Arabic chronicles of al-Andalus all emphasize the role of Arabs in the region's conquest and subsequent history.¹ The original invasion and settlement in 711, however, was in fact headed up by the Berber governor of Tangier, Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād, with a predominantly Berber army.² Ṭāriq was the mawlā of the Arab governor of Qayrawān, Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr, and probably carried out the invasion without orders from Mūsā. In 712 Mūsā arrived in al-Andalus with the Arab jund or army division that he commanded in Ifrīqiyyah (central North Africa), which included prominent members of various Arab tribes, among them the Quraysh (the Prophet Muḥammad’s tribe). Mūsā met with Ṭāriq in Toledo, a meeting that apparently ended with Ṭāriq abasing himself and apologizing for acting on his own, and Mūsā having Ṭāriq’s head shaved. The two commanders then joined forces, but with Mūsā in charge and representing legitimate authority, which is to say Arab authority. From that point on, the ruling class of al-Andalus was predominantly Arab or closely affiliated with Arabs until the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate in 1031, and not until the Almoravid invasion of 1086 did Berbers rule all of al-Andalus.

Arabs may have formed the social elite in al-Andalus, but the question of who qualified as Arab was an open one. Although medieval people believed biological inheritance played an important role in ethnic identity, it was not the determining factor it is today. In al-Andalus, language ability, cultural practices, and religion were also factors, so that individuals could to some degree lose one ethnic identity and acquire another. Men from Christian families not only became government administrators for the Umayyads, po-
sitions that were routinely filled by non-Arabs in Islamic lands, but were accepted almost as members of the Arab elite, provided that they spoke and wrote Arabic fluently, converted to Islam, and were circumcised. Rather than being strictly a matter of blood, Arab ethnic identity under the Umayyads was made up of a variety of cultural factors.

This chapter will focus on two of the factors that helped define whether or not a person was Arab. One was biological descent, which was particularly important to the Umayyads and other aristocratic families. Their ideas about biological descent were different from modern ones. In most cases only descent through the male line counted, so that a man could have a Berber or European mother and grandmother but still be considered of pure Arab lineage. The concept of biological descent kept Arabs separate from non-Arabs at least in the short term, since there was no biological route through which one could acquire Arab identity. One could of course take on a fictional Arab lineage, but under most circumstances one could not establish such an identity overnight.

The other sign of Arab identity the chapter will explore is knowledge of Arabic, not in the sense of knowing the colloquial form of the language but of speaking, reading, and writing literary or Classical Arabic, and being familiar with the Classical Arabic learned traditions. Those traditions included secular disciplines like poetry and rhetoric but also scriptural studies and Islamic jurisprudence, meaning that knowledge of Arabic and knowledge of Islam were linked, although often in an uncertain way. Knowledge of the language allowed for a more porous boundary between Arabs and non-Arabs than kinship did. The linguistic piece of Arab identity also drew different boundaries than the biological piece, defining an elite based on education rather than lineage. Non-Arabs who were adept at Arabic language and letters could become honorary Arabs, while the uneducated, even if they were of Arab birth, could be seen as falling outside of the elite group. Taken together, the biological and the linguistic sides add up to a picture of Arab identity that was far from clear-cut, and that allowed for movement in and out of the group.

THE BIOLOGICAL PIECE: ARAB KINSHIP

The seminal work on kinship structures in al-Andalus is Pierre Guichard’s *Structures sociales “orientales” et “occidentales” dans l’Espagne musulmane*, first published in 1977. According to Guichard, Arabs and Berbers maintained
strict boundaries between themselves and the subject Iberian population by enforcing what Guichard calls a traditional Eastern kinship system, which he contrasts to the Western or European system. Guichard’s classification system is on firmer ground when describing Arab rather than Berber kinship, since in the case of Berbers he relies more on modern anthropological studies than on evidence from the medieval period. The basic features of the system are as follows:

1. **Kin groups were patrilineal**: Arab families were organized in patrilineal descent groups. They traced each individual’s kinship through the father, not the mother, and viewed themselves as all related through a common male ancestor. ‘Aṣabīyah, a strong sense of loyalty to agnatic kin, was a driving social force.

2. **The tribes favored endogamous marriage**: Arab men preferred marriage to a woman from their own patriliny. The ideal marriage was between a man and his bint al-‘amm, his parallel cousin on his father’s side (father’s brother’s daughter).

3. **Marriage within the patriliny preserved honor**: Men’s honor depended on the chastity and modest behavior of the women in the group. A sister or female cousin who misbehaved compromised the entire lineage’s honor; controlling one’s women, therefore, was of great importance. Allowing them to marry out of the lineage placed them outside the family’s control and increased the possibility that they might cause dishonor. In the anthropological literature, endogamy is generally viewed as a strategy for keeping property within the family. Guichard, however, believes that honor was the chief motive for endogamy.

4. **Marriage with a woman from outside a man’s lineage neither increased nor decreased his family’s status**: In European societies, a family’s prestige rose when a son married a woman of higher social rank. In Arab and Berber society, a woman brought in from outside had no effect on the status of the lineage she married into. Hence exogamous marriage could not improve a family’s prestige.

5. **Women did not inherit**: Under most circumstances women neither inherited nor transmitted property, particularly land.

Guichard contrasts those characteristics of “Eastern” marriage and kinship with the typical “Western” pattern that members of the subject population who were not Arab or Berber followed. Societies following the Western
pattern recognized descent through the mother as well as the father. Marriage was usually exogamous rather than endogamous. Among marriage’s main purposes was the forming of alliances between families, and a man’s marriage to a woman from a higher social class enhanced his family’s status. Through dowry and inheritance a woman had at least some control over property and could bring property into her husband’s family.

Guichard’s assertion that women were disinherited is at least partially incorrect, as we shall see later. A further confusing aspect of Guichard’s model is that he applies the term “endogamous” to Arab and Berber men and women alike. A better description of the situation, though, is that endogamy was desirable for men but mandatory for women. While a man’s marriage to his bint al-‘amm might be seen as an ideal, in practice men were free to marry muwallad women or even Jewish or Christian women without dishonor. They could also keep slave women as concubines without compromising the status of any children born to such a union. The point was not to keep unrelated women out but to keep the lineage’s women in, to safeguard honor and to reserve the women’s reproductive capacities for the lineage’s use.²

This ideal of Arab kinship practices is best exemplified by Ibn Ḥazm’s genealogy of the Arab tribes of al-Andalus, Kitāb Jamharah ansāb al-‘arab. His family were, depending on which source one reads, either Persian mawālī of the early Umayyads or muwallads, and both he and his father served in the Umayyad bureaucracy near the end of the dynasty’s reign.³ He was therefore biologically a non-Arab, but as an adīb, or expert in Arabic letters, a Muslim theologian, and an administrator in the government of an Arab dynasty, he was in some ways more Arab than the Arabs. Writing during and after the collapse of Umayyad power in al-Andalus, he compiled his genealogy most likely with the Umayyads and other important Arab families as his audience. Although there is no guarantee that any genealogies of the period represent the objective genetic reality of who is related to whom, they do tell us what people wanted to believe about their past.⁴ Given the political turmoil at the time it was written, the Jamharah is perhaps best seen as representing an idealized vision of the Umayyads and of Arab society. Ibn Ḥazm brings his genealogies up to his own time, relating for example the Umayyads’ history in al-Andalus from ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I’s arrival to the last Umayyad caliph’s deposition in 1031.⁵ His main focus, however, is not on the time in which he was writing, but on the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries, that is, on the heroic eras of the Arabian jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic period), the time of Muḥammad, and the Umayyad caliphate before the Abbasid revolution of
750. The Jamharah confirms Guichard’s contention that Arabs traced their kinship mostly through agnates. It also partially supports his claim that Arabs favored endogamous marriages.

Ibn Ḥazm begins the Jamharah by discussing the large blocks into which the Arab tribes were traditionally divided, and ends the work with a catalogue of the major tribal groups who immigrated to al-Andalus and their most famous members.11 The bulk of the Jamharah looks at smaller lineages within tribes of about five to seven generations.12 Ancestors linking an individual to the lineage’s founder are almost exclusively male, making the Jamharah primarily lists of fathers and sons.

Ibn Ḥazm does frequently mention women, particularly women from important families of the seventh and eighth centuries. He occasionally treats women as links in a genealogy. There are a few men in the Jamharah who apparently identified themselves as sons of their mother rather than their father, probably as a way of sealing an alliance with powerful maternal relatives,13 and Ibn Ḥazm naturally emphasizes that the children of Muḥammad’s paternal first cousin ‘Alī were also the children of Muḥammad’s daughter Fāṭimah,14 at one point describing ‘Alī and Fāṭimah’s daughter Zaynab as “daughter of ‘Alī from Fāṭimah daughter of the Messenger of God.”15

Those cases are, however, unusual. Most of the women Ibn Ḥazm mentions are mothers or wives of important men, are from prominent Arab families, and are identified by the male lineage they were born into, as “so and so daughter of X son of Y son of Z.” They are not therefore links in a genealogy but genealogical dead-ends whose children are members of their husbands’ lineage. A high-status mother may provide her children with some additional luster, but a mother who is low status does not appear to have an impact on her sons’ status. Ibn Ḥazm reports that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I’s mother, a Berber woman, was umm walad, that is, a slave who bore her master’s child and would be set free after her owner’s death.16 Since the Umayyads were sometime patrons of Ibn Ḥazm’s family, it is unlikely that he intended any insult. So although women are not absent from the Jamharah, and Ibn Ḥazm sometimes speaks highly of them, they are not transmitters of lineage. Umayyad men often took women of European origin as concubines. Their mothers’ background, however, in no way compromised their identity as Umayyads and as Arabs.17

Although Ibn Ḥazm does not consistently give the names of men’s wives, he often does so, particularly for the seventh and eighth centuries. Whether the marriages he describes are endogamous is open to debate. Some clearly are, particularly within the Umayyad family. Among the Caliph al-Walīd
II’s daughters, one married Muḥammad, the son of her father’s first cousin Yazīd III. Another daughter of al-Walīd married her father’s first cousin ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Neither of those marriages was quite the theoretically ideal bint al-‘amm pairing, but they were certainly close-kin marriages.

More typical of the families described in the Jamharah, however, is the marriage of the sixth-century founder of the Umayyad family, Umayyah al-Akbar b. ‘Abd Shams b. ‘Abd Manāf to Āminah bint Abān of the Banū Kulayb. While both partners were from what came to be regarded as important Arab lineages, their closest common relative was some dozen generations in the past. In its most basic definition, a patrilineal descent group is a group of kin who are related to one another on the male side and who are all descendants from a common male ancestor. In a loose sense therefore the two are part of the same extended family. In practice, however, descent groups tend to segment every few generations into separate lineages. The larger descent group still recognizes that all its members have a common ancestor, but for practical, day-to-day interactions, the lineage is the most important unit; that is, the smaller patrilineal kin group in which the exact relationship of each member to the others is well known, and in which members recognize specific obligations to each other, for example the obligation to pursue a blood feud. When a group can be said to have segmented is a judgment call, but while two people with an ancestor twelve generations in the past may have recognized that they had common blood, it is unlikely that they saw themselves as actively part of the same lineage.

The marriage of Umayyah and Āminah reflects not so much endogamy as the Arab concept of kafā’ah, or equality of status between spouses. Authorities disagreed as to what constituted equality of status, and to what extent piety, wealth, lineage, and freedom from physical defect should be taken into account. In general, though, kafā’ah meant that women could not marry into families of lower social status, which in turn meant that an Arab woman could not marry a non-Arab. Ibn Ḥazm notes when important Arab men married women from prominent non-Arab families, for example when Caliph Yazīd I married the descendant of a Persian king. For an Arab woman to marry into a non-Arab family, though, however prominent they were, would be a violation of kafā’ah; even the most prominent non-Arab is by definition inferior to an Arab. I have found no examples in Ibn Ḥazm’s text of such a marriage. The absence of such examples does not mean that mixed marriages of that sort never happened, but it does mean that the author did not think an account of them was suitable for a work celebrating Arab heritage in al-Andalus.
Ibn Ḥazm further elucidates his views on marriages between Arabs and non-Arabs in his *Naqṭ al-‘arūs*, a collection of stories and gossip about prominent Arabs. In one section, Ibn Ḥazm describes marriages between illustrious Arab men, including several caliphs, and women who were beneath them socially. Some of the women he mentions may have been Arab, and some were clearly not; one is Jewish, and one is identified as a mawlāḥ (probably meaning a freedwoman). What Ibn Ḥazm emphasizes, however, is not their ethnic identity but the fact that they are lower class. One is a professional dancer who performs for gatherings of common people; others are identified as the daughter of a gardener and the sister of a fuller. By contrast, when he describes marriages of Arab women to inappropriate men, the men are inappropriate not only if they are lower class (one woman marries her grandfather’s mawlā or freedman) but also by virtue of not being Arab. Ibn Ḥazm reports for example that a sister of two recent Umayyad caliphs (Muḥammad II and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān V) married Aḥmad b. Rashiq, a court official from the Banū Shuhayd. The Banū Shuhayd were a successful and wealthy mawālī family of scribes and administrators who had served the Umayyads for generations (“mawālī” in this case means they were the Umayyads’ clients). Here Ibn Ḥazm’s objection is to the husband’s ethnicity, not to his wealth or social prominence.

Ibn Ḥazm may have been unusually particular about whom he would count as Arab; Umayyad mawālī like the Banū Shuhayd, whatever their original background, were generally accepted as part of the Arab elite. Certainly though the sense of Arab superiority and solidarity one sees in the *Jamharah* and the *Naqṭ* can be documented in other sources; a story from a chronicle by ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Ḥabīb (ca. 791–853) illustrates it well. In the story, one Abū Laylā has a conversation with an early Arab governor of al-Andalus, ‘Īsā b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī, whom Ibn Ḥabīb describes as extremely proud and overbearing (jabbār). The governor questioned Abū Laylā about the identity of the fuqahā’ (singular “faqīh,” experts in Islamic jurisprudence) in various major cities of the Islamic world. After Abū Laylā gave each set of names, ‘Īsā asked, “who are they?,” and Abū Laylā invariably replied, “mawālī” (in this case meaning non-Arab Muslims). The governor became more and more upset with each mention of a mawlā, until to placate him Abū Laylā named two Arab fuqahā’ in Kufa. ‘Īsā then said, “God is great,” and the conversation ended. The story reflects the fact that Arab aristocrats maintained a sense of superiority in spite of the reality that non-Arabs did much of the heavy lifting in the government and religious establishment.
Ibn Ḥazm’s *Jamharah* supports Guichard’s thesis that Arabs attached great importance to agnatic kin. With rare exceptions, women in the text, although they themselves are members of their father’s lineage, do not transmit membership in a lineage to their children. Men give the lineage its identity and status; thus men can marry women who are foreigners or of lower social rank with limited or no damage to the family honor, while a woman who marries down would disgrace the lineage. As for Guichard’s assertions about endogamy for women, the text does suggest that the most powerful families, particularly the Umayyads, preferred to marry a daughter to a close relative when a suitable one was available. Generally though the endogamy that the *Jamharah* depicts is more a tendency for aristocratic Arab women to marry other Arabs of their class. Still, Guichard’s general point holds within ethnic and class lines if not always within the lineage. Aristocratic Arab men married other Arabs when possible, and aristocratic Arab women did not generally marry out of their ethnic group.

What the Umayyads and other aristocratic Arabs maintained was by no means a genetically contained system in a modern sense, since non-Arab women were often mothers of even Umayyad princes. It was, however, a pattern that placed boundaries between Arab and non-Arab families and largely excluded intermarriage with European families as a means of forming alliances. It is safe to say that a modified form of endogamy was standard practice among Arab aristocrats during the period of Umayyad rule.

THE CULTURAL PIECE

The second pillar of elite Arab identity was knowledge of what I am going to call Classical Arabic, by which I mean a form of literary Arabic substantially different from the colloquial language, and which Arabic speakers believed was close to the language spoken in Arabia at the time of Muḥammad. Classical Arabic was, and still is, a powerful presence in the lives of those living in Arabic-speaking countries. Since it was not in the middle ages, and is not today, the language of everyday speech, Arabic speakers must in effect master more than one language. Classical Arabic (or as a modernized form of it is sometimes called now, Modern Standard Arabic) is the language of politics, education, and high culture, and is a koiné that is intelligible all over the Arab world. Virtually all Arabic speakers, however, speak an Arabic dialect in their daily lives. The dialects feature structure and vocabulary that are substantially different from Classical Arabic, and from each other;
while most Arabic speakers can understand Egyptian dialect because Egyptian movies and television shows are seen all over the Arab world, Moroccan dialect poses a challenge to people outside that region. In addition, people in many areas use other languages not related to Arabic. Those include spoken languages such as the Berber languages of North Africa and the liturgical languages of non-Muslims, such as Coptic in Egypt. Classical Arabic is taught in secular schools and as part of religious education, and its acquisition is seen as an important part of what makes a person educated. Research into the attitude of Egyptians who study it in school, however, reveals that while learning Classical Arabic is a source of comfort and pride, it is also the focus of anxiety and ambivalence. Many Arabic-speaking Muslims see the acquisition of Classical Arabic as an important component of their religious education and welcome the insights its study gives them into the Quran and other religious texts. On the other hand, they also see the time they spend in school memorizing a complex grammatical system and vocabulary, neither of which has much bearing on how they communicate in day-to-day life, as burdensome and oppressive. Classical Arabic is a cultural marker that people admire, aspire to, and dread.

The situation in the middle ages was just as complicated. In the early days of the conquests, Arabs did not discourage the use of indigenous languages for administrative purposes. Arabic was the language of the conquerors and of Islam, and only in the late 600s did it become the language of government. Even after that shift, much of the indigenous population continued to speak other languages, such as Greek, Syriac, Persian, or Coptic. In most areas, Arabic became more dominant over time, although not always; Persian, most notably, retained its primacy as a spoken language and a language of high culture. Even outside of Persia, people continued to speak languages other than Arabic, for liturgical purposes, in daily life, or both. Spoken Arabic dialects also developed early on, probably by the time of the early conquests, setting up the Middle East’s bi- or trilingualism that continues today. Even written Arabic appeared in a variety of forms. Middle Arabic—written Arabic that followed Classical models but incorporated features of spoken dialects—was used throughout the middle ages. The term “Middle Arabic” can apply to the Arabic of authors who did not know the finer points of Classical grammar and made mistakes, but also to a style that deliberately incorporated vernacular elements. The fourteenth-century text of *Alf laylah wa laylah* (*The Thousand and One Nights*), for example, is closer to Middle Arabic than to Classical, although eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editors corrected the language to conform with Classical Arabic.
makes sense that this cycle of often bawdy stories would originally be written down in a vernacular-accented language. Jews and Christians who used Arabic as a written language tended to use versions of Middle Arabic, perhaps because they did not feel the same obligation Muslims did to use a language that was supposedly closer to the Quran. In the case of al-Andalus, a variety of languages were in play: Classical Arabic for government and high culture, Middle Arabic for less formal writing, and Arabic dialect and Romance as spoken languages.

In the linguistically complex situation of the Arab-dominated Middle East and Maghrib, scholars gradually developed an ideology defining Classical Arabic and arguing for its superiority over less formal Arabic and other languages. In its fully articulated form, the argument for the preeminence of Classical Arabic is based on a static understanding of grammar that does not recognize that languages evolve. Or, to be more precise, the model does acknowledge that languages change but classifies any changes as mistakes or signs of degeneration. That theory of an ideal, unchanging Classical Arabic did not evolve all at once but came out of a long tradition of associating correct Arabic with ethnic superiority and with Islamic piety.

The foundational grammarian Sībawayhi (d. ca. 796/180), working in the second half of the eighth century CE (a good one hundred and fifty years after Muḥammad’s death and the early conquests), believed in prescriptive grammar—there was a right way and a wrong way to express an idea—drawing his model of correct usage mostly from the contemporary spoken language of Arabian Bedouins. His top three sources for the rules he derived were, first, the current spoken language of the Ḥijāz (western Arabia, including Mecca and Medina), followed by the language of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, and then lastly the Quran. Perhaps because his priority was the spoken rather than the written word, he recognized the flexibility of language, and that usage often depended on social context. He gave a lower priority to written texts. All usages in the Quran were, by definition, correct Arabic, and part of the reason he favored Ḥijāzī Arabic was that he believed it best represented the language of the Quran. Because the Quran used constructions that were not typical of speech, however, Sībawayhi did not recommend it as a model. In keeping with his focus on language as it was used rather than as it should be, Sībawayhi believed that words have no original or absolute meaning; meaning is a convention between members of a society who need to communicate with each other.

While Sībawayhi’s approach to Arabic was generally flexible and descriptive compared with later grammarians, there were aspects of his thought that
did not fit well with observable facts. Even though he indicated a preference for the Arabic of Bedouins of the Ḥijāz, in part because it was supposedly closest to the Arabic of the Quran and of the earliest Muslim community, that style of Arabic was already by Sibawayhi’s time better represented by the Arabic of eastern Arabia than by the vernacular used in Mecca. The eastern dialect retained features of Quranic language, such as the lack of noun-verb agreement in sentences beginning with the verb, which were no longer current in Meccan Arabic. 39 Even though Sibawayhi saw himself as guided by a living, spoken language, he was already creating something of an artificial construct when he favored Ḥijāzī Arabic.

Some grammarians continued to use Bedouin informants into the tenth century, but by the end of that century, as day-to-day speech drifted away from the ancient ideal, grammatical study was based on written texts, including the Quran, Bedouin poetry, and earlier accounts of Bedouin speech. The lack of living informants contributed to the increasingly normative rather than descriptive nature of grammar. The religious weight of Arabic, which scholars from Sibawayhi on recognized, also pushed the discipline toward the prescriptive. Arabic was the language of God’s final and complete revelation to human beings, and if people spoke differently now, it was not because Arabic had changed but because people were speaking incorrectly. Grammarians did recognize that native speakers could creatively manipulate the language, for example by altering word order; instead of following the normal order of verb, subject, direct object, one could correctly use the order direct object, verb, subject in order to emphasize the direct object of a statement (the difference between “Zayd hit ‘Amr” and “It was ‘Amr that Zayd hit”). They argued that such a change, however, is purely accidental or on the surface. Underlying the statement is the true and unchangeable word order, verb, subject, direct object, even though that ideal form is not apparent to the listener. The speaker’s ability to make such changes legitimately was limited; foreigners, who could not be trusted to know the underlying structures, made mistakes, not legitimate embellishments.

Grammarians came to see Arabic as superior to other languages and independent from them. Early Arabic grammatical study recognized that Arabic had foreign loan words, but later it became a truism among some scholars that there were no foreign words in the Quran and that what appeared to be loan words in early Bedouin speech could be traced to Arabic roots. That belief required some intellectual gymnastics to sustain, since the Quran clearly does use loan words. 41 Arabic-speaking scholars were not generally interested in learning other languages. 42 Even though Muslim philosophers held Greek
culture in esteem, grammarians believed the Greek language was inferior; unlike the Arabs, Greeks had allowed their language to change and deteriorate and spoke a version of Greek that was substantially different from that of the classical period. Rulers of Arabic-speaking lands, however, did face the practical problem of having to communicate with non-Arab rulers, which may explain the high value the Umayyad court in al-Andalus placed on the services of Iberian administrators who were fluent in both Arabic and Latin and could therefore correspond with and act as ambassadors to nearby Christian European states.

Arabic’s superiority supposedly came not only from its independence from other languages and resistance to change but from its inherent structural superiority. The North African religious scholar, philosopher, and historian Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) summed up the mainline argument for Arabic’s superiority, saying that it is grammatically compact and precise in a way that other languages are not. Ibn Khaldūn also followed the consensus of grammarians that the dialect of the Quraysh in the Ḥijāz was the purest form of Arabic and the closest to the Quran, and that Arabic is corrupted by contact with non-native speakers. This inherent superiority meant that translations from Arabic to another language could only be imperfect since Arabic conveyed concepts that no other language could encompass.

Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, was another source of claims for Arabic’s special status. Letter mysticism was an important field of study within Sufism; the most famous of the Andalusí Sufis to discuss the mystical meaning of letters was Ibn al-ʿArabī (1165–1240), whose work will be discussed in detail in chapter 5. An earlier Andalusí mystic, Ibn Masarrah (883–931), also made explicit claims about the unique and even magical status of Arabic letters. In his treatise the Kitāb khawwās al-ḥurūf (Book of the Properties of Letters), he characterizes the cosmos as a book, whose letters constitute the divine creation. In particular he concentrates on the fourteen letters, al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa’āh, that appear without context at the beginning of 29 of the Quran’s chapters or surahs; surah 2, for example, is headed by the letters alif, lām, and mim, ʿa, ʾ, and m, while surah 68 is headed by the single letter nūn or n. What the letters signify is unclear, but they have often been taken to have an esoteric or mystical meaning. Ibn Masarrah assigns particular mystical meanings to the isolated letters, meanings that are in some cases tied to the letter’s morphology: alif, for example, because unlike most letters it stands by itself and does not usually connect with other letters in Arabic script, is a sign of God’s unity or tawḥīd. Lām also has a special status because it is the only letter with which alif does connect in script, and because
it follows alif in the word “Allāh”; Ibn Masarrah calls lām the first veil (al-
hijab al-awwal) and connects it to the part of the divine that is hidden.49
Because the letters’ physical morphology affect their meaning, letters written
in anything other than Arabic script would not carry the same significance.

CLASSICAL ARABIC AND ISLAM

The impulse to view Classical Arabic as an unchanging, ideal language, sub-
ject to damage from the ignorance of outsiders, came from two overlapping
groups: the religious scholars or ‘ulamā’ for whom Arabic was a sacred lan-
guage and therefore one that could not legitimately change and the govern-
ing elite who wanted to demonstrate their cultural distinctiveness and su-
periority. The earliest works on grammar and lexicography were connected
with Quranic exegesis, and religious scholars’ enthusiasm for establishing
clear rules about Quranic Arabic increased over time.50 It has been argued
that the ‘ulamā’ became more concerned about grammar and lexicography
as contemporary Arabic moved farther away from the Quran’s language,
but in fact by the time of the early conquests there was probably no group,
even among the Bedouin, who spoke anything very similar to Quranic Ara-
bic. The more likely explanation is that as the ‘ulamā’ elaborated Islamic
scriptural exegesis and law, they increasingly saw themselves as upholding a
unique and complex religious system in a society that was not yet majority
Muslim. At the same time, secular scholars at the caliph’s court, and regional
courts, developed an Arabic literary tradition. The basis of that tradition,
and the marker of membership in it, was mastery of Classical Arabic, and
particularly the Arabic of pre-Islamic Bedouin poetry.51 The court and the
world of the ‘ulamā’ overlapped; the caliphs had a religious role in Islamic
society and thus valued the work of religious scholars. And while the ‘ulamā’
sometimes acted in opposition to the caliphs—for example in the case of a
revolt religious scholars instigated against the Abbasids over the caliph’s right
to make decisions about religious doctrine52—caliphs also used scholars as
their proxies in urban areas. As time went on, it became more common for
rulers to appoint ‘ulamā’ to major office such as judge (qāḍī). The two groups
interacted to form an elite religious and literary culture based on knowledge
of Classical Arabic.

In the case of al-Andalus, Maribel Fierro and Manuela Marín argue that
the qādis were originally appointed to hear cases involving conquerors and
settlers. They were Arab, or perhaps Umayyad mawāli, and their appoint-
ment depended on their tribal affiliations. By the ninth century, independent ṣulāmā’ flourished in a number of cities, including Toledo, Zaragoza, and Seville, and were primarily Berber or muwallad. Also by the ninth century, ṣulāmā’ had become more closely tied to central authority in Córdoba. A leading ḍālim and center of an important circle of scholars in Córdoba was Ibn Waḍḍāh (d. 900), whose family were mawālī of the Umayyads and whose uncle, al-Ḥārith ibn Bazī’, was a military governor and ally of the Umayyads. Ibn Waḍḍāh’s group supported the creation of the Umayyad caliphate. Also at the time of Ibn Waḍḍāh it became more common for scholars from all over al-Andalus to study in Córdoba and develop a relationship with the Cordovan ṣulāmā’. By the later tenth century, when the Umayyads took the title of caliph, the Cordovan government exerted considerable influence over the appointment of ṣulāmā’ in other cities. Among the ṣulāmā’ with connections at court were specialists in grammar. In the period of the caliphate, Abū Bakr al-Zubaydī from Seville, a well-known grammarian, tutored the sons of the caliph al-Mustanṣir (r. 961–76) and became chief qāḍī of Córdoba, a position appointed by the caliph. The Umayyads acted as patrons to the ṣulāmā’, and in return the ṣulāmā’ helped shore up the Umayyads’ credibility as guardians of religion. Grammarians in particular made the case that Arab cultural identity and Islamic piety were connected.

CRITICS OF THE GRAMMATICAL TRADITION

It is easy for a modern reader to be perplexed by or impatient with the medieval Arabic grammatical tradition, given its complexity and rigidity, and its claim that Arabic is demonstrably superior to other languages. A few medieval scholars were critical as well. In some cases the objections were intellectual in nature, but other critiques had broader social implications, calling into question contemporary assumptions about the nature of the Islamic community and the special status of Arabs within it.

The philosopher al-Farābī (d. 950) rejected the standard classification systems of Arabic grammar; for example, following Greek grammar, he regarded the position of the verb in a sentence as unimportant, while most grammarians of Arabic drew a strong distinction between sentences beginning with a verb and sentences in which the verb appears later. Perhaps because he studied other languages, al-Farābī also rejected the notion of Arabic’s superiority. Arabic, like all languages, had its good and bad points. As a philosopher and scientist familiar with the Greek and Persian intellectual
traditions, al-Farābī was focused on universal knowledge, not on knowledge conveyed by one particular language or historical tradition, nor did he have any interest in proving the superiority of Arabic.

Another main source of criticism was the Žāhirī school of legal thought, which centered in al-Andalus and whose best-known proponent was Ibn Ḥazm.56 As we have seen, he was a prolific author in many fields, including law and scriptural exegesis, Arab genealogy, and religious polemic against Christianity and Judaism.57 Although he studied Mālikī law, the dominant madhhāb or school of law in al-Andalus, Ibn Ḥazm adopted Žāhirism, which can best be described as a technique of interpreting scripture.58 The Žāhirīs leveled a number of criticisms against the grammarians, which, although technical in nature, finally point to an important disagreement about the nature of the ummah.

Žāhirism is a method of reading scripture (Quran and the ḥadīths), and interpreting law on the basis of that reading, that favors acceptance of scripture’s outer, obvious, generally agreed-upon meaning (its ẓahr, literally its back or visible part) rather than its hidden, esoteric meaning (its baṭn, literally its belly or hidden part). Ibn Ḥazm rejects, for example, readings of the Quran using Hellenistic philosophic techniques, as well as the specialized esoteric interpretations of Shi‘īs and of Sufi mystics. He also disapproves of the use of ra‘y (the personal opinion of a legal expert) and of qiyās (analogy) in legal reasoning. It would be easy to conclude that Ibn Ḥazm and other Žāhirīs favor a simple-minded, literalist reading of scripture, but that analysis does not do justice to Ibn Ḥazm’s concerns. He rejects any use of a specialized language and interpretation, whether philosophical, mystical, or Gnostic, because it is intelligible to only a few people. God’s purpose in sending down the Quran, in his view, was to communicate with the whole community of believers, not with a few people possessing special knowledge. Scholars who use ra‘y or qiyās in effect create a private meaning for words that by rights have a community function. To find esoteric meanings in the words of the scripture is to distort its primary meaning and purpose, which is communication with a wide audience and the building of community.59

Ibn Ḥazm could feel confident that such general communication is possible because of his assumptions about language.60 For a word to qualify as language, in his view, it must correspond to something that exists. The correspondence can be with an abstraction such as “truth,” but it must be an abstraction that is real. In addition, the word must be intelligible to others who speak the same language. That transparency, and the direct correspondence between a word and the material thing or concept it signifies, is guaranteed
by the fact that God created language. Ibn Ḥazm takes the passage in the Quran, 2:31, in which God teaches Adam the names of all things, as scriptural evidence that language came directly from God at the very beginning of human society. In addition to quoting scripture, he explains the logic of God’s creation of language. Human beings, by definition social beings who live together and cooperate to survive, could not exist without language. Without it they would be unable to communicate to one another the basic concepts about crops, livestock, and how to defend themselves against the elements that would allow the group to cooperate (he does not imagine the possibility that humans might have originally lived as something other than farmers or pastoralists). Clearly, therefore, God must have given people language at the same time he created them, as the Quran says, and he is the reason humans can be confident that words correspond to reality.

Ibn Ḥazm’s differences with traditional grammarians are striking. Like the grammarians, he accepts that there is such a thing as a perfect language, in that the original language God gave to Adam was transparent and unambiguous in meaning. In his view, however, there is no reason to think that that language was Arabic or that Arabic is superior to other languages. God revealed the Quran in Arabic not because he particularly favors Arabic but because he wanted to communicate with Arabs. When he wanted to communicate with Jews, he revealed scripture in Hebrew. Furthermore, although God gave humans an original language, language by its nature shifts over time. It is clear, he says, that Syriac, Hebrew, and northern Arabic are all closely related, and that Hebrew and Arabic probably evolved from Syriac. One can see how that evolution took place, he explains, by looking at the example of contemporary Arabic. The Arabic of al-Andalus sounds very different from that of Qayrawān, which is in turn different from that of Khurasān. One need only go a short distance outside of Córdoba to find people who speak an Arabic that is almost a different language. People who are new to the language inevitably make mistakes—he cites the problems Berbers and Galicians have pronouncing Arabic consonants like the glottal scrape, the “sh” sound, and the emphatic “h”—and those variant pronunciations, over a period of time, add up to change.

According to Ibn Ḥazm, change happened even in what grammarians believed were the source of true Arabic, scripture and Bedouin speech. The word “kāfir,” in Bedouin speech, meant someone or something that covers something up, so it can mean a farmer, someone who sows seed and covers it up. That is also one of its meanings in the Quran, where it is sometimes a synonym for one who sows (Q. 57:20). For the purposes of
Sharī’ah, however, God shifted the meaning to one who denies God or denies Muḥammad’s status as prophet.

Ibn Ḥāzm’s theory of language is, then, quite different from that of the grammarians. His interest is in the whole community of believers, which includes non-Arabs as well as Arabs. He assigns no special status to Arabic, nor does he see Arabs as possessing any sort of special linguistic wisdom. Arabic is valuable or not valuable insofar as it allows clear communication among believers, and it is subject to change, like other languages. In fact, Ibn Ḥāzm’s belief in the historicity of texts—that even scripture has a specific intended audience who existed in time—is one of his main differences with the grammarians. He notes, for example, that divine law can change; Jacob was not punished for marrying both Leah and Rachel, although later Jewish law would have forbidden him to marry sisters.62

Another Ţāḥirī scholar, Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Maḍā’ (d. 1196), who received patronage from the Berber Almohad rulers of al-Andalus, is beyond the chronological scope of this study; his work, however, is related to that of Ibn Ḥāzm and helps elucidate Ţāḥirī objections to traditional grammar.63 Those objections are on the surface quite technical, but, as in the case of Ibn Ḥāzm’s critique, they are in fact a challenge to the grammarians’ assumptions about what language is for and who is included in the discourse community of Islam.

Ibn Maḍā’s treatise about grammar, Kitāb al-radd ‘alā al-nuḥāh (The Book of Refutation of the Grammarians), criticizes the elaborate and speculative nature of grammatical study. To simplify his argument considerably, Ibn Maḍā’ attacks three aspects of the standard grammatical analysis of Arabic: the concept of the grammatical regent (“‘āmil” in Arabic), the related concept of suppressed words, and the search for the root causes of grammatical and morphological rules. ‘Āmil, usually translated as “regent,” is perhaps better translated as that which produces something else. In Arabic grammatical studies, the concept of the ‘āmil is a way of understanding the fact that nouns in Classical Arabic are inflected, taking either the nominative, accusative, or genitive case. So in the sentence “Zayd hit ‘Amr,” “Zayd” is in the nominative case and “‘Amr” is in the accusative, and the verb “to hit” is the ‘āmil, the ruling word that forces the nouns into their appropriate cases. The related concept of suppressed words suggests that there is an ideal, standard form for all sentences, and that if an element is missing from a sentence, it is in some sense still present, having been only suppressed or elided. Most commonly it is the ‘āmil that is supposed to have been suppressed. For example, in some instances, if one addresses a person directly (“O ‘Abd
Allāh”), the name of the person is in the accusative. Since there is no obvious regent to put the proper noun into the accusative (the vocative particle equivalent to the English “O” does not qualify as a regent), there must be an implied or suppressed verb in the sentence acting as ‘āmil. The underlying form of the sentence, therefore, is “[I call] ‘Abd Allāh.” Finally, grammarians traditionally strove for a deep level of explanation for grammatical forms, explanations that demonstrated the underlying logic of the language and the wisdom of Arabic speakers.

At the beginning of his treatise, Ibn Maḍā’ emphasizes his religious objections to those three principles. The idea of implied or suppressed words allows grammarians to read into the Quran words that God did not put there, meaning that they are taking it upon themselves to change scripture. He is particularly incensed by the concept of the ‘āmil, which assumes that words can produce other words. He quotes the Mu’tazilī (rationalist theologian) Abū al-Fath Ḫūthmān Ibn Jinnī, who was also critical of the grammarians and who wrote that it is the speaker, not the grammatical regent, that produces the cases of nouns. Ibn Maḍā’ expands on Ibn Jinnī’s statement, saying that it is ultimately God who produces all speech, but agrees that the human speaker is the immediate cause of the words being formed in a certain way. The concepts of the regent and of suppressed words undermine the authority of God and the powers God gave to humans.

Although Ibn Maḍā’'s argument has religious elements, his main accusation against grammarians is that they have created an elaborate, convoluted system that serves no purpose. At its worst, the system is actively misleading. To say that the utterance “O ‘Abd Allāh” can be understood as identical to “I call ‘Abd Allāh” is to lose the speaker’s meaning, since the first utterance does not in fact mean the same thing as the second. Even when grammarians are not actively misleading their audience, their system is mostly useless because of its elaborate search for the causes of grammatical structures. For example, if asked why the name “Zayd” takes the nominative case—that is, the ending “un”—in the sentence “Zayd is standing” (qāma Zaydun), grammarians will give several layers of answers. “Zayd” is in the nominative because it is the subject, and all subjects take the nominative case. The nominative ending is “un” because that is how the Arabs say it. They say it that way because they need to distinguish between the two terms a verb most commonly has regency over: the subject, which takes the nominative, and the direct object, which takes the accusative (the ending “an”). Finally, Arabs use the “an” for the accusative and the “un” for the subject because “an” is “lighter,” or easier to pronounce, than “un,” and there are more direct objects in speech than
there are subjects; verbs normally have only one subject, while they can have multiple objects. Therefore it is logical that the Arabs reserved the easier-to-pronounce “an” as the more common ending, and shows the intelligence of Arabic speakers.\textsuperscript{68}

Ibn Maḍā’ approves of the first two levels of explanation: that all subjects take the nominative and that the nominative is indicated by the ending “un” because that is how Arabs say it. Those two facts can be confirmed by listening to Arabic speakers, and knowing those facts allows a student of Arabic to speak correctly. The rest of the explanation, however, serves no purpose. The statement that Arabs chose “an” as the accusative ending because it is easier to pronounce than “un” does not offer any practical guidance and functions only to make a case that the Arabs are a wise people. Like Ibn Ḥazm, Ibn Maḍā’ sees language as a practical tool for communication and the study of language as valuable only so far as it furthers the goal of communication. He recognizes no special claims for Arabic as a language, or for the Arabs as a people of particular linguistic abilities. Ibn Maḍā’ and Ibn Ḥazm cared about correct speech. They were also interested in grammar as a tool for language acquisition, since both were surrounded by non-native speakers. This was particularly true of Ibn Maḍā’, whose patrons were Berber.

The Ţāhirī view of grammar is not a modern view, particularly in its confidence that words reliably correspond to reality. Compared to traditional Arabic grammar, however, it is easier for a modern reader to understand, given its emphasis on communication and its resistance to establishing any hierarchy of languages. The Ţāhirīs’ attitude toward language is also recognizable to the modern reader because of its emphasis on a social context for speech and on any speech act’s intended audience, or discourse community; if no one can understand what an utterance means, it is not language.\textsuperscript{69}

In the context of al-Andalus, however, the main difference between the Ţāhirīs and the grammarians was that they envisaged a different audience, and a different purpose, for texts written in formal Arabic. Ţāhirīs imagined a broad community of believers, some of whom were non-Arabs struggling to learn Classical Arabic. Mainstream grammar addressed an educated elite, primarily people who were courtiers, members of the ulamā’, or both. That elite group wrote and, in formal settings, spoke an Arabic based on the model of Bedouin speech of the past and Islamic scripture. Ability in that specialized version of Arabic denoted both Arab identity and distance from non-Arab subject peoples, and from less educated Arabic speakers. For that group, skilled speakers of Arabic took precedence over other believers. Those who considered themselves masters of that type of Arabic vigorously
patrolled the borders of their group, looking for those whose membership was suspect.  

ARAB, “ARAB,” OR NON-ARAB?

Two stories from al-Khushanī (d. 971), author of the *Quḍāt Qurṭubah (The Judges of Córdoba)*, depict the policing of boundaries between Arab and non-Arab. The first tells the story of the head qāḍī (judge) of Córdoba, Mūsā ibn Muḥammad Ibn Ziyād al-Judhāmī, who was appointed by Amīr ‘Abd Allāh (r. 888–912). Mūsā was descended from Syrian Arabs of the Palestinian jund or army division, probably one of the groups that came in with Balj. The amīr appointed him as head of police, then as the judge of the appeals court, then to the high guard, then to the office of chief qāḍī of Córdoba. One of al-Khushanī’s witnesses said that he possessed ḥilm (a quality of personal dignity, self-control, and judiciousness), as is shown by his restraint when a boorish petitioner threw a legal document at him (one needs to imagine large heavy documents with seals).

Whatever his good qualities, however, Mūsā made mistakes in his Arabic. One story circulating among the ‘ulamā’ said that Mūsā was well-mannered and urbane, conspicuous in valor and generosity, and dignified, the only problem being that he was ignorant when it came to expressing himself verbally. One witness said he talked one day about observing the whole fast of Ramaḍān, to the day of al-‘Arafāt. He thus made two ugly mistakes; first, he mistakenly believed that there was a day of ‘Arafāt in the month of Ramaḍān as there is in the month of pilgrimage (Dhū al-ḥijjah); second, he used the definite article “al” before the word “‘Arafāt.”

The remark about Mūsā’s incorrect use of the definite article may seem odd at first glance. Native speakers do not normally misuse the definite article. Given that Arabs generally traced genealogy only through the male line, and that Arab men commonly married Iberian women, Mūsā’s family, although technically Arab, may have included generations of Romance-speaking relatives. It is also possible that his family were mawālī of the Umayyads who had arrived as part of Balj’s army. Still, clientage to the Umayyads usually meant close association with Arabs and inclusion as part of the elite, so it seems unlikely that he did not speak Arabic as one of his languages growing up. Probably the insult means that he did not use proper Classical Arabic in speech, but instead used more colloquial forms. Perhaps the usage that appears in the ḥadīths, which is “yawm ‘Arafāt,” without the definite
article, was a formal usage, and “yawm al-‘Arafāt,” with the article, was used more informally; both can be found on the Internet today. The passage goes on to say that he made mistakes forming the plural, another indication that he was not familiar with Classical Arabic.

The claim that he did not understand the Islamic calendar is more difficult to interpret. It seems unlikely that a religious scholar would think that months other than Dhū al-ḥijjah (the month of pilgrimage) would have a Day of ‘Arafāt. The Day of ‘Arafāt is the ninth day of the month and second day of the ḥajj (pilgrimage to Mecca), on which the pilgrims spend the day in prayer on the Plain of ‘Arafāt outside of Mecca. For Mūsā to believe that another month could have a Day of Arafāt would be similar to a Christian believing that each month contained a Feast of the Epiphany, not impossible but unlikely in someone with a reputation for expertise in religious law. Further calling the story into question is the fact that according to al-Khushanī, Mūsā himself went on the ḥajj, although it is not clear whether he went before or after his alleged mistake.

Whatever Mūsā in fact said or did not say, the combination of the two accusations is an interesting one, since the story seems to link together ignorance of Arabic and of Islam. In one sentence, he supposedly demonstrated that he did not know Arabic grammar and that he did not understand the basics of the ḥajj, one of Islam’s five pillars. The criticisms of him also suggest that even for someone who was Arab or an Umayyad mawlā, ignorance of Classical Arabic precluded full membership in the Cordovan elite.

A similar linkage between knowledge of Arabic and knowledge of Islam appears in another of al-Khushanī’s stories. Aslam ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, an Umayyad mawlā who became chief qāḍī for the first time under ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III, made an obliquely insulting remark about a possible candidate for a judgeship, who according to al-Khushanī was of Iberian parentage. While discussing the candidate, Aslam said, “thank God who made me one of those who say ‘there is no God but God.’” The main thrust of the statement is that his possible successor was not a legitimate Arabic speaker. The term al-Khushanī uses to denote the ethnicity of the man’s ancestors, “‘ajam,” is a linguistic designation that originally meant people who spoke Persian rather than Arabic; in al-Andalus, it meant speakers of Romance. The phrase in question is also, however, part of the central confession of faith in Islam, the shahādah or witnessing: “There is no God but God and Muḥammad is his prophet.” Aslam’s criticism implies that the candidate’s lack of legitimacy as an Arabic speaker meant that he was not a legitimate Muslim either.
This is perhaps a good place to say more about the definition of the word “mawlā.” The term has a variety of uses, and depending on context it can in fact have the opposite meanings of either “patron” or “client.” Generally though it denotes the less powerful party in an unequal relationship between two men; women are not characterized as mawālī, although they could be members of mawlā families. In the period of the conquests and of Umayyad rule in the Middle East the term mawlā referred to a non-Arab and had two common meanings: a freedman or a convert to Islam who became a client of an Arab tribe, who then held a relatively low status in the tribe. The category of mawlā probably emerged from systems of patronage practiced in the Roman Middle East. The term’s meanings in al-Andalus are varied and not always identical to usages in the east. At the time of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I, for example, subordinate branches of an Arab tribe could be referred to as the dominant members’ mawālī, in the sense of helpers or confederates, or the term could be used simply to designate supporters of the Umayyads who had no explicit ties of clientage. Most commonly in al-Andalus, however, “mawlā” meant either a freedman or the descendant of a convert who had become a client of the Umayyads at the time of the conquest or, occasionally, of another prominent Arab family. The differences between the two types of clientage were immense. A freed slave remained in an inferior position, while descendants of mawālī who had converted and become clients of the Umayyads were important members of the ruling elite. So while the term “mawlā” in the sense of client suggested low status in the east, in al-Andalus it meant membership in the khāṣṣah and honorary Arab identity.

In the Middle East up to the time of the Abbasid Revolution, becoming a client to an Arab tribe was essential for any non-Arab wishing to convert to Islam. Clientage could involve a hijrah, or move from a rural area or a non-Muslim city to a miṣr, or Muslim military base. Being a mawlā gave legal status and protection to a non-Arab, who took on the Arab lineage of his patron. In a society in which protection came from the kin-group, the new convert had left his behind; as a client his adopted Arab tribe was obligated to pay blood money (diyah) should he cause an injury, and the tribe could collect diyah if another tribe injured him. That original protective function was rendered less important over time as conversion became more common, but the tie remained an important one throughout the period of Umayyad rule in the Middle East.

Originally mawālī were regarded with contempt, as members of conquered peoples. In al-Andalus, however, as has been noted, the term as it was applied to a mawlā by conversion denoted high status. Since the Mus-
lim invaders of al-Andalus lived intermixed with the subject population and never established amšār, and since the majority of invaders were Berbers rather than Arabs, the issue of clientage for all converts never emerged; Iberian converts were muwalladūn, non-Arab Muslims, or ‘ajam, non-Arabic speakers, but not mawālī. Individuals like Aslam who claimed clientage ties were almost always referring to ties with the early Umayyads, usually undertaken before 711 or shortly after. Some mawālī were early Iberian converts who were important enough to be taken on as Umayyad clients; others were members of mawlā families who came over with the first invaders, or with Balj’s army, which included large numbers of Umayyad clients. The tenth-century scholar and historian Ibn al-Qūṭiyah, for example, claimed descent from the Visigothic royal family and traced his family’s clientage with the Umayyads back to the caliph ‘Umar I (r. 634–44). Clientage with the Umayyads gave the client the status of being Arab; whatever the mawlā’s literal genealogy, his ancestor took on a new genealogy at the time of conversion and became part of the Arab ruling class. Maribel Fierro has demonstrated that references to mawālī became much less frequent in biographical dictionaries by the twelfth century, suggesting that mawālī families simply came to be classified as Arabs.

Arab identity, however flexibly it was defined, continued to be important into the period of the caliphate, despite the caliphs’ claims of Islamic as well as Arab authority. That identity was based on linguistic ability. It was also based on lineage up to a point, but with some flexibility; a family’s ties of clientage to the Umayyads and their longstanding identification with Arab culture could trump what we think of as genetic identity. In al-Andalus, Arab and Muslim identity continued to be equated, as they no longer were in Abbasid society. That equating of ethnicity and religion, however, did not exist in any simple way, nor was it unchallenged. Ibn Ḥazm is a good example of someone who struggled with the question of who was part of the community. As author of the Jamharah ansāb al-‘Arab, he celebrates the Arab heritage of the Umayyads and their important allies. Even in the Jamharah, however, he struggles to reconcile his enthusiasm for sound Arab lineage with his belief that the community of Islam is not ethnically divided. In his religious works, Ibn Ḥazm defines the community without any reference to ethnicity or language as the Islamic ummah, the community of all believers.