At its most ambitious, the revolt of Ibn Ḥaṣūn and his family and allies threatened the Guadalquivir Valley and the heartland of Umayyad power. It developed in areas over which the Umayyads expected to have at least some direct control. Those participating in the revolt also seem to have accepted the social norms that were current in Córdoba: Ibn Ḥaṣūn recognized a difference between muwallads and Arabs and between Christians and Muslims, and he used those differences to defy Umayyad authority. Farther from the geographic center of the Arab Muslim elite, though (however imperfectly that elite was defined), such categories had less meaning, and distinctions between ethnic and religious identity seem to have been not so much blurred as ignored. The ongoing political resistance of the Banū Qasī, a muwallad family on the northern march, illustrates some of the cultural differences between the capital and the distant border regions.

By the time of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III, the Umayyads understood the northern frontier of al-Andalus as falling into three rough divisions: the lower, middle, and upper marches. The frontier between al-Andalus and the Christian north (always ill-defined by modern standards) followed the Duero river in the west, then in the east rose north of the Ebro river to include the Ebro plains up to about the 1,000 meter line; the hills and valleys beyond that point were part of the Christian kingdoms. All three marches were, in comparison with the citied heartland of the Guadalquivir Valley, rural and had small Arab populations; they were controlled largely by Berbers.
and muwallads. The presence of what cities and towns there were on the marches, and the Arab population, increased from west to east. To the west, the lower march had Mérida as its principle town; otherwise the area was largely made up of rural villages punctuated by castles. Powerful landlords in the area were primarily muwallad and Berber, with the majority of the population made up of muwallad or Christian farmers and Berbers who were farmers or pastoralists. The middle march centered on the larger city of Toledo, most of whose leading families were muwallads. The city ruled over a rural muwallad, Berber, and Christian farming population, along with some Berber pastoralists. In the northeast, the upper march was a more urban and ethnically mixed region that included the city of Zaragoza and a number of smaller but significant towns like Tudela, Huesca, Calatayud, and Tortosa. Powerful Arab, Berber, and muwallad families vied for supremacy in the region.

The Arabic term “thaghr” (plural thughūr) is usually translated as frontier or march, in contrast with the demilitarized province or kūrah (plural kuwar). The thaghr bordered non-Muslim lands (the dār al-ḥarb), while the kūrah did not. The kūrah had a governor (wali or ‘āmil), while the thaghr had a qā’id or military commander. The thughūr were taxed at a lower rate than the kuwar, paying the ‘ushr or one-tenth of income rather than the more substantial land tax or kharāj. Relative to the kūrah, the thaghr was more independent and was not expected to participate in military campaigns that did not affect its particular region.²

That distinction between thaghr and kūrah became stable by the time of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III; before that period, terminology was more fluid. The term thaghr was sometimes used for areas that were not directly in contact with the dār al-ḥarb, but whose ruling families were involved in defense and had a relationship with regions that really were on the frontier. An example is the territory of the Banū Dhī al-Nūn who, from their base around Santaver, periodically helped the Umayyads defend border regions.³ The territory included in the three major thughūr also differed over time, although the designation of the upper or far march (al-thaghr al-‘lā or al-thaghr al-aqṣā) seems consistently to have meant the region along the Ebro river centering on Saragossa.⁴

In the Abbasids’ lands, the thaghr was strongly connected with the idea of jihād.⁵ Frontier towns often featured volunteer jihadists and the construction of ribāṭs, which were paid for by established waqf funds. While the Umayyads in al-Andalus, like the Abbasids in the east, styled themselves as jihadists and embarked most years on the summer campaign or ṣā’ifah,
rulers of the marches were not always reliable allies, fighting with the Umayyads only sporadically. As we will see in the case of the Banū Qasī, the culture of the upper march in particular was not focused on religious militancy, and Umayyad power over the region was too weak to compel regular participation in jihād.

The story of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Marwān al-Jilliqī illustrates the contentious nature of the Umayyads’ relationship with provincial leaders on the marches. As the name “al-Jilliqī,” “the Galician,” suggests, Ibn Marwān came from a family with roots in northwestern Iberia; by the ninth century, they were a prominent muwallad family living on what was at that time called the nearer march (al-thaghr al-adnā), around the area of Mérida and Badajoz. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s father, Marwān ibn Yūnis al-Jilliqī, rebelled against Córdoba in 816/17, then apparently made peace with the Umayyads in the time of the amīr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II, who made him governor of Mérida—probably, as happened repeatedly in the ninth century, offering the emirate’s legitimation to a provincial family who were already de facto rulers. After Marwān’s death, his son took over as ruler of Mérida and staged a major rebellion against the Umayyads in the 860s. In 868 the amīr Muḥammad I put down the revolt, and Ibn Marwān and his followers agreed as part of the terms of surrender to come to Córdoba and serve in the amīr’s army. While in Córdoba, however, Ibn Marwān got into a dispute with the army general and court official Hāshim ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, the powerful Umayyad mawlā who had challenged the authority of the Muslim convert Ibn Antonian. Ibn Marwān left Cordoba, created a new stronghold for himself in Badajoz, and continued in a more or less permanent state of revolt until his death in 890. Badajoz remained under his family’s control until ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III conquered it in 929/30. The on-again off-again alliance of Ibn Marwān and his family with the Umayyads, the family’s periodic open rebellions against central authority, and the regime’s intermittent attempts to integrate the family into the Cordovan power structure were all typical of the relationship between the Umayyads and the great families of the marches.

Ideally, from the Umayyad point of view, the powerful families of the marches, whether muwallad, Berber, or Arab, functioned as Muslim allies against the Christian kingdoms and principalities to the north. In the ninth century, the major Christian states were (moving from west to east) Asturias-Leon, including the towns of Leon, Burgos, and Oporto; Navarre, whose urban center was Pamplona; and the Spanish March (the future Catalonia), which included the city of Barcelona. The Christian north was ethnically diverse and included Galicians, Asturians, Cantabrians, Basques, Gascons,
and Franks, as well as families who continued to identify themselves as Goths. Although the threat from the north became acute only in the eleventh century, as Umayyad rule collapsed, Christians did make incursions south in the eighth and ninth centuries as well. In the late eighth century, for example, the Umayyads lost Pamplona, which was subsequently controlled by Franks, by a Gascon and Frankish alliance, and later by local Basque families. At times aristocratic families on the marches did act as good Muslims, defending the borders and waging jihad against the infidel north; in 856, the Banū Qasī leader Mūsā ibn Mūsā led a summer raid against Barcelona. Often, however, prominent Muslims on the marches were unreliable jihadists. Particularly on the upper march, the border, to the extent that there was such a thing, was porous, and the great families on either side formed a society that crossed religious lines.

The history of the Banū Qasī illustrates the complexities of society on the borders, and of that society’s relationship with Córdoba. Ibn Ḥazm says that the family’s founder, Cassius (rendered as Qasī in Arabic), was count of the northern marches in the time of the Visigoths. After the Muslims conquered al-Andalus, Count Cassius traveled to Syria, where he converted to Islam at the hands of the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd (r. 705–15). The family’s original stronghold was just to the north of the Ebro, across the river from Tudela. In the course of the eighth and ninth centuries, however, they came to control a large territory on both sides of the eastern Ebro River, a territory that included at various times Pamplona, Huesca, Zaragoza, Borja, Tarazona, and Arnedo. The family also, for a brief time in the mid-ninth century, controlled Toledo, away from their main center of operations. As was the case with many of the ruling families in border regions, the Banū Qasī acknowledged the authority of the Umayyads only intermittently.

Some details of this narrative have been called into question. Fierro, among others, dismisses the story that Cassius was a count as a way for the family to aggrandize itself through a fictitious pedigree. Manzano Moreno, on the other hand, makes a case that Cassius really was a Visigothic count and was part of a continuity of rule along the northern frontier; he had manned the borders against the Basques in Visigothic times and continued to do so after the Muslims arrived. Fierro also finds it unlikely that Cassius traveled to Syria to convert. According to her, it is more plausible that he became the mawlā of an Arab family that settled in the north and only later became, or claimed to become, an Umayyad mawlā. To me the claim that Cassius was a count seems reasonable; he likely had some status that gave him the authority and resources to move smoothly into the role of defender.
of the march for the Umayyads. On the other hand, as Fierro suggests, the claim that a frontier official traveled to Damascus to be converted by the caliph himself seems more dubious.

Even if the family were mawālī, converted at the hands of the caliph, that fact seems to have been largely irrelevant to their political dealings. Ibn Ḥazm, who refers to the Banū Qasī as muwallads but also makes the claim that they were mawālī of the Umayyads and therefore had a kind of Arab identity, says that in the days of the factional divide between the Yamanīs and the Muḍarīs in the eighth century, they were grouped with the Muḍarīs. Their affinity with the Muḍarīs presumably reflects the fact that it is the faction the Umayyads were part of. Other than this one reference, however, there is no evidence that the Banū Qasī ever behaved or were treated like Umayyad mawālī. Mawālī like Ḥāshim ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz enjoyed a level of prestige comparable to that of well-born Arabs—for all intents and purposes they were Arabs—and were integrated into the Cordovan power structure. The Banū Qasī, for all that they were occasional allies of the Umayyads, were far from Córdoba and were not part of that inner circle. They seem to have related to the Umayyads in the same way Ibn Marwān and leaders of other powerful muwallad families did.

The Banū Qasī’s power and territory were at their height at the time of Mūsā ibn Mūsā ibn Fortún ibn Qasī (ca. 790–862), the great-grandson of Cassius. By Mūsā ibn Mūsā’s time, the Banū Qasī’s pattern of occasional cooperation with the Umayyads between periods of revolt was well-established. His father, Fortún, had rebelled against the Umayyads in the early ninth century, primarily over control of Zaragoza. That issue reemerged in 840/41 when ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II attempted to appoint the governors of Tudela and Zaragoza. Since the Banū Qasī regarded those cities as part of their territory, Mūsā ibn Mūsā fought vigorously against the appointees and defeated the amīr’s troops who were supporting them, taking the general commanding the Umayyad force, Ḥārith ibn Bazī’, prisoner. In 843 ʿAbd al-Raḥmān appeared in person at the head of an expedition against the Banū Qasī, whom he defeated; Mūsā ibn Mūsā was forced to surrender Ḥārith and swore obedience to the amīr. In exchange, the amīr appointed Mūsā ibn Mūsā as the official governor of Arnedo, a town he already controlled. In 844 Mūsā ibn Mūsā rebelled again; the amīr’s forces besieged him at Tudela, forcing him to capitulate and taking his son Lope as a hostage. Later in 844, when Vikings landed near Seville, Mūsā ibn Mūsā led troops to assist the amīr. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān released Lope, who also fought against the Vikings. After ʿAbd al-Raḥmān died in 852, Mūsā ibn Mūsā continued to expand his
territories in the Ebro Valley; Muḥammad I made him the official wali of the upper march, probably as a way of saving the Umayyads’ dignity in the face of the inevitable.

Mūsā ibn Mūsā died in 862 from injuries sustained during a battle with the Banū Sālim Berbers, the leaders of Guadalajara. After his death, the family’s relations with the Umayyads improved briefly as Mūsā’s sons, Lope, Muṭarraf, Fortún, and Ismā’il, laid low and consolidated their power in the north. By 871, though, the alliance deteriorated as badly as ever; Muṭarraf proclaimed himself governor of Tudela in defiance of the amīr, and Ismā’il did the same in Zaragoza. Muḥammad I led an expedition to the north where he defeated Muṭarraf, brought him back to Córdoba, and had him crucified along with his three sons, Muḥammad, Lope, and Mūsā, certainly a low point in relations between the Umayyads and the Banū Qasī. The pattern of alternating rebellion and quiescence resumed, until the family lost the last of its major castles in 929, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III reasserted Umayyad power over the region.

While the power struggles along the upper march most obviously represented a potential military threat to Córdoba’s control of the north, the area is also of interest for the ways in which it was culturally and socially different from the Umayyad heartland. Distinctions among religious and ethnic groups seemed to matter far less than they did in Córdoba.

We can see some of this indifference to the cultural and social concerns of Córdoba in the Banū Qasī’s relationships of kinship and military alliance. Their major allies in the areas were the Iñiga family, a Christian Basque family from around Pamplona. The first of the Iñiga family to appear in the sources is called Wannaqūh in Arabic, or Iñigo Arista. He had two sons, Fortún and Iñigo Iñíguez; the latter, whom the Arabic sources call Wannaquh ibn Wannaquh (probably derived from Enneco, the Basque version of the name Iñigo), became ruler of Pamplona sometime between 810 and 820. After Iñigo Arista died sometime around 780, his widow married Mūsā ibn Fortún Ibn Qasī and became the mother of Mūsā ibn Mūsā, making Mūsā the half-brother of Iñigo Arista’s sons Fortún and Iñigo Iñíguez; they fought with him against the Umayyads during his revolt in the early 840s. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān’s campaign of 843 was directed against the Iñigas as well as the Banū Qasī. Fortún was killed in battle and his head sent to Córdoba as a trophy; Iñigo Iñíguez agreed not to leave the principality of Pamplona and to pay the amīr 700 dinars a year. Iñigo Iñíguez’s son García, who took over the principality of Pamplona after his father’s death in 851 or 852, was married to Mūsā ibn Mūsā’s (presumably Muslim) daughter Oria or Aurea; they
had a son, Mūsā Garcés. Mūsā ibn Mūsā’s son Muṭarraf married Velasquita, a daughter of García by another wife. Ibn Ḥazm also notes that Mūsā ibn Mūsā arranged the marriages of his (Muslim) nieces, the daughters of his brother Lope, to members of the Iñiga family.

The most obvious questions that the frequent marriages between the Iñigas and the Banū Qasî raise pertain to religion. As far as can be determined, among Muslims in al-Andalus, only aristocratic Arab families (and perhaps elite Berber families, although that is difficult to determine) enforced strict endogamy for women. Other groups did not see female endogamy as desirable or practical and used marriages to seal alliances; they were Muslims but followed what Guichard would call a European kinship pattern. It is not surprising, therefore, that muwallads like the Banū Qasî would use daughters as bargaining chips, and indeed we can sometimes see them handing out daughters for strategic purposes. In the early 860s, when it seemed likely that there would be hostilities between the Banū Qasî and the Banū Sâlim Berbers of Guadalajara, Mūsā ibn Mūsâ offered his daughter to the Banū Sâlim leader Izrâq (or Azrâq) ibn Manțil, telling Izrâq, according to Ibn al-Qūṭīyah, that his daughter was the most beautiful in al-Andalus and should be married only to the most beautiful young man in al-Andalus, who was none other than Izrâq. Despite the flattery, Mūsâ ended up attacking Izrâq in Guadalajara when he feared Izrâq was colluding with the Umayyads against him. In another instance, Mūsâ ibn Mūsâ’s son gave one of his daughters as part of a peace agreement with ‘Abd Allâh ibn Khalaf ibn Râshid, the governor of Boltaña, but then later attacked him and seized the town.

Giving one’s daughters to other Muslim families, as in the examples above, is one thing; giving them to non-Muslims, as was the case when the Banū Qasî married their daughters to the Iñigas, is something else again, and it certainly violates a major principal of Sharî’ah family law, which is that Muslim women are a resource for the ummah. Muslim men took resources from the unbelievers by marrying Christian or Muslim women (although not pagans). Muslim women, however, could under no circumstances be given to non-Muslims, whether or not they were People of the Book, and for a Muslim woman to marry outside the faith was an act of apostasy. Aside from the intermarriages with the Iñigas, a Banū Qasî daughter named Urâraca was married to Fruela, the son of Alfonso III of Asturias-León, sometime around 900. This casual shuffling of daughters between Christian and Muslim families calls into question how important religious identity was on either side of the frontier.
It is also worth noting that the Christian families involved seemed to have no qualms about marrying daughters to Muslims, or at least not to prominent ones. Aside from the marriages outlined above, there were kinship ties between the Iñiga family and the Umayyads. Fortún Garcés, who ruled Pamplona from 882 to 905 and was the great-grandson of Iñigo Arista, was captured (before he was ruler of Pamplona) by the amīr Muḥammad I and, along with his daughter Iñiga or Onneca, was held for some time in Córdoba. There Iñiga married (or at least became part of the ḥarīm of) the future amīr ‘Abd Allāh, taking the name Durr, or pearl. Her status as a captive, and the fact that Durr is a common slave name, suggest that she was a slave concubine rather than one of the official wives. That status, however, did not affect the position of her offspring; her son with ‘Abd Allāh, Muḥammad, while he did not become amīr himself, was the father of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III, meaning that Iñiga was the grandmother of the first Umayyad caliph of al-Andalus. Iñiga’s daughter by a previous marriage, Tota or Ṭūṭah, became queen of Navarre; she traveled to Córdoba to arrange an accord with ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III, who treated her as an honored relative.

The practice of northern Christians giving their daughters in marriage to Muslims is perhaps less striking than the fact that Muslims in that region married their daughters to Christians, given that there are plenty of references to marriages between Muslim men and Christian women in the sources for the martyrs of Córdoba. There is an important difference, however. In Córdoba, the Christian families involved were most likely interested in marrying up into the Muslim-dominated hierarchy. The northern women in question, however, were aristocrats, whose families were equals of the Muslim families, such as the Banū Qasī, with whom they married (Iñiga’s marriage to an Umayyad is the exception, since she was a captive, however honorably treated). There marriages may have come out of political expediency, but they also are more likely than the marriages in Córdoba to represent a free choice on the part of Christian families, rather than a response to social pressures.

Members of the Banū Qasī, while they remained predominantly Sunni Muslim, sometimes changed religions. Ibn Ḥazm reports that Lope ibn Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘il became a Shi‘ī while he was in central North Africa. Two other Banū Qasī sons became Christian. Unfortunately we do not know the context of those conversions, but they do suggest a certain fluidity of religious identity. As we have seen in the case of some Berber uprisings, and in the rebellion of ‘Umar ibn Ḥafṣūn, claiming Shi‘ī identity was a way to defy, or at least annoy, the Umayyads, so there is a context for that con-
version. The claiming of Christian identity also showed defiance, or at least a disconnect, with Cordovan power, and probably also had to do with the family’s close ties to Christians; Ibn Ḥaṣṣūn would later use a similar shift to Christianity as a way to separate himself from the Umayyads. The Banū Qasī’s casual attitude toward religious identity, as well as the family’s often open hostility toward Córdoba, undermines any notion that they acted as Umayyad mawālī.

The family’s naming practices are also suggestive of a social group that extended across the border and across religious lines. Generally once an Iberian family converted to Islam, subsequent generations of boys were given standard Muslim, or at least Arabic, names. In ‘Umar Ibn Ḥaṣṣūn’s family, for example, men had Arabic names going back to the great-grandfather, Ja’far, who was the original convert. Before Ja’far the family had Romance or Latinate names, for example Damian and Alfonso. It is true that Ibn Ḥaṣṣūn’s daughter Argentea had a Romance name, but no Romance family names for boys are recorded. Banū Qasī sons, however, were split between a majority who had Arabic names like Muḥammad or Ismā‘īl and a minority with Romance names like Lope or Fortún, a name also used by the Iñigas (the name Cassius never reappears in the family). Sons of the same father might end up with a mixture of Romance and Arabic names, so for example the sons of Mūsā ibn Fortún Ibn Cassius included Mūsā and Muṭarraf but also Lope and García (although David Wasserstein has suggested that the name “Lope” or “Lubb” was a rare case of a Romance name that Muslims broadly adopted). Naming patterns do not therefore seem to represent the practices of different branches of the family. It is possible that the sons of Mūsā ibn Fortún with Arabic names and those with Romance names had different mothers with different religious or ethnic backgrounds. Perhaps the most obvious explanation, though, is that the family chose to preserve traditional family names, and names they shared with the Iñigas, without regard to their origin. We have very few girls’ names from the family, but it is interesting that the two we do have—Aurea and Urraca—are both Romance names.

To what extent we are looking at a unique concept of religious identity that prevailed in the north, one in which boundaries between religions were less defined than in Córdoba, is hard to determine. Lévi-Provençal believes that the fluidity was quite pronounced and goes so far as to suggest that the much-married Iñigo Iñiguez may have been polygynous, in imitation of his Muslim relatives among the Banū Qasī. There is no way to verify this theory, however, nor for that matter is it clear that the Banū Qasī men
The Banū Qasī and the Northern March

married more than one wife at a time. More generally, it is impossible to say what the religious sensibilities of the population as a whole were along the northern march. Presumably most people on both sides of the Ebro were Christians at the time of the Banū Qasī; if Bulliet’s theory about conversion rates is correct, then Muslims had not been in control of the upper march long enough for any widespread conversion to Islam to have taken place on the southern side of the frontier. But although we can say that most people in the region were probably Christians, the texture of what being a Christian meant to them is not something we can recover. It does appear, however, that there was an aristocratic culture and system of kinship alliances in the north that superseded religious identity.

Arabic-speaking chroniclers writing about the Umayyad heartland often mention language: the Christian administrator whose Arabic was impeccable, the Muslim qāḍī whose grasp of Arabic grammar was sadly inadequate. No such issues are raised about the north. The sources give no indication that the Banū Qasī, in spite of Ibn Ḥazm’s assertion that they were Umayyad mawālī, saw themselves as part of the Arab and quasi-Arab elite, nor do we know if the family, or at least the men, spoke Arabic or were educated in Arabic letters. Maribel Fierro claims that they were in fact conversant in Arabic language and culture. Her assertion, however, is based on a passage from Ibn al-Qūṭiyyah that is open to interpretation. In the passage, the courtier Umayyah ibn ‘Īsā Ibn Shuhayd reports that in Córdoba, at the house where hostages were kept (dār al-rahā’in), he heard hostages from the Banū Qasī reciting a poem by the pre-Islamic Arab poet ‘Antarah. Ibn Shuhayd chastises the teacher of the hostages, saying that he should not be teaching the enemies of the caliphs poetry like that of ‘Antarah that inspires heroism; instead he should teach them only the wine poetry of Ḫasan ibn Hānī’ (Abū Nuwās) and other jokers (ahzāl) like him. Ibn Shuhayd’s story does not tell us if the members of the Banū Qasī were reciting from a tradition they already knew or being taught that tradition for the first time. Fierro may be correct in concluding that they came to Córdoba already literate in Arabic. The whole point of bringing enemies to the capital, however, was to integrate them into the Umayyads’ service, as was attempted in the case of Ibn Marwān and, later, members of ‘Umar Ibn Ḥaḍūn’s family. Education in Classical Arabic would have been part of that process. In addition, the fact that the Banū Qasī hostages were working with a teacher (mu‘addib) suggests a tutorial rather than a salon. What Ibn Shuhayd overheard could have been part of an ultimately unsuccessful effort to bring the northern rebels in line with the Umayyads’ worldview.
The Banū Qasī do not, then, appear to have acted as members of the Arab elite. In particular they did not show any interest in the endogamous marriage practices of that elite. At the same time, they do not seem to have had any sense of superiority based on their Gothic identity and were happy to marry daughters and sons to Berbers, Basques, or to whomever expediency dictated.

There are some useful contrasts to be drawn between the Banū Qasī and ‘Umar Ibn Ḥafṣūn that can give us an idea of how geography, and specifically distance from the capital, affected culture. In Ibn Ḥafṣūn’s world it mattered whether you were Arab or muwallad, Muslim or Christian; when he became Christian (or admitted to being a Christian, depending on how one looks at the situation), his political and legal status changed dramatically. On the northern march, those boundaries were less important. That contrast can perhaps best be seen in the lives of the Banū Qasī’s daughters as opposed to the fate of Ibn Ḥafṣūn’s daughter Argentea. Under Shari‘ah, a Muslim woman who married a Christian man was guilty of apostasy. The Banū Qasī nevertheless regularly married their daughters to Christians, correctly anticipating that there would be no repercussions. Argentea’s own act of apostasy, however, led to her death at the hands of a Shari‘ah court. In southern al-Andalus, the rules of the Islamic polity applied. In the north, they intruded only minimally.

NON-ARAB MUSLIMS IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY: THE SHU‘ŪBĪYAH

I have argued throughout this book, following Wasserstein and others, that the Umayyad period in al-Andalus was a time of particular tensions about ethnicity and religious identity. But by the end of the tenth century, as the Umayyads increasingly identified themselves as Muslim rather than Arab leaders, and as the majority of the Christian population converted to Islam and took on aspects of Arab culture, those tensions faded. The evidence does not suggest that they played an important role in the Taifa period. Furthermore, after the Umayyads lost power and the Christian north began to seize Muslim lands in the eleventh century, culturally ambiguous areas like the Ebro Valley region were eliminated from Muslim rule, leaving a core of al-Andalus in which most people were Muslims and Arabic-speaking. Muslim elites generally identified themselves with Arab culture and often adopted Arab genealogies. Thus François Clément distinguishes only two
classes of Taifa leadership: Arabized leaders, made up of those claiming biological Arab descent along with old Berber families and ṣaqālibah, and non-Arabized leaders, meaning newly arrived Berbers.\footnote{31} 

One piece of evidence that could potentially contradict this view of the Taifa period is the Risālah of Ibn García, written in the mid-eleventh century.\footnote{32} The Risālah is an example of shuʿūbī literature, a polemical literature that originally appeared under the Abbasids in the late eighth century. Its original authors were primarily Persians and other non-Arab Muslims at the Abbasid court who argued that non-Arab Muslims had a noble and dignified history equal to, if not superior to, that of Arabs.\footnote{33} To what extent the shuʿūbiyah can be connected to a real political movement, rather than a literary exercise on the part of Persian courtiers, is debatable, but in its original incarnation it does seem to have served as a way for Persian and other non-Arab elites to express their claim to a place in the Abbasid system, and to reject the idea that Islam was inevitably associated with Arab identity. The authors’ proof text was the Quran, sūrah 49:13. Ibn Ḥazm used a paraphrase of this same verse from the ḥadīths (somewhat unconvincingly) at the beginning of his book on Arab genealogy, the Jamharah, to temper his claims for Arab superiority:

\begin{quote}
O people, we have created you from a male single male and female, and we have made you into groups (shuʿūb) and tribes (qabāʾil) that you may come to know one another; truly the noblest (akram) among you before God is the most righteous (atqā) among you; truly God is all-knowing, all seeing.\footnote{34}
\end{quote}

Although commentators differed in their interpretation of that verse, Persian exegetes generally took “qabāʾil” as referring to the Arabs, who calculated relatedness through genealogy, and “shuʿūb” as ‘ajam (non-Arabs) or mawālī (in the eastern sense of non-Arab Muslims, not the Andalusī sense of honored clients), who understood relatedness to mean coming from a common city or region.\footnote{35} To shuʿūbī authors, the verse demonstrated that both groups were equally part of God’s creation of humankind and was the basis for an argument that tried to break the link between nobility and the possession of an Arab genealogy.

Ibn García, writing in the mid-eleventh century, was part of a smaller and later version of that movement. His full name in Arabic was Abū ʿĀmir
Ibn Gharsiyah al-Bashkunsī, and, as the name suggests, he was (according to Ibn Saʿīd) a Basque; he was captured as a child, converted to Islam, and educated at the Taifa court in Denia. The rulers of Denia at that time were ṣaqālibah, and the Risālah may have been a response to the work of a poet at the court of Almería praising the lineage of Almería’s Arab ruler. Despite the fact that his background was quite different from that of the eighth- and ninth-century shuʿūbī authors, he adopted their polemics without much adjustment, arguing for the superiority of Byzantine and Persian culture over the culture of Arabs, characterized in the Risālah as goat-milkers and herders of mangy camels. Ibn García also argues that Muslims who were descendants of Christians had an edge over Arab Muslims, in that their ancestors were at least monotheists rather than pagans. Those of Christian ancestry were descended from Sarah, the legitimate wife of Abraham, rather than Hagar, a slave. All the shuʿūbī authors, including Ibn García, purport to show the inferiority of Arab identity, yet they use Classical Arabic and imagery from Arabic poetry to do so, suggesting that they were in fact arguing for their fitness to be part of Muslim, Arabic-language culture.

The Risālah might then suggest that conflicts over the connection between Arab and Muslim identity continued well into the eleventh century. Gören Larsson argues that this is in fact the case, and that Ibn García’s intention was “to formulate and legitimize a non-Arab alternative to Arab rule.” For Larsson, the treatise is about the rights of non-Arab Muslims in general to have a role in Muslim society equal to that of Arabs, making Ibn García’s work similar in intention to the earlier shuʿūbī literature in the east. Wasserstein, on the other hand, sees the Risālah as a work by a freed slave, a ṣaqlabī, in the service of the ṣaqlabī rulers of Denia, and believes he is arguing for the inclusion of the ṣaqlabī in the dominant Arabic-Muslim culture of al-Andalus. The culture in which Ibn García wanted full membership was defined by Arabic language and literature but was no longer linked to Arab identity in a genealogical sense, including as it did groups like the established Berber families of the peninsula. Other than newly arrived Berbers, the ṣaqlabī were the only Muslims who continued to stand out as a separate group.

The difference of opinion about Ibn García’s intentions is understandable given how difficult it is to know exactly what he was up to, or how he understood his own position in Andalusí society. Taken at face value, the Risālah says that people of Persian and Byzantine background are superior to Arabs, an argument that is not relevant in the context of al-Andalus; Ibn García was Basque, not Byzantine or Persian. It is also not clear that
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he fits the category of ṣqālibī, as Wasserstein assumes. David Ayalon has argued forcefully that in Andalusī society the term ṣaqālibah referred only to slaves taken from east of German-speaking lands, and that slaves from Galicia, the Basque Country, and other parts of western Europe counted as a different group altogether. His argument depends, however, on his interpretation of a fairly ambiguous passage from the tenth-century geographer Ibn Ḥawqal, which in any case may not have applied to the situation in the eleventh century. The question of Ibn García’s identity in his society cannot be fully resolved.

Surviving refutations of the Risālah do nothing to clarify its meaning any further. The responses range chronologically from the 1080s, within decades of the Risālah’s writing, to the early thirteenth century, and none of them addresses directly the conditions of Andalusī society any more than Ibn García does. The refutation of Abū Yaḥyā Ibn Mas’adah, an Almohad courtier writing around one hundred years later, is primarily a polemic against Christianity, as though the Risālah were a defense of Christianity rather than a defense of non-Arab Muslims. Along with denouncing Christian beliefs and practices—he claims that Christians place Judas’s authority above that of Abraham and Noah—he attacks Sarah, the mother of the Christians, saying that she was loaned out as a sexual partner to an Egyptian prince. In addition, he asserts that Sarah was a partner in an incestuous marriage between uncle and niece, apparently relying on a story in Talmud that conflates Sarah with Abraham’s niece Yiskah, the daughter of Abraham’s brother Hārān. The other refutations seem equally disconnected from the social realities of al-Andalus, and from the Risālah itself.

Ibn García’s language therefore is symbolic of a problem he perceived in Andalusī society, rather than a literal description of that problem. Most likely Wasserstein is correct in interpreting the Risālah as a plea for the inclusion of freedmen in the Arabic-speaking Muslim community. Even if Ibn García’s society would not have classified him as a ṣaqālibī, he was a freed slave, and his masters were certainly ṣaqālibah. A Basque freedman and the ṣaqālibah may well have been among the last non-Arab Muslims who stood out as different in al-Andalus. He does not seem to be mounting a defense of muwallads, a term that was rarely even used by the eleventh century; the sources do not classify any of the Taifa rulers as muwallads. He was not a muwallad himself, since he was not a descendent of Iberian converts to Islam. Ibn García says that he is speaking on behalf of “ma’shar al-mawālī,” the community of the mawālī, which Monroe seems to accept as a term for non-Arab Muslims in general. The term mawālī would in fact have had that
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meaning in the ninth-century Abbasid east. As we have seen, however, the system of tribal clientage for converts used in the east did not exist in al-Andalus after the earliest period of the conquest, and the word mawālī was mostly used to designate elite families. These facts suggest that Ibn García was either simply lifting the term out of the eastern shuʿūbī literature or was using it in the other sense in which it commonly occurred in al-Andalus, which was to refer to freed slaves. In any event, it is most likely that Ibn García was pleading the case of a very limited community of freedmen in al-Andalus, and that the Risālah does not represent any widespread continuation of the Umayyad period’s ethnic conflicts.