

SYNOPSIS

Roman Tarraco and its province, the Tarraconensis, were remembered as the classical foundation of law and order in northeastern Hispania, and high culture too, but these entities were pagan and past for medieval Christendom and *Dār al-Islām*. St. Augustine had permitted the continuation of whatever did not contradict Christianity, as in his principle of taking Truth from its unjust possessors. So, Christians dwelled in the Roman Empire and when it was gone, they took from it almost everything they could except for religion and continued their reformation that began in the Apostolic Age but in the West especially after Christianity became an official religion under Constantine I and the Church began its development in the open as a Roman institution. It continued when the Empire ceased, and in Hispania had the Visigothic successor state over it which was Christian but Arian rather than Catholic until in 589 the monarchy converted to Roman Catholicism. Then a Church-State partnership was forged.

The Church carried on in those troubled times often idealized as a ‘Golden Age’ combined with that of the Fathers, and this became the model in the mind’s eye for the Restoration during the Reconquest and liberation of a suppressed Christianity after the Islamic Conquest in 711-718. This study examines the myth and reality of the Romano-Hispani Church, especially the Primatial See of Tarraco from its foundation and appearance under the Dacian persecution, and then its role as a Metropolitan See to its eclipse by *Islām*. It rejects the myth of a united, flourishing Church that had successfully Christianized the province, and instead shows a troubled institution fighting to survive in hard times that nevertheless was the saving grace for an even more unstable Visigothic monarchy that was constantly at war. Despite the misnomer, it was not a Visigothic Church, but a continuation of Hispano-Roman Christianity under Visigothic rule. In particular it studies the Church’s leadership to show episcopal succession was as problematic as regnal transitions, often the victim of the latter; and that the Church was in serious trouble before the Muslim invasion dealt it a final blow in a lingering, painful death, so that the Restoration was a real start-over and more thorough Christianization in the aftermath of Reconquest. The Late-Antique Church was remembered most for its Canon Law from the Toletan councils, its organization and formalization of liturgy, its saint cults and the rise of monasticism, and the writings of some extraordinary savants like Isidore of Seville, and its self-propagated myth that it was more successful than it really was. Contrary to the conventional picture, the Hispanic Church under the Visigoths was not well organized everywhere, united, or content with its lot, and the new hybridization of Visigoths with their Hispano-Roman subjects did not instantly form high culture and thorough Christianization as the heritage of Romanization. Things were more complicated than that, testier and chancy, but in the aftermath survival was mythologized as great success. That would inspire the medieval Restoration movement when Hispania actually became more extensively and thoroughly Christian with the Reconquest, even with Judaism surviving through it all, than it ever was in Late-Antiquity and the Visigothic era. Despite the myth of the Truth marching on, this revision suggests a pretty waiving and stop-and-go path forward, all too human; and that puts both the Islamic Conquest and Christian Reconquest in a different light.

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June 2023