

Chapter 8



A Beacon of Light for the European
Dark Ages – Moorish Spain

THE WARLIKE ARABS WHO had been the driving force behind the rapid expansion of the Islamic Empire proved as skilful in shipbuilding and naval warfare as they had been in building cities and fighting on land. They mounted seaborne expeditions against Cyprus in 648; in 655 they won a decisive naval victory in the ‘battle of the masts’ and less than 20 years later, a large Muslim fleet appeared under the walls of Constantinople in the first of several naval sieges of that great city. They were frustrated in these early attempts to capture Constantinople by the Byzantine’s secret weapon, Greek fire, that strange amalgam of naphthalene against which wooden ships were particularly vulnerable.¹ However, despite their failures at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, the naval and military might of the growing empire of Islam was to score a signal victory far to the west where the sea was at its narrowest, at the Straits of Gibraltar.

Visigothic Spain

Visigothic Spain was in a state of political turmoil when King Witzia (d. 710 CE) sought to strengthen his power at the expense of both the Church and the nobility, only to be violently overthrown

in 710 CE. Many of the nobles, however, were as opposed to his successor, the usurper Roderick (d. 711 CE), as they had been to Witzia himself.² While it is feasible to suggest that both Byzantine and Jewish merchants in Spain may have sent for help to combat Visigothic persecution,³ Musa ibn Nusair, the governor of the Islamic province of Ifriqiya, which comprised North Africa and the Maghreb, seized the opportunity created by the political chaos in Spain to invade. He dispatched his most able general, Tariq ibn Zihad, in April 711 with an army of 7,000 Berbers.⁴ Tariq landed at Gibraltar, the name derives from the Arabic *Jebel al-Tariq*, or the Rock of Tariq, and pushed inland. In a lightning campaign which met little resistance, he captured Malaga, Grenada and Cordova and then, on 19 July 711 at the Battle of the Rio Barbate, he destroyed the Christian army led by Roderick who was killed in battle. The defeated and demoralized Christians fled in disarray to the north, and Tariq occupied and looted the rich royal city of Toledo. Musa himself landed in Spain in June accompanied by 18,000 Arab troops and proceeded to conquer Seville and Mérida before joining forces with Tariq outside Toledo.⁵ Resistance to the Muslim invasion was sparse and ineffective. The flight of the Christian armies was panic-stricken, and this incredibly rapid conquest of the greater part of Spain by the forces of Islam that took only two or three years at most, was typical of the way in which the Muslim armies combined prudence with audacity.⁶

For the Jews of Spain, the Arab invasion was a godsend. The Visigoths had prohibited all manifestations of Judaism and had even cruelly separated children from their parents in order to bring them up in the Christian faith. Thus, the Jews not only welcomed the Muslims as saviours but also actively collaborated with the invaders who rewarded them by leaving the defence of some conquered towns and cities to Jewish garrisons. After the Muslim conquest, many Jews who had previously left Spain to avoid persecution by the Visigoths now returned from North Africa where they had previously sought sanctuary.⁷

For the next few years, the constantly changing and fluid boundaries between the Christians in the north and the Muslims in

the south of Spain led to the creation of a variety of independent cultural entities. There were the new Islamic converts, or *muwal-ladun*; there were Christians who lived under Arab rule and who became known as the Mozarabs, from the Arabic word *mustarib*, 'Arabized' and, in centuries to come, Muslims living under Christian rule, the Mudejar. The entire territory of Muslim Spain became known as al-Andalus, a name which, according to Heinz Halm, the twentieth-century German historian, was derived from the Gothic word for 'landless', *landahlutz*.⁸

Forays into the Lands of the Franks

The new conquerors extended the range of their military activities when, in 719 CE, they crossed the Pyrenees and invaded and plundered parts of the Frankish Empire. Some year later the Muslim armies conquered Carcassonne and ravaged territory on the far side of the Rhône as far as Autun in Burgundy. One Governor of al-Andalus, Abd-al-Rahman al-Gafiqi, ranged as far as the Loire and sacked Tours. In October 732, however, at the famous Battle of Poitiers, he was defeated and killed by a Frankish army under the command of Charles Martel (688–741 CE), the grandfather of Charlemagne, known thereafter as Charles the Hammer.⁹ The pivotal Battle of Poitiers, which the Christians later called 'the salvation of the West', was only one battle among many, for frontier disputes continued for many years and after 791, Muslim troops once again captured Carcassonne and Narbonne.¹⁰

In the early years of the Moorish occupation, the scarcity of the Muslim ruling class in respect of their conquered peoples posed potentially serious problems to the new rulers. Several waves of settlers and soldiers were brought to Spain from Islamic countries to compensate, and given lands vacated by the Christians who had fled to the north. They were generally settled according to their tribal groups, which proved to be a grave mistake that led to bitter inter-tribal jealousy, conflict and, ultimately, to civil war. This was only one important factor in an already fundamentally unstable political situation reflected in the fact that 19 different governors

ruled Cordova in the 30 years between 716 and 747.¹¹ The situation began to be resolved under the governor Yusef al-Fihri (747–56 CE) who installed members of his own family in key positions in many leading cities, thus stabilizing the situation throughout al-Andalus. This stability was not to last, however, for after 750, discontented southern Arabs who were hostile to Yusef's rule, demanded that Prince Abd al-Rahman ibn Muawiya (756–88 CE), who had miraculously survived the massacre of the Umayyad family, be given ultimate power throughout Spain.¹²

The Creation of the Spanish 'March'

The potential for expansion of Moorish Spain was severely limited in the East by an astute statesman and brilliant warrior of the Rex Deus line, Charles the Great, otherwise known as Charlemagne (742–814 CE). The grandson of Charles Martel, Charlemagne first succeeded to the throne jointly with his brother Carloman. After the death of Carloman, Charlemagne reunited his divided kingdom and began a series of successful wars to expand it until, eventually, as Holy Roman Emperor; he ruled a territory that stretched from the Danube to the Mediterranean. He made several forays into Moorish Spain and while he was unsuccessful in the north, in the south he captured several important areas collectively known as the Spanish Marches which acted as a bulwark against further Moorish incursions eastwards into Christian territory. Behind this line of defence, he consolidated the empire's hold on Septimania, an area that had once been settled by the seventh legion of the Roman army, now the Languedoc/Rousillion area of southwestern France.

Jewish Septimania

Not long before the Moorish invasion of Spain, Jews fleeing persecution instituted by the Visigoths, settled in Septimania. This considerable and prosperous Jewish community eventually came to live under the guidance of their own nasi, or prince, whose appointment was first authorized by Pepin the Short, King of the

Franks (747–68 CE) and father of Charlemagne, after the capture of Narbonne in 759.¹³ Perhaps this proposed installation of a Jewish prince in Christian Europe was an act of gratitude in recognition of the fact that the Jews of Narbonne delivered the city to the Franks in return for a promise of self-government under their own king, a matter recorded in several Hebrew and papal documents.¹⁴

After the capture of Narbonne, the Jews of Septimania were clearly perceived as a highly privileged group, richly endowed with freehold estates granted to them by the Carolingian kings.¹⁵ Their protection was assured by Charlemagne himself who knew where the true commercial interests of his empire lay, for the Jews, as had been proven in the empire of Islam, were the keys to success in international trade. Many charters testifying to the granting of protection and privileges to Jewish merchants are still extant.¹⁶

Charlemagne used the services of a Jew, Isaac by name, as an interpreter for the ambassador he sent to Harun-al-Rashid, caliph of Baghdad, in 797. As a result of this ambassadorial visit, the first *nasi*, or Jewish prince of Narbonne, a certain Rabbi Makhi, came from Baghdad to Septimania, where Charlemagne endowed him with great possessions.¹⁷ There was another, equally important, reason for Charlemagne's determined protection of the Jews, for the historian of the Carolingian era, P Munz, writing long before any public disclosure of the Rex Deus traditions, asserted that Charlemagne claimed descent from the biblical kings of Israel. Munz concluded that Charlemagne deliberately engineered the situation in Septimania to arrange a marriage between his family and that of the *nasi*, who was also descended from the Davidic line. An alliance, that the emperor hoped, would demonstrate that the Carolingian dynasty had divine sanction as rulers.¹⁸

However, the most important responsibility of the new Nasi Makhir was to lead the Jews of Septimania and the Toulousain in the defence of the Spanish frontier and the Mediterranean coast, against raids by the Umayyad Moors of Spain and North Africa.¹⁹ Thus, Charlemagne's motivation was many-faceted: it was commercial and directed towards trade; it encouraged Jewish

scholarship as well as commerce; but, most importantly it had primarily a strong defensive element and also provided a unique opportunity for the union of two royal houses in marriage, with both claiming descent from the House of David. This complex range of aims and objectives succeeded beyond all expectations.

The descendants of the *nasi* were, with one exception, loyal supporters of the Carolingian dynasty throughout their long reign. The Jewish community in Narbonne grew steadily and prospered until the expulsion of the Jews from France under King Philippe le Bel in 1306, and records disclose that the Jews maintained considerable estates in the Narbonnais from the time of Pepin the Short until at least the middle of the eleventh century. Indeed, the noted Jewish chronicler Benjamin of Tudela wrote as late as the twelfth century:

Narbonne is an ancient city of the Torah. From it the Torah goes out to all lands. Therein there are sages, magnates and princes (nas'im) at the head of whom is R Kalonymo... a descendant of the House of David as stated in his family tree. He holds hereditaments and [other] landed properties from the rulers of the country and no one may dispossess him by force.²⁰

The extensive properties held by the Jews and their nasi at the time of their expulsion indicates that they occupied a sizeable portion of the countryside and city until the early years of the fourteenth century.²¹

Charlemagne's protection of the Jews, along with his statesmanship, military prowess and commercial acumen led to a growing reputation and an ever-expanding kingdom. To keep order within his sprawling dominions, he used the royal prerogative of *gratia* to create a warrior aristocracy,²² rewarding his supporters and loyal aids by the granting of rank and lands. Within the empire, Charlemagne created over 600 counties²³ that enabled his orders to be implemented with considerable efficiency by his loyal counts. Who were the most trustworthy people he could appoint to these positions of power? Other members of the Rex Deus family group were the obvious choice, especially in the regions of greatest

potential danger, the Marches or borderlands, which were ruled by a marquess and, under him, a number of counts. Thus, by the time of Charlemagne's death in 814, much of Europe – particularly France, Septimania, Provence, northern Italy and Saxony – were administered by nobility of the Rex Deus line.²⁴

The Umayyad Dynasty in al-Andalus

The last surviving scion of the deposed Umayyad family, Prince Abd al-Rahaman I, landed in southern Spain in 755. In May 756, he defeated Governor Yusef outside the walls of Cordova and captured the capital, but forbade any looting by his troops. This merciful action persuaded the other cities to submit peacefully to his authority and Abd al-Rahaman I proclaimed himself emir of al-Andalus (756–88 CE). Thus came to power the one man above all others who can truly be called the great creator of Islamic Spain.

Abd al-Rahaman established close links between al-Andalus and his former homeland for both culture and commerce, and paid particular attention to enhancing agricultural production by means of accurate surveying and the installation of highly efficient irrigation canals. Sugar, cotton, rice and several varieties of fruit, vegetables and spices were imported from the Orient and all over the country, granaries were constructed to prevent famine occurring at times of shortage.²⁵ Industry was also actively encouraged, and among the most important occupations in al-Andalus were silk and wool manufacture; dyeing and leatherwork in the area around Cordova; armaments and steel from Toledo, while the Almeria became a centre for ceramics.²⁶ Commercial progress contributed greatly to the growing stability of the political situation.

Since the Battle of Poitiers in 732, there had been little overall political discipline in Spain, particularly in the north where the Pyrenees offered impregnable retreats to those dissatisfied with central government, for to local governors, or *vali*, it often seemed preferable to turn for help to the Franks rather than bend before the stern authority of the emir. Therefore, it is not surprising to learn that it took several decades before the restored Umayyad

prince and his successors were fully accepted by the chiefs of the Arab and Syrian marauders. Nonetheless, under the rule of the Umayyad dynasty, the ninth century came to represent the peak of cultural achievement not only in Spain but in the entire European continent. The rise of Cordova was ensured by Abd al-Rahman II (822–52 CE), who devoted much time to cultural matters and began the construction of public buildings in Cordova that are still a source of pride in Spain today. During his reign, the Jewish population of Granada was estimated to be over 5,000, so it is no wonder that the Muslims called the city *Gharnatat al-Yahud*, the City of the Jews.²⁷

It was Abd al-Rahaman III (912–61 CE) who succeeded at the age of 22 and finally unified the Islamic territories in Spain when he re-conquered Seville and Mérida and expelled the rival clan of Hasfun from al-Andalus. Exploiting the political weakness in the Christian lands, he concluded a treaty of protection with the kingdoms of León and Navarre who, in consequence, recognized Abd al-Rahaman III as the *de facto* ruler and arbiter in all Spain. Even the strong Christian kingdoms of Castille and Barcelona in the Spanish March paid him tribute. When, in January 929, he named himself caliph, Cordova became the third caliphate in Islam along with the caliphates of Baghdad and Cairo.²⁸

The Caliphate of Cordova

The new caliph created a new and a strictly centralized internal administration, thus ensuring the country's rapid growth in prosperity based upon his grandfather's insistence on extensive irrigation and efficient agriculture. The arts flourished along with agriculture and Muslim sophistication paved the way for the new rulers to found trade guilds for skilled craftsmen who were prized and well rewarded.²⁹ The formulation of a just and effective tax system resulted in overflowing state coffers and allowed trade concessions for the Jews. All these factors, allied to sound municipal administration, enabled al-Andalus to become the most populous country in Europe at that time. Cordova, its capital, thrived as an

economic and cultural centre to such an extent that it was compared favourably with Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire and may, indeed, have even exceeded that city as a centre of learning.³⁰

The caliph's son, Crown Prince al-Hakkam (961–76 CE) shared in government from the age of 40, and, as caliph, continued to build upon his ancestor's achievements. A peace-loving and scholarly man, during his time as crown prince he surrounded himself with scientists and scholars and amassed many books, following the example of previous emirs who had also owned great libraries and attracted poets, philosophers and mathematicians to their courts.³¹ In Cordova, Caliph al-Hakkam created a library of 400,000 books which were indexed in 44 catalogues, and he added his own commentaries to many of these volumes.³² Thus Cordova became home to one of the greatest libraries in Europe, second only to the greatest in the world located in Baghdad at the heart of the Islamic Empire. This almost insatiable passion for learning, stimulated the production of between 70,000 and 80,000 bound volumes each year, which not only reflected local demand but also demonstrated the country's capacity for a phenomenal high-volume, top-quality production, many centuries before the invention of printing. Sciences, such as geography, agriculture and irrigation, astronomy, medicine and mathematics were actively encouraged, as was the serious study of philosophy based principally on classical Greek thought. With the expulsion of the persecuted Nestorian scholars from Europe as a result of Christian intolerance, the Arab world had become home to this vast collection of Greek learning in mathematics, philosophy and science, which now took root and flourished in Spain along with knowledge of classical medicine.³³

It was not just the fruits of Greek civilization that came by this tortuous route into European consciousness, for along with them came more recent advances in medicine, art and architecture. Much of the classical knowledge of ancient Greece that we now treasure and take for granted would have withered away had it not been preserved and enhanced by Islamic scholars.³⁴ As caliph,

al-Hakkam now commissioned many scholarly works on ethics, statecraft and history, taking a personal interest in popular literacy and education, establishing schools and centres of learning open to people of every social class. Thus his reign is rightly renowned as the apotheosis of science, scholarship and poetry in the history of Moorish Spain.³⁵

Cordova eventually became the dominant centre of Islamic culture during the ninth century. The phases of construction of its extraordinary mosque, which became the second largest in all of Islam, reflect the cultural changes that took place between 785 and 980. Roman methods, still active, brought interesting new forms to oriental ideas: superimposed tiers of many-coloured arches and ribbed cupolas. This continuity with pre-Muslim tradition reflects the prosperity of this part of al-Andalus, famous for its weapons, leather goods and silks; an area whose growth and stability had never suffered serious attack or disturbance from Christian enemies – neither the Franks from across the Spanish Marches nor those Spaniards who had taken refuge in the northwest of Spain.³⁶

The Jews, who were being treated as second-class citizens in the rest of Europe north of Spain and Septimania, enjoyed a rich cultural renaissance of their own³⁷ and the large Christian population was also allowed full religious liberty in Spain, as throughout the Islamic Empire. Most Spanish Christians were extremely proud to belong to a highly advanced and sophisticated culture that was light years ahead of the rest of Europe.³⁸ The legacy of Moorish Spain to the later development of European culture is considerable. Mozarabic Spanish Christian scholars and their texts later supplied much of the raw material for the emerging literature of the West.³⁹ Thus the variety of literary creation in Spain was both broader and richer than that which arose in the caliphate of Baghdad or North Africa.⁴⁰

Under the rule of the Umayyad caliphs, Moorish Spain gained international renown for the poetry, literature and learning of both Cordova and Granada. The well-attended and richly endowed colleges in Andalusia were later to provide a model and a template for those founded in Oxford and Cambridge in England.⁴¹ In an era

when the vast majority of European Christian nobles, kings and emperors were barely literate, the Islamic Umayyad court at Cordova was the most splendid in Europe; one that provided a haven and an oasis of peace wherein philosophers, poets, artists, mathematicians and astronomers could pursue their studies.⁴² This tradition continued long after the fall of the Umayyads, for later during the height of Abbasid power, Spain continued to enjoy an era of unexampled, independent prosperity.⁴³

It was in the tolerant atmosphere of Muslim Spain that Jewish science found its most fertile soil with substantial and important contributions being made in many areas: medicine; geography; cosmology; developments of instruments for measurement, cartography and navigation, and, as importantly, with the translation of works from Greek into Arabic and from Arabic into Latin and other European languages. In Andalusia, as in the Muslim world at large, the Jews wrote their scientific, medical and philosophical treatises in Arabic, a language that they found best suited to this branch of human learning. It was as a result of this combination of the innate Islamic respect for learning and Jewish scholarship that the West first came into contact with classical Greek science and its Arabic commentators. In Toledo in al-Andalus, and in other centres in Septimania, Jewish scholars translated works in philosophy, mathematics, geometry, physics, astronomy, astrology, medicine, and magic, and thus provided the basis for the Latin science that evolved during the central and late Middle Ages.⁴⁴

From the early tenth century, the previously unified Islamic Empire had already begun to fragment into smaller states, yet despite this apparent disunity, most remained highly sophisticated centres of wealth and learning that provided a fertile environment for both economic and cultural life.⁴⁵ As a result of their integration into what became, in effect, an Islamic free-trade zone, both Moorish Spain and the Islamic states in North Africa developed lucrative trade deals with the Levant.⁴⁶ This resulted in a sustained level of prosperity that lasted for nearly seven centuries; one that has left us an architectural and artistic heritage that is still a source of wonder to the modern world. Yet this magnificent and still

highly visible flowering of art and architecture, important though it is, pales almost into insignificance when compared to the achievements in literature, poetry, medicine, mathematics and philosophy that accompanied it.

Spiritual Schools in Muslim Spain

It was not only secular learning that flourished under the benevolent rule of the Muslim caliphs in Spain. Religious and spiritual schools abounded in all three of the main religious communities; Muslim madrasas, Jewish yeshivas and Christian seminaries operated side by side in this tolerant country, each operating according to the religious requirements of their own community. The seminaries provided the priests necessary to minister to the large and flourishing Christian population. Jewish yeshivas provided the opportunity for the rigorous Bible study that was such an integral part of medieval Judaism. They also acted as centres of scholarship that refined and enhanced the various respected oral traditions of mysticism within the Hebraic tradition, such as the *maaseh bereshith*, based on the work of creation described in the first chapter of Genesis, and the *maaseh merkabah*, founded on accounts of Ezekiel's vision of the divine chariot; 'the Psalms of ascents' that is the mystical ascents to the higher heavens, or the ascent through the various degrees of Neoplatonic enlightenment or gnosis in another variation of the Merkabah tradition known as Hekaloth.⁴⁷ These now developed into a written form known as the kabbalah with its earliest version attributed to Aaron ben Samuel in Italy at the beginning of the tenth century.

The classical kabbalah is, allegedly, the oldest initiatory, mystical tradition that was received from Aaron and then passed down from master to pupil in an oral form of teaching that only reached written completion in the thirteenth century CE. The *Sefer ha-Zohar* or Book of Splendour expressed its principal aspects, mainly Jewish Gnosticism tinged with Sufi mysticism, recently synthesized Neoplatonism and magic.⁴⁸ It was written about 1280 and spread into Christian Europe from the rabbinical schools in Moorish

Spain and Septimania. Regular contact between Septimania and Spain were well established and yeshivas in Narbonne and Montpellier are now acknowledged to have played an important role in creating the first full written versions.⁴⁹ The *Sefer ha-Zohar* was attributed to the second-century sage and rabbi, Simeon bar Yohai, but took written form from the hand of Moses de León. Later, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the kabbalah spread into Christian Europe and a Christianized form of it became popular among scholars of a mystical inclination.

The Sufi mystery schools in Spain were the principal open and accessible sources of Muslim mystical teaching in a continent wherein the Christian Church actively discouraged spiritual exploration.⁵⁰ Sufism is a mystical tradition that derives its inspiration from the Qur'an and the teaching of the Prophet, and the Sufi orders were all founded by men who claimed spiritual and/or genealogical descent from Muhammed. However, unlike their counterparts within the Christian world who had to operate in secret for fear of persecution, the Sufis were able to operate openly within Islam and contributed significantly to its development. The poet and mythologist Robert Graves claims that Sufism in fact dates back to 2500 BCE and alleges that he found a 'Sufic signature' in accounts of the building of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.⁵¹ The grandson of Judaism's greatest thinker, Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), also states that the Sufi tradition is Hebraic in origin when he wrote that Sufism is 'the pride of Israel bestowed upon the world'.⁵²

Undoubtedly, the greatest medieval mystical writer was the Sufi teacher from Seville, Mohieddin ibn Arabi (1165-1240) who described the Great Prophet Muhammed as the manifestation of the 'Perfect Man'. Renowned as a mystic, philosopher and poet, ibn Arabi is known among the Sufis as Shaykh al-Akbar, or 'the greatest teacher'. In the West he became known as Doctor Maximus, an accurate translation of his Arabic title. He wrote profusely about the Prophet's mystical journey, ascent and travel through the heavens to Jerusalem, thereby reinforcing the pervasive influence of earlier forms of Jewish mysticism. His sublime poetry, which is even

more popular today than it was in the medieval era, profoundly influenced such leading scholars as Friar Roger Bacon, Dante Alighieri, Cervantes, Averroes, St Francis of Assisi and Chaucer. From these brief examples, it is clear that Moorish Spain had a more profound influence on the development of European thought, scholarship and culture than any other single country in European history.

Classical Learning crosses from Spain to Christian Europe

Jewish scholars who could move with ease between Latin, Hebrew and Arabic, provided a vital link in the international dissemination of knowledge.⁵³ Knowledge of the Greek Classics crept back into European consciousness via the theological college founded by Bishop Fulbert of Chartres (960-1028). Fulbertus' pupils were probably the first in Christian western Europe to read the works of Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras and Cicero as well as being familiar with mathematics, science and contemporary Arabic inventions such as the astrolabe.⁵⁴ Thus, the knowledge taught at Chartres came from that beacon of light in the Dark Ages, Moorish Spain, translated not from Greek, but from Arabic by Jewish scholars. How did this knowledge get from Spain to Chartres? The answer lies in the Rex Deus connection whereby nobles of the hidden family group passed translations of the classics sent by members in Spain to another of their group, Bishop Fulbert.⁵⁵

Fulbert was called 'that venerable Socrates' by his disciples who now truly belonged to the international community of scholars.⁵⁶ The twelfth century marked the zenith of the Chartres School: Bernardus of Chartres, Gilbert de la Porée, Thierry of Chartres, and John of Salisbury, were its masters who were celebrated throughout France and attracted pupils from every province and even from abroad.⁵⁷ The school at Chartres marked the pivotal time that separated the Dark Ages from the early roots of the Renaissance, for it was from the time of Bernardus of Chartres (d. circa 1130) and Abelard of Paris (1079-1142) that one can date the first important breaching of the dam of ecclesiastically enforced ignorance. It was

here that the philosophers of classical Greece were reinstated in the mainstream of European Christian philosophy.⁵⁸

Under the leadership of Gerard of Cremona (1114-87), an influential school of translation developed in Toledo that attracted scholars from all over Europe. Its main area of interest was scientific and mathematical works which included the work of the Muslim Averroës of Cordova (1126-98). It was from this school that the distinguished Abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable, commissioned a translation of the Holy Qur'an into Latin in 1141. His motive was to create a scholarly basis for the refutation of Islam.⁵⁹