

ABSTRACT

This is a history of late-antique and medieval Tarragona, the city and its territory, and the See and its ecclesiastical province, the Tarraconensis, that came to be co-terminus with the medieval Crown of Aragón-Catalunya-Valencia. The frontier setting is a vast medieval frontier stretching East to West from the outskirts of Barcelona to Tarragona and down the coast to Tortosa, past Zaragoza and up the Ebro Valley, which for centuries separated Islam and Christendom at the point of closest contact, the very junction of the Iberian Peninsula and European continent. According to medieval mapmakers, it was the gateway between Europe and Africa. For Romans ancient Tarraco had been the entry to Iberia and was the capital of Hispania Citerior. For the Latin Church, Tarracona was an ancient metropolitan See, primatial in dating back to the Apostolic era, made holy by its martyrs. Its history was important in so many ways, but yet remains largely unknown in History at large. This work seeks to correct that. It does this in 6 volumes in a series, each standing by itself or part of the whole sequence after a historio-geographic introduction (1), covering four chronological periods of dramatic change: (2) Roman and (3) Visigothic Late-Antiquity and early Christianity; (4) the Islamic Interregnum; (5) the Reconquest and Restoration period; and then (6) the critical apparatus for this study (Master bibliography, gazetteer, index).

The first part (1-3) lays the theoretical groundwork for interpretation and the foundation from Late Antiquity to the Islamic Conquest about what was or was thought to have been, that would be reconquered and restored in the Middle Ages. What went before, or was thought to have happened, guided recovery and reconstruction after the alteration of the Hispano-Roman trajectory with the overlay of Arab religion and leadership with Berber might. The midsection (4) addresses Islamic history of the northeastern frontier of the *Umayyad* caliphate and *al-Andalus*, their *thughūr* or frontiers, which to Christians was a regrettable interregnum and eclipse of Christendom. The third part tells the story of Tarragona's Reconquest and Restoration, more than its own urban reconstruction, but the reformulation and reconstitution of the province of the Tarraconensis and amalgamation of Church and State in the creation of the Crown of Aragón-Catalunya and its extension to Valencia and beyond. Interlaced are the themes of continuity versus discontinuity; repeated conquests and reconquests; liberation and restoration; conversion and assimilation; missions and reforms; cultural revival and expansionism; and the interplay between the Ibero-Christian kingdoms and Islamic *al-Andalus* and *tawā'if* kinglets through the 12th c. and then a brief 13th c. epilogue.

An interpretative construct, the American-based frontier thesis, is applied unabashedly to the geographic frontier of New Catalunya from the Llobregat River to the Ebro Valley bounded by the Iberian range, primarily New Catalunya and New Aragón, and to the north the Pyrenean piedmont. It begins with Tarraco's foundation and growth in the classic era, maturity in late antiquity, and the birth of Christianity in Hispania Citerior; then traces its decline at the end of the Roman Empire in the era of barbarian invasions and survival under the Visigothic successor state. All of this is a prologue to ascertain what there was to be retaken and restored, in theory and actuality. The Islamic interregnum is explored, especially to learn why the Islamic empire stopped its western expansion at this point; the effect of the long stand-off between Muslim and Christian forces in the frontier of New Catalunya related to that of New Aragón; the role of the Muslim *tawā'if* of *Saraqusta*, and how the tide was finally reversed with the incorporation of this frontier into the newly formed Crown of Aragón-Catalunya. This accomplishment is placed in the context of the entire Mediterranean, the Crusades, and the resurgent *Islam* from North Africa, stressing the western arena in this global confrontation. The main foci are on the Church and Principality of Tarragona and satellite fortress cities and bishoprics of Lleida and Tortosa. Its subjects are the frontiersmen who tamed this frontier, the armies that fought over it, and the Muslim, Jewish and Christian pioneers who resettled it. The epilogue is how this absorption of the northeastern Muslim *ṭaghr* prepared the way for the conquest of the Balearics and the fall of Valencia, thus

expanding the Crown southward and dividing the peninsula between it and the kingdom of Castile-León until its unification by the Catholic Kings. It removes Tarragona from just local history and sets it into the international arena, as one of the most important episodes in all European medieval history.

The text also attempts to differentiate between distinct realities in the same place by using place-names according to usage during the time referenced (hence Roman Tarraco, Visigothic Tarraco, Islamic *Tarrakunah*, Romance Terrachona, and Catalan Tarragona) and italics for Arabic transcriptions and varied names as in this example. Nomenclature transcribed from the Arabic for Muslim tribal political entities are also italicized when familial names also indicate territorial control, a school of law or thought to dominate in an area, and Arabic words including *Islam* and *Allah* out of respect for their non-Western origins and religious usage. Although transliterated and standardized here, they are not fully Westernized or Anglicized to preserve their non-Western identities and to escape Anglo-American intellectual imperialism. A simplified transliteration is used to avoid the older, complex forms heavy with diacritical markups that now impede electronic retrieval, but in any case, it seems impossible to be entirely systematic when even the Library of Congress (LC) system contends with the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR)* to preserve original renderings in bibliographic citations regardless of usage in the text. So versions in this text often differ from bibliographic entries, a problem sometimes overcome by the use of main entries for filing order instead of the common confusion in entry forms under author, editor, title, variable titles, etc., for the same works. Moreover, the archival principle of provenance is preferred, i.e., place of origin or originating authority rather than transmitter or editor. Modern equivalents as popularly used are given in the first occurrence of Arabic equivalents, but even here one is forced into decisions about place-name and personal references in Latin, and then Spanish or Catalan or the other federated state languages as well as Portuguese, with the quandary of what to do before these Romance languages had fully emerged or were themselves standardized after the period under consideration here. One might imagine the orthographic variance found in the documents themselves, say nothing about scribal abbreviations, and sympathize with the researcher. So, consistency often seems an elusive goal just as for medieval scribes -- a noble ideal but contrary in itself to the variety of usages evolving regionally and the complexity of the history studied here. So sometimes personal preference prevails. *Mea culpa*; but, I trust, not *maxissima culpa*.

An American perspective on comparative frontier history, including those of expansionist Europe in the Middle Ages, cannot escape a pre-conditioning from a popular culture that extolls the pioneer spirit and American westward movement. Nor can the historian of modern times shake the assumption that the past is prologue, and that so much of what was experienced by immigrant Europeans in the American frontier was preconditioned by the experiences of their ancestors in places like medieval Iberia, remote and yet familiar, in a past eschewed and yet held onto dearly. Walt Whitman's poetic words can be applied to the medieval frontier, an Old World made new through reconquest, liberation and restoration. He captured the spirit of the March even if he was wrong about leaving the past behind. His determinism can be dismissed, while appreciating the determination of those who marched onward and westward, in America and across Iberia studied here. Frontiersmen and pioneers, in the medieval past as in the American frontier, took their cultures with them and changed everything by creating a new blend with the indigenous.

Pioneers! O Pioneers!

(selected stanzas)

All the past we leave behind,
We debouch upon a newer mightier world,
 varied world,
Fresh and strong the world we seize,
 world of labor and the march,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!
We detachments steady throwing,
Down the edges, through the passes,
Up the mountains steep,
Conquering, holding, daring, venturing we go
 the unknown ways,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!

O to die advancing on!
Falling in they beat for us,
 with the Western movement beat,
Holding single or together,
 steady moving to the front, all for us,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!
On and on the compact ranks,
With accessions ever waiting,
 with the places of the dead quickly fill'd,
Through the battle, through defeat,
 moving yet and never stopping,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!

Walt Whitman, 1819-1892¹