99] Through cultural exchange between powers of differing religions, the buildings of the Great Mosque of Córdoba and the Madīnat al-Zahrā' can be established. There was a need to preserve the heritage of the Umayyad dynasty in Córdoba through the renovation of the Mosque. Through the building of the Madīnat, 'Abd al Rahmān III marked the beginning of a new era as a caliphate, open to the exchange of cultures and ideas with external parties.

The construction and maintenance of these monumental buildings required more than just a few helping hands. Slaves were integral to the construction of the palace and once completed,

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[94] Maribel Fierro, *'Abd al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 109.
[95] Rose Walker, *Art in Spain and Portugal from the Romans to the Early Middle Ages: Routes and Myths*, Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016) 194.
[96] Walker, *Art in Spain and Portugal*, 186.
[97] Ibid., 194.
[98] Jessica A. Coope, *The Most Noble of People: Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Identity in Muslim Spain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 29; Fierro, *'Abd al-Rahman III*, 113.
[99] Coope, *The Most Noble of People*, 29.

required the services of some 3.950 eunuchs and slaves as servers and guards.[100] Through gifts and the mutual process of maintaining good relations with each other, the physical symbol of the Caliphate of Córdoba is established. This is not the only manner architecture evolved in the tenth century, however. In the south of France, the adaptation of architecture was much less explicit, as was the role of the enforcers of this change.

In Provence, the Arabs of Fraxinetum exerted a lasting influence on the region's architecture and social demographics. As soon as they took up residence in La Garde-Freinet, they demanded timber and building materials for ships and houses.[101] During their time in power sacked and burned a multitude of buildings and monasteries, which prompted Otto I to react. Otto I placed heavy importance on monastic buildings and was planning on building them along the route whilst protecting travelling pilgrims.[102] To achieve this security for the pilgrims and combat the Arabs, Otto I funded the construction of multiple fortified towers around the region.[103] Notably, the monastery at Saint Gall received its first fortifications between 953 and 975, a city previously attacked by the Arabs.[104] A direct link can be drawn between the targets of the Arabs of Fraxinetum and the areas Otto I chooses to fund and fortify. These fortifications and towers, built to protect the monasteries in the region, became prototypes for later aristocratic castles.[105] This is an inadvertent but lasting impact the Arabs of Fraxinetum had on the region's architecture. Due to them, more money was spent not only on building more monasteries, but also on making them safer for their inhabitants. Using new types of fortifications that would be incorporated for centuries to come.

The dissolution of Fraxinetum in 973 scattered its Arab inhabitants. Those who survived were converted to Christianity, sold into generational slavery, or married and settled locally.[106] Arabs who stayed in the land became serfs living out their days in the south of France.[107] The land previously occupied by these Arabs was divided and resettled amongst members of the

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[100] Roger Collins, *Caliphs and Kings: Spain, 796-1031*, (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 183.
[101] Johannes Fried, *The Middle Ages*, trans. by Peter Lewis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 89.
[102] Kees Versteegh, "The Arab Presence in France and Switzerland in the 10th Century," *Arabica* 37, no. 3 (November 1990): 373, https://doi.org/10.1163/157005890X00041.
[103] Adriano Boschetti, "The Beginnings of Medieval Fortifications in the Late Carolingian Period from a Swiss Perspective," in *Fortified Settlements in Early Medieval Europe: Defended Communities of the 8th-10th Centuries*, ed. by Neil Christie and Hajnalka Herold (Oxbow Books, 2016), 126.
[104] Boschetti, "The Beginnings of Medieval Fortifications," 131.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Manfred W. Wenner, "The Arab/Muslim Presence in Medieval Central Europe," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 1 (August 1980): 62, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800027136.
[107] Versteegh, "The Arab Presence," 375.

nobility as feudal systems were incorporated.[108] Even after its fall, Fraxinetum impacted the demographic of the land as Muslim Arabs integrated into the land. Their role in political relations between powers, cultural exchange in the region, and the social demographic behind their collapse is significant. They were the silent bearers of change between alienated worlds due to their tumultuous existence.

Cultural exchange in the tenth century between various rulers across the Mediterranean took up several positions. Religious rivalry was not the obstacle for communication that it was made out to be. Lack of communication stemmed from political or military rivalry, which were often overcome to reach a common goal. The Arabs of Fraxinetum played a significant role in breaking down these barriers, as they became a common issue for various parties. Due to the unrest they brought to the south of France, the Caliphate of Córdoba and the Ottonian Empire engaged in several discussions. The religious rivalry that began to fail at the eclipse of the tenth century can be attributed to the Arabs again. Their disturbance and targeting of religious buildings and people made it so that Latin Christian sources, such as *Antapodosis*, were very critical of them. Liudprand specifically mentions the slaughtering of Christians at the hands of the Arabs in his source, hinting at religious animosity.[109]

This obstacle is overcome due to the mutual and increasing need for slavery throughout the Muslim and Christian worlds. Slavery served as a gateway facilitating communication and trade among these powers. A gateway that opened the door for the exchange of gifts and ideas. Through the administration established by ʻAbd al-Rahmān III, the flow of slaves and eunuchs in and out of Córdoba was highly efficient. Positive relations with Otto I and Constantine VII ensured that there was a buyer and seller for the product they needed. The manufacturing of eunuchs was overseen by Jews who were integrated into Córdoban upper society. A testament to the ability of ʻAbd al-Rahmān III in creating an efficient sphere through his positive relations and relative tolerance toward religious minorities.

From diplomatic relations facilitated by envoys, cultural exchange flourished. Through these relations, architecture, art, and medicine are exchanged to establish a chain of positive

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[108] Kees Versteegh, "The Arab Presence in France and Switzerland in the 10th Century," *Arabica* 37, no. 3 (November 1990): 376, https://doi.org/10.1163/157005890X00041.
[109] Liudprand of Cremona, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. by Paolo Squatriti (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 46.

communication. Architecture in Córdoba flourished in this manner and was indicative of its time as a caliphate. While, according to tenth-century contemporary chroniclers, the Arabs of Fraxinetum embodied evil, they inadvertently changed the course of history in the region for the better. The stir they caused around the Alpine pass forced Otto I to fortify previously unprotected monasteries and buildings. These new fortifications and defensive towers were prototypes for future architectural advances. The end of the Arabs further brought different dimensions to the region as they integrated into daily life. Their role in shaping the history of the region and the relations between surrounding rulers is multifaceted. These developments defined the period as boundaries shifted between the acting players of tenth-century politics.

Conclusion

Tenth-century Mediterranean politics exhibited a diverse array of characteristics. The establishment of the Caliphate of Córdoba under ‘Abd al-Rahmān III in 929 implied a new direction in interreligious relations between powers at the time. The aspirations of Otto I in southern France, as he sought to restore the former great Frankish Empire, meant that he confronted the Arabs of Fraxinetum directly. This band of Arabs that had established a stronghold near La Garde-Freinet caused anxiety in the region during their stay. They forced the caliph and the king to meet in 953 through the Ottonian monk, John of Gorze. Before he could deliver the letters that offended Islam and requested the cessation of support of the Arabs of Fraxinetum, he was intercepted by emissary Hasdai. After years of diplomatic discussions, the Spanish bishop Recemund traveled to Frankfurt to negotiate the retrieval of the letters and reached an agreement with Otto I. The connection established through emissaries such as John of Gorze and Recemund provided the foundation for diplomatic relations to flourish.

These diplomatic missions triggered various cultural and social developments across the Mediterranean. Interreligious relations in the tenth century proved not to be an obstacle when it came to establishing mutually beneficial deals. It was the powers of the same religion that experienced more religious animosity, rather than differing religions. These relations shifted after the events of Fraxinetum. Islamic-Christian animosity rose as the Arabs of Fraxinetum targeted monasteries and abbots in southern France. Alongside Liudprand, eleventh-century Christian sources increasingly aimed hostility toward Islam. Despite this, trade, namely that of slavery, was too significant to halt due to these tensions. ‘Abd al-Rahmān III required a surplus of slaves in his new caliphate and thus entered trading agreements with the Arabs of Fraxinetum and Otto I. These slaves fulfilled various roles in Córdoba, including that of building the Madīnat al-Zahrā’.

Open communication in trade facilitated the exchange of architectural styles, gifts, and artwork. The Great Mosque of Córdoba was renovated, and the Madīnat al-Zahrā’ was built using Byzantine style architecture and mosaic work. Architecture in southern France was further impacted by the existence of the Arabs of Fraxinetum, as they forced Otto I to build stronger fortifications for monasteries along with Alpine passes. A style that has been used for centuries as a prototype for monarchical castles. After their dissolution, the Arabs of Fraxinetum seamlessly integrated into normal lives in southern France.

We can thus deduce that several cultural movements are spurred through the political relations between the Caliphate of Córdoba and the Ottonian Empire. Diplomatic missions carried out by emissaries make sure that the word of their sovereign is transmitted and relations can be established. The enforcers of the meeting between ‘Abd al-Rahmān III and John of Gorze, the Arabs of Fraxinetum, inadvertently impacted the area for generations. Along with them, diplomatic missions are carriers of change as they bring gifts and messages that alter cultural and societal norms in the region. Islamic-Christian relations were permanently changed after the events of Fraxinetum. Despite this, these relations remained functional and capable of breaking even ground. Slavery thrived as its necessity only grew in the tenth century. Through diplomacy, Córdoba's architectural development was influenced by the Byzantine Empire. The Arabs of Fraxinetum played a significant role in further shaping the architecture of the region and altering its social demographic. The tenth century is a time when various strands of cultural and social identity intertwine through the means of interreligious politics.

Through this study, I compiled several historiographical investigations on the role of the Arabs of Fraxinetum in southern France. Concluding that the Arabs of Fraxinetum were enforcers of positive change throughout the Mediterranean, rather than the bringers of Christian destruction. Primarily investigating the case through the lens of *Antapodosis* and the *Vita Joannis abbatis Gorziensis*. Limitations of this study are the availability of translated, relevant primary sources. Aside from translating the *Vita Joannis abbatis Gorziensis* from German to English, proper translations for *Sūrat al-’Ard* and *Muqtabis* are challenging to come by. Thus, further research on this topic could include a comprehensive translation of these sources, which would provide a glimpse into the Arabic perspective of the tenth century. Additional studies might investigate the relationship between al-Hakam II and Otto II, and how they were able to maintain the relations passed down to them by their predecessors. The tenth century encompassed a wide range of interreligious interactions and cultural developments that would shape the Mediterranean for centuries to come.

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