

HOW TO ADAPT TO THE CONQUERING COLONIZER? DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN EARLY ISLAMIC AL-ANDALUS AND NORTH AFRICA

Roundtable Discussion

When: **Tuesday Jan, 27, 2026**

Time: **4-6 pm CET**

Format: **Hybrid – Zoom and Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Rm 18**

Organizer: **Katharina Mewes and Stefan Heidemann, RomanIslam Center (Early Islam)**

Discussants: **Islamic Conquest as Colonial Rule**

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Al-Andalus

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Background:

In North Africa and on the Iberian Peninsula we encounter colonial situations in the Roman and Early Islamic Period, created by a conquering empire. The regions soon transformed, whereas the elites adapted in multiple ways. The RomanIslam Center studies those continuities and changes in the regional and local structures. Being a Roman (and religion did not yet play a major role in this case), a Muwallad, a Musta‘rab and a Muslim became part of the identity. How were processes of colonization from the east, exploitation, and religious and cultural adaption, and resistance entangled?

Al-Andalus – What Happened? - *Islamification* rather than *Islamization*?

Al-Andalus, once a Roman colonized province, at the time of the Islamic conquest it was divided between Late Antique Germanic Kingdoms. It was then swiftly conquered by troops of Syrian and Berber origins, apart from its impoverished north. Al-Andalus transformed soon into an Umayyad province and with a

fiscal administration and bureaucracy, proven by many early Islamic seals. The spread of Mālikī law, starting around the 2nd / 8th century seems to have stabilized the colonial rule, bringing a predictable enforceable law to the region. Latin in its regional variance continued to be widely used and later transformed to Spanish, while Arabic dominated the written culture. As in other provinces, the major religious communities Christians, Jews and Muslims coexisted under Muslim rule, later fostering the myth of 'convivencia'. The other pole of the debate points to a rapid process of acculturation to the culture of the conquerors by the death of the first independent amīr 'Abd al-Rahmān in 173/ 788. The old elite remained but transformed. The integration of the regional, albeit Muslim, elites the *muwalladūn* into the Muslim 'colonial' elite saw setbacks, and visible dissatisfaction exemplified in the uprising of 'Umar ibn Hafṣūn at the end of the 9th century.

North Africa – What Happened? *Islamization* rather than *Islamication*?

For North Africa the seemingly disappearance of Christianity and Judaism is often perceived as a result of a rapid progress of Islamic homogenization, pointing towards a (rapid) process of Islamization. A view certainly fostered by the sources, as most of the Arabic historiographical sources were committed to "telling a story of Muslim triumph," (Sahner) discounting the role played by the Christian and Jewish communities, while providing a picture of a homogenous Muslim society. The former Roman-Christian elite and their culture seems to disappear following the Arab conquest, probably many fleeing and returning to the shores of the Byzantine empire.

But the North Africa experience was divided. The province of Ifrīqiya (modern day Tunisia) saw a massive influx of foreign military population, first from Syria and under al-Manṣūr (r. 136–58/754–75) about 40.000 Khurāsanians. The Berber regions beyond to the west, remained Berber, but Islamized. The pressure to be molded in the 'colonial' manner was only on Ifrīqiya. Nevertheless, the Berber polities adopted soon dissident forms of Islam (Khārijīyya, and Ibāḍīyya). Their revolts at the end of the Umayyad period, were politically motivated, nativist uprising, often within the same religious, but dissident Muslim vernacular. The influx of new Muslim military population, the establishment of an administrative systems, as well as the introduction of Islamic legal practice under the Ibāḍīyya among the Berber and Mālikīyya in Ifrīqiya fostered a process of Islamization. Christianity and native languages disappeared soon, while the Berber identity and religious diversity within Islam remained in the regions beyond the confines of the empire. In this process, we see an urbanization in the Berber polities fostering a further Islamization.

The round table discussion wants to bring experts of both regions into a discussion to enhance the general understanding how the Muslim/ Arab conquerors and their 'colonial' rule impacted both regions. In order to attend online or in presence, please register by **Jan. 25, 2026** with

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More: www.romanislam.uni-hamburg.de