

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Umayyad State in Al-Andalus: A Study of the Relationship between Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil and Charlemagne

Abdelkarim Hamattit ^{1*}, Youcef Slimani ², Mahfoudh Saidani ³, Aissa Hameri ⁴, Brahim Betka ⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5} University of Djilali Bounaama-Khemis Miliana, (Algeria)

a.hamattit@univ-dbkm.dz¹, y.slimani@univ-dbkm.dz², m.saidani@univ-dbkm.dz³, a.hamri@univ-dbkm.dz⁴, b.betka@univ-dbkm.dz⁵

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Abstract:

The Umayyad state was revived in Al-Andalus after its collapse at the hands of the Abbasids in the East. Abd al-Rahman ibn Mu'awiya ibn Hisham, known as al-Dakhil (the Entrant), succeeded in fleeing the Abbasid massacres and managed to propagate his cause across the Maghreb and Al-Andalus until he was established as its Emir. However, his ascension to the emirate did not mark the end of the hardships he endured as a fugitive; rather, it signaled the beginning of a new era of struggle and perseverance. His primary objective was to consolidate the foundations of his nascent state and maintain a unified Al-Andalus in the face of imminent threats. Scarcely had he stabilized his rule when internal opposition movements began to emerge, ranging from Abbasid and Umayyad to Fatimid-aligned uprisings. Al-Dakhil even faced rebellions from his own nephews and close associates. He exerted immense effort to suppress these revolts, which nearly dismantled the unity of Al-Andalus were it not for

his relentless determination and resolve in confronting every insurgency. Furthermore, he faced Christian resistance pockets in the North, specifically the lurking threat of the Franks after Charlemagne assumed control of the Empire. Charlemagne sought to expand his territory and annex Islamic Spain to his kingdom, exploiting the turbulent political conditions in Al-Andalus.

Keywords: Abd al-Rahman ibn Mu'awiya, Charlemagne, Conflict, Umayyad, Al-Andalus.

Introduction:

The Battle of Poitiers, led by Abd al-Rahman al-Ghafiqi in 114 AH, is considered a setback for Islam and Muslims in Al-Andalus. It led to the retreat of the conquest movement in the northern regions of Islamic Spain; consequently, they failed to subjugate the Christian powers behind the Pyrenees on one hand, and to expand

towards Europe in general—rather than just the land of the Franks—on the other.

The conditions in Al-Andalus grew turbulent, particularly towards the end of the Era of the Governors, which coincided with the emergence of the Abbasid State on the political stage. This situation prompted the Frankish State¹ to exploit the circumstances of the wounded Islamic state, working to reclaim provinces belonging to the Islamic realm in Al-Andalus. This ambition was spearheaded by their leader², Charlemagne³.

¹ The Franks: The Frankish element belongs to the descendants of Japheth, including the Slavs, Galicians, Turks, and others who profess the Christian faith. Their state expanded extensively, encompassing approximately one hundred and fifty cities. Their kingdom existed in Africa, Sicily, and Crete before these regions returned to the Islamic fold. The term "Franks" refers to the people and the land, most often the people. The term is not precisely defined; some Arabic and Andalusian writings used it to encompass all of Europe, and at times it was used for certain parts of Europe. Those who used it in a limited sense usually applied it to the French or intended it to mean the inhabitants of the Roman Empire during the era of its king, Charlemagne. See: Abu Ubayd al-Bakri (487 AH / 1094 AD), *Geography of Al-Andalus and Europe through the Book of Paths and Kingdoms*, edited by Abd al-Rahman Ali al-Hajji, Dar al-Irshad for Printing and Publishing, Beirut, Lebanon, 1387 AH / 1968 AD, pp. 137-138; Abd al-Rahman Ali al-Hajji, *Andalusiyat (Second Collection)*, Dar al-Irshad for Printing and Publishing, Beirut, 1389 AH / 1969 AD, p. 128.

² Khash'a al-Ma'adhidi, *The Emir of Al-Andalus Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil or the Falcon of Quraysh*, Dar al-Shu'un al-Thaqafiya al-'Amma, Baghdad, Iraq, 1989, p. 85.

³ He was known among his contemporaries as Carolus or Charles the Great, and appeared in

To ensure the success of his project to expel the people of Al-Andalus, he sought to consolidate relations with the Abbasid State in the East. He worked on improving his ties with the caliphs of this nascent state, attempting to draw closer to them through envoys and gifts⁴. He even went as far as providing aid to the Abbasids and supporting their efforts to eliminate their opponents in Al-Andalus, leading several campaigns toward that end, aiming to diminish the Islamic presence in the northern parts of Spain and France⁵.

In 133 AH / 752 AD, the Frankish king besieged the city of Narbonne⁶

Troubadour songs as Charlemagne. Muslims called him "Qarla," and his dynasty was known as the Carolingian. He assumed the throne as a partner with his brother Carloman after the death of their father, Pepin the Short, in 768 AD, then ruled alone after his brother died in 771 AD. He was later crowned Emperor in 800 AD by Pope Leo III in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. He died in 814 AD in Aix-la-Chapelle after spending 47 years in power at the age of 72. See: *Biography of Charlemagne*, pp. 37, 49.

⁴ Among the manifestations of rapprochement between the Franks and the Abbasid State was that Pepin the Frank sent envoys to Baghdad, where they remained for three years. They then returned to France accompanied by envoys of the Abbasid Caliph, who were treated with great hospitality by Pepin, who housed them in the Palace of Sels. They returned to the East after spending an entire winter there, carrying gifts to the Caliph. See: Shakib Arslan, *History of Arab Invasions in France, Switzerland, and the Mediterranean Islands*, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, Beirut, Lebanon, 1352 AH, p. 119.

⁵ Al-Ma'adhidi, *Ibid*, p. 85.

⁶ Arbuna, or Narbonne: Located in southeastern France on the Mediterranean coast, it lies on the edge of the frontier (Thughur) of the land of Al-Andalus, a thousand miles from Cordoba. It was the first Roman colony in Gaul, then became the capital of the Visigoths in 462 AD. Muslims

with the assistance of a Gothic prince named Osmund (Ismandus). However, King Pepin withdrew and left the task to Osmund due to the city's formidable defenses and excellent fortifications. The lifting of the siege was also aided by the famine that struck southern France, temporarily sparing Narbonne from danger, as the city's garrison succeeded in repelling the aggression of the Frankish Christians. Nevertheless, the killing of the garrison commander, Abd al-Rahman ibn Alqama al-Lakhmi, during the governorship of Yusuf al-Fihri, weakened the city and subsequently made it a target for Christian ambitions⁷.

Once the Umayyad Emir Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil had stabilized his rule, the primary concern of the state shifted towards the defense of its borders and the preservation of the Islamic presence in these lands. On the other hand, the Frankish strategy underwent a significant shift, taking a different course than before; it transitioned from a state of defense and retreat before the Islamic armies to an offensive stance. This was part of their

conquered it in 720 AD. See: Al-Himyari, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Mun'im, *Al-Rawd al-Mi'tar fi Khabar al-Aqtar*, edited by Ihsan Abbas, Heidelberg Press, 1st ed./1975, 1st ed./1984, Beirut, p. 24; Al-Sharif al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi Ikhtiraq al-Afaq*, Maktabat al-Thaqafa al-Diniya, Cairo, Egypt, 1422 AH / 2006 AD, p. 739; Yusuf Ahmad Bani Yasin, *Countries of Al-Andalus in the Works of Yaqut al-Hamawi (574-626 AH / 1178-1229 AD): A Comparative Study*, Zayed Center for Heritage and History, Al Ain, UAE, 2000, p. 188.

⁷ Khalil Ibrahim Salih al-Samarrai, *The Upper Andalusian Frontier: A Study of its Political Conditions (90 AH - 316 AH / 714-928 AD)*, Asad Press, Baghdad, Iraq, 1976, p. 230

pursuit to complete an expansionist project based on reclaiming provinces conquered by Muslims, and potentially attempting to permanently expel them from Al-Andalus⁸.

Of the frontier strongholds beyond the Pyrenees⁹, only the city of Narbonne remained in the direction of Valence, which was prior to the arrival of Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil in Al-Andalus. The Franks exerted all their strength to seize the city through several failed attempts led by King Pepin III, who was forced to withdraw with his army after the inhabitants of the city showed steadfastness and valor in its defense. Consequently, it remained under the authority of the Arab Muslims¹⁰.

During the reign of Abd al-Rahman I, specifically in 140 AH / 758 AD, and in his endeavor to consolidate the distant frontiers and repel the Frankish threat, he dispatched an army to aid the people of Narbonne. This army was led by Commander Abu Sulayman Habib ibn Abd al-Malik ibn Umar ibn al-Walid ibn Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan. However, the mission of this

⁸ Al-Ma'adhidi, op. cit. , p. 85.

⁹ Al-Burt Mountains (Jibal al-Burtat): This is the barrier between the Lands of Islam and the Lands of the Gauls (Southern France). Many researchers mistakenly use this term as a synonym for the Pyrenees, making "Al-Burtat" mean "The Pyrenees" and vice versa. The correct view is that the Pyrenees are located north of Cordoba and are thus situated within Andalusian territories. See: Abu Ubayd al-Bakri (487 AH / 1094 AD), *Geography of Al-Andalus and Europe through the Book of Paths and Kingdoms*, edited by Abd al-Rahman Ali al-Hajji, Dar al-Irshad for Printing and Publishing, Beirut, Lebanon, 1387 AH / 1968 AD, p. 85.

¹⁰ Al-Ma'adhidi, op. cit. , p. 86.

army failed to repel the Frankish danger and suffered a crushing defeat before reaching Narbonne at the hands of bands that ambushed them in the mountain passes of the Pyrenees, forcing the Muslim army to return to Cordoba¹¹.

The hopes of the Umayyad Emir were dashed, and his disappointments were compounded by numerous insurrections that erupted in various parts of his state¹². Consequently, he diverted his attention from Narbonne, and this expedition was considered the last campaign undertaken by the Muslims of Al-Andalus to save the final stronghold remaining to them beyond the Pyrenees¹³.

This retreat of Islamic forces encouraged the inhabitants of Narbonne—specifically the treacherous elements among the Christians—to surrender. They reached out to the Franks, enticing them to launch a campaign against the city and conspiring to open the gates should they attack, on the condition that Pepin leave them as free men within their city. The Frankish king fulfilled his promise to the inhabitants and launched a nocturnal assault, successfully expelling the

Muslims from their last remaining stronghold beyond the Pyrenees. Consequently, the balance of power shifted in favor of the Franks. Pepin ensured his army participated in the massacre of the Muslims to secure this achievement, dispatching a force that completed the atrocities committed by the Christians of Narbonne against the Muslim population. They targeted mosques and institutes, destroying them. Narbonne was lost to Islamic territory from that point onward, approximately three decades after it was annexed to their authority. Since 141 AH, the Pyrenees have been considered the natural boundary separating Al-Andalus from the Land of the Franks¹⁴. Upon his withdrawal, the Frankish king left a military garrison to protect the city from any Islamic counter-attack¹⁵. The deterioration of the morale among the Muslim inhabitants of Narbonne was likely due to the isolation they endured following al-Dakhil's defeat and the prolonged siege imposed upon them¹⁶.

The Frankish appetite for further victories at the expense of Islamic provinces grew. Encouraged by the seizure of Narbonne, they exploited the internal and external challenges facing Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil, particularly

¹¹ Salim ibn Abd Allah ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Khalaf, Political and Cultural Relations between the Abbasid Caliphate and the Umayyad Emirate in Al-Andalus (132-300 AH / 751-912 AD), Master's Thesis in Islamic History, Department of Graduate Studies, Islamic University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, p. 169.

¹² Al-Ma'adhidi, op. cit. , p. 86.

¹³ Salim ibn Abd Allah ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Khalaf, Political and Cultural Relations between the Abbasid Caliphate and the Umayyad Emirate in Al-Andalus, p. 169.

¹⁴ Al-Ma'adhidi, op. cit. , p. 87; Salim ibn Abd Allah ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Khalaf, op. cit., , p. 170; Sa'd Abd Allah al-Bishri, "The French Role in the Crusades against the Muslims of Al-Andalus," Umm Al-Qura University Journal, No. 4, Year 3, 1411 AH, p. 174.

¹⁵ Khalil Ibrahim Salih al-Samarrai, The Upper Andalusian Frontier: A Study of its Political Conditions (90 AH - 316 AH / 714-928 AD), Asad Press, Baghdad, Iraq, 1976, p. 231

¹⁶ Salim ibn Abd Allah, op. cit., , p. 169.

the movement of Sulayman ibn Yaqghan al-Arabi in Zaragoza in northern Al-Andalus in 157 AH. They viewed this insurgency as an opportune moment that should not be missed¹⁷. Sulayman al-Arabi had allied with certain Arab tribal leaders, such as al-Husayn ibn Yahya al-Ansari¹⁸, driven by a desire to depose the Umayyad Emir, who was considered an interloper in Al-Andalus. Their efforts aligned with those of the Abbasid State in the East, which spared no effort in attempting to eliminate the son of Mu'awiya, sending Abd al-Rahman ibn Habib al-Fihri¹⁹—known as "Al-Saqlabi"—to return Al-Andalus to Abbasid obedience²⁰. They considered

¹⁷ Al-Ma'adhidi, op. cit. , p. 87.

¹⁸ Dozy provided an account via 'Inan stating that the alliance which decided to seek help from Charlemagne included Sulayman al-Arabi, al-Husayn ibn Yahya, Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Fihri, and al-Saqlabi, and they all went to meet "Charlekan" (Charlemagne). The agreement was for al-Arabi to assist Charlemagne in his invasion while al-Saqlabi would mobilize Berber troops from Africa, enter Al-Andalus, and camp in the city of Tudmir to distract Abd al-Rahman from saving Zaragoza. However, after applying critical study to these historical events, it appears impossible to accept the narrative of a quadruple alliance participating in the attack on Zaragoza. Perhaps the reason confirming the inaccuracy of this account is that Arabic sources do not mention any alliance of this kind, nor do foreign sources written about Charlemagne's invasion refer to this quadruple alliance. Most sources consider al-Saqlabi's movement an independent one with no connection to the Frankish invasion. Regarding Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Fihri's participation in the alliance, it can be noted that he was still in prison and his escape occurred in a period following the battle. See: Muhammad Abdulla 'Inan, The Islamic State in Al-Andalus, 4th ed., Al-Khanji Library, Cairo, Egypt, 1417 AH - 1997 AD, Vol. 1, p. 186. It is also unlikely that the campaign was part of an agreement between Charlemagne and the Abbasid Caliphate represented by Caliph al-Mahdi (who

seeking assistance from Charlemagne, King of the Franks, who was regarded in his era as the protector of Christendom and a bitter adversary of Islam²¹ . Regrettably, those who drew Charlemagne's attention to Al-Andalus, encouraged him, and promised him support were Arabs led by the governor of Barcelona, al-Arabi. Their vengeful spite against Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil reached such a degree that they endangered both Islam and Arabism in the Iberian Peninsula, driven solely by personal animosity²² .

Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil prepared to confront this abhorrent alliance and repel it. For this purpose, he

took office in 158 AH), as the latter realized that the elimination of the Umayyad Emirate would benefit Charlemagne and Al-Andalus would not return to the Abbasid banner. See: Issam Muhammad Shabaro, Al-Andalus from the Targeted Arab Conquest to the Lost Paradise (92-897 AH / 710-1492 AD), Dar al-Nahda al-Arabiya, Beirut, Lebanon, 2002, pp. 114, 115.

¹⁹ Ibn Idhari al-Marrakushi, Al-Bayan al-Maghrib fi Akhbar al-Andalus wa al-Maghrib, edited by G.S. Colin and Évariste Lévi-Provençal, 2nd ed., Dar al-Thaqafa, Beirut, Lebanon, 1400 AH / 1980 AD, p. 57.

²⁰ Ibn al-Athir al-Jazari (d. 630 AH), Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, corrected and reviewed by Umar Yusuf al-Daqqaq, 1st ed., Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, Beirut, Lebanon, 1407 AH - 1987 AD, pp. 339, 340.

²¹ Ali Adham, Falcon of Quraysh: A Study of the Life of Emir Abd al-Rahman I, known as al-Dakhil, Founder of the Umayyad State in Al-Andalus, Al-Muqtataf Publications, n.p., 1938, p. 92.

²² Husayn Mu'nis, Landmarks of the History of the Maghreb and Al-Andalus, 1st ed., Dar al-Rashad, Cairo, 1997, p. 301; Suhayl Zakkar, The Shami Encyclopedia of the History of the Crusades: Introduction to the History of the Crusades, Medieval Europe, and the Stages of the Crusade Events, Damascus, 1416 AH / 1995 AD, Vol. 3, p. 106.

mobilized an army to suppress this movement and entrusted its command to Tha'laba ibn Ubayd al-Judhami²³ in 158 AH. However, the capture of the commander and his being sent to the King of the Franks prevented the completion of the mission, and the Muslim army returned to Cordoba²⁴.

The rebels were encouraged, and their ambitions grew following the retreat of the Cordovan army. Nevertheless, they inclined toward peace, which was manifested in an exchange of correspondence. Through this, both parties sought to gain time to continue their projects and resume the offensive—especially since the rebels did not trust the Umayyad Emir and sensed his determination to expand into new provinces, which encouraged them to seek support from the Franks²⁵.

In this context, the rebels sent a letter to Charlemagne in 160 AH, while he was residing in Paderborn in the Westphalia region (northwest of

present-day Federal Germany) during the convening of the Great Assembly. Sulayman al-Arabi arrived during this meeting²⁶ and presented him with the idea of an alliance against the Emir of Al-Andalus. They agreed that they would assist him in seizing Zaragoza²⁷. Charlemagne welcomed this proposal, finding no better opportunity to expand his authority²⁸. At that time, Charlemagne was following in the footsteps of his predecessors by implementing the traditional policy of encouraging any rebellion aimed at secession and independence from the central government in Cordoba to weaken its power²⁹. They also sent another letter to the Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdi, containing the same request, as they were aware of the magnitude of the resentment the Abbasids harbored toward the Umayyads³⁰.

The fate of Islam in Al-Andalus became endangered, especially as the alliance forces converged against it. It became imperative for al-Dakhil to deal

²³ Sa'ida Abd al-Fattah Anis Suwaylim, The Relationship of the Umayyad Emirate in Al-Andalus with the Christian Kingdoms in Spain, Master's Thesis in History, An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine, 2011, p. 15.

²⁴ In the story of Tha'laba's capture, the author of Akhbar Majmu'a mentions another name for Charlemagne, stating: "And the Arab [the rebel] sent him [the prisoner] to Qarluh [Charlemagne], and when he arrived, Qarluh [Charlemagne] coveted the city of Zaragoza because of that..." See: Anonymous, Akhbar Majmu'a fi Fath al-Andalus wa Dhikr Umara'ihha wa al-Hurub al-Waqi'a biha Baynahum, edited by Ibrahim al-Abyari, Dar al-Kutub al-Lubnani, Beirut, Lebanon, 1410 AH / 1989 AD, p. 103; Al-Ma'adhidi, op. cit. , p. 87; Ahmad ibn Umar ibn Anas al-Udhri al-Dala'i, Texts on Al-Andalus from the Book of Tarsie al-Akhbar, edited by Abd al-Aziz al-Ahwani,

Publications of the Institute of Islamic Studies in Madrid, p. 25.

²⁵ Al-Ma'adhidi, , op. cit.p. 87.

²⁶ Shakib Arslan, History of Arab Invasions in France, Switzerland, Italy, and the Mediterranean Islands, Hindawi Foundation for Education and Culture, Egypt, 2012, p. 118.

²⁷ Husayn Mu'nis, op. cit., , p. 301

²⁸ Syed Ameer Ali, A Short History of the Saracens, translated by Afif al-Baalbaki, Dar al-Ilm lil-Malayin, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed. 1961, 2nd ed. 1967, p. 393.

²⁹ Ali Adham, Falcon of Quraysh, p. 92

³⁰ Muna Hassan Mahmoud, The Muslims in Al-Andalus and Their Relationship with the Franks (92-206 AH / 714-815 AD), Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, Cairo, 1986, p. 179; Al-Ma'adhidi, op. cit. , p. 87.

with the situation using his available resources to save what could be saved, at a time when the Frankish armies were increasing at the expense of the Islamic army in Al-Andalus. The Emir's task was further complicated by the military support from the Eastern Caliphate in its endeavor to eliminate the nascent Umayyad Emirate and the capital, Cordoba, in particular³¹.

To prepare thoroughly for the campaign against Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil and Al-Andalus, Charlemagne mobilized a massive army selected from the finest inhabitants of his territories, such as Bavaria, Provence, Austrasia, Burgundy, Septimania, and Lombardy. This meticulous preparation proves beyond doubt that Charlemagne's ambition was not limited to Cordoba itself or the cities promised to him by Sulayman al-Arabi, but extended to an attempt to control Spain entirely, or at least its northern part, and to put an end to the Islamic threat to France³². The kings of Asturias played a role in pushing Charlemagne to fight the Arabs and inciting hostile sentiment against them. Furthermore, we must not overlook the role of the Papacy and the bishops of Toledo in encouraging him; Pope Hadrian blessed this campaign and considered it a "Holy Crusade"³³. Churchmen began anticipating the time

when the "Cartagena of Saint Augustine" would return to the fold of the Cross³⁴. In the same context, Diggs cites a narrative that appears to be a myth that governed the Frankish people for decades: a vision seen by Charlemagne in which Saint James called to him, stating that his body—unknown to Muslims and Christians—lay in that distant land. He commanded Charlemagne to rise and liberate Galicia from the hands of the Muslims. The vision was repeated three times, and Charlemagne answered the call on the fourth³⁵.

In Rabi' al-Awwal of the year 161 AH, Charlemagne headed with his armies to Spain, targeting Cordoba, the capital of the Umayyad Emirate, crossing the Pyrenees. The army was divided into two divisions: the first from the east along the sea toward Barcelona, and the second from the west toward Pamplona led by Charlemagne himself. The plan required the two armies to meet on the banks of the Ebro River³⁶ near Zaragoza, where Charlemagne would meet his allies among the Muslim Arabs representing the opposition. The plan was very precise and well-executed, signaling that the blow would be severe for Abd al-Rahman ibn Mu'awiya³⁷.

³¹ Al-Ma'adhidi, op. cit. , p. 88.

³² Muna Hassan, The Muslims in Al-Andalus and Their Relationship with the Franks, p. 179.

³³ Einhard, Life of Charlemagne, edited by Adel Zaitoun, Dar Hassan for Printing and Publishing, 1st ed., 1410 AH / 1989 AD, p. 75.

³⁴ Diggs, Charlemagne, p. 99.

³⁵ Diggs, Ibid, p. 98.

³⁶ The Ebro River: Located in Spain, it was famous in ancient times as the Hiberus or Iberus, named after the Iberian people who lived on its banks and in the Iberian Peninsula. It extends for 917 km, flowing southeast from the Cantabrian Mountains. This river has been used since antiquity. Einhard, Life of Charlemagne, p. 99.

³⁷ Al-Ma'adhidi, op. cit. , p. 88; Ali Adham, Falcon of Quraysh, p. 92.

Charlemagne marched toward Al-Andalus, and on his way, he managed to seize the cities of Pamplona (inhabited by the Christian Basque tribes), Huesca, and Gerona by force. These cities were known for their rebellious nature and resistance to any external authority. He established military garrisons within them. Subsequently, he met his ally, Sulayman al-Arabi, and they proceeded toward Zaragoza. However, their plans were thwarted by the steadfastness and resistance of the people of Zaragoza against the massive Frankish army and its allies—an outcome they had not anticipated, as they expected a surrender according to their prior arrangements. The city proved insurmountable because Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil had communicated with al-Husayn ibn Yahya al-Ansari, the lord of Zaragoza and ally of Sulayman al-Arabi. Al-Dakhil enticed him with sole leadership over the city and persuaded him to align with the Umayyads. Successfully convinced, al-Ansari abandoned his alliance with al-Arabi and Charlemagne, swiftly fortifying the city and closing its gates to the Franks.

The siege of the city was prolonged, and the allied armies failed to make any significant progress. Charlemagne decided to lift the siege

after receiving news of the Saxon leader, who had exploited the absence of the Frankish army to incite the Saxons to revolt once again. They swept through the land, reaching the Rhine borders and seizing several cities. Faced with this alarming news, he found no choice but to accelerate his return. Indeed, he retraced his steps along the same path through the Pyrenees toward France after his army suffered a humiliating defeat, having failed to enter Zaragoza. The group of allied Arabs failed to provide the promised assistance, leading Charlemagne to suspect betrayal³⁸. He accused Sulayman al-Arabi and his associates of deception and took him, along with all the hostages in his possession³⁹, as a prisoner before retreating⁴⁰.

The captivity of al-Arabi and his companions profoundly affected the Muslims of the Upper Frontier and their Basque allies, who shared a common hatred for the Franks. They decided to attack Charlemagne's retreating army and devised a plan for the operation. They hid in the bends and thickets overlooking the valley. When the Frankish forces reached the narrow Roncevaux Pass⁴¹, the army was forced to march in a long, stretched column. The attackers allowed most of the

³⁸ Einhard, *Life of Charlemagne*, edited by Adel Zaitoun, Dar Hassan for Printing and Publishing, 1st ed., 1410 AH / 1989 AD, p. 75.

³⁹ Al-Ma'adhidi, op. cit. , p. 89; Muna Hassan, op. cit., , p. 180.

⁴⁰ Ali Adham, *Falcon of Quraysh: A Study of the Life of Emir Abd al-Rahman I, known as al-Dakhil*,

Founder of the Umayyad State in Al-Andalus, Al-Muqtataf Publications, n.p., 1938, p. 93; Shakib Arslan, *History of Arab Invasions in France, Switzerland, Italy, and the Mediterranean Islands*, p. 119.

⁴¹ Shakib Arslan, op. cit., , p. 119.

Frankish army to pass unmolested and then struck the rear guard, which was carrying the baggage and supplies. Exploiting the sunset, they dispersed under the cover of darkness⁴². In this regard, Ibn al-Athir mentions that once Charlemagne was far from Muslim territory and felt secure, he was attacked by al-Arabi's sons, Matruh and Ayshun, who had gathered their father's forces and followers to raid him⁴³. Thus, a large number of people united against Charlemagne, driven by the goal of revenge. The Basques seized the opportunity because they could not engage in open warfare with the Franks for fear of Charlemagne's powerful and fierce heavy cavalry⁴⁴.

The Muslim forces succeeded in rescuing the prisoners from Charlemagne's defeated armies, foremost among them Sulayman al-Arabi, and returned him to Zaragoza. Of the prisoners, only the commander Tha'laba remained, as they were unable to liberate him; he remained in captivity and was later released following

⁴² Syed Ameer Ali, *A Short History of the Saracens*, p. 393.

⁴³ Shakib Arslan, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁴⁴ Al-Ma'adhidi, *op. cit.*, p. 89; Husayn Mu'nis, *op. cit.*, p. 302; Einhard, *Life of Charlemagne*, p. 76.

⁴⁵ Roncevaux (Renshavala): The Roncevaux Pass is located at the western end of the Pyrenees, 20 km northeast of Pamplona. It is one of the passes used by the Romans in ancient times to cross the Pyrenees from north to south. The Arabs also used it during their first crossing into France. See: Einhard, *Life of Charlemagne*, p. 77.

⁴⁶ Ali Adham, *Falcon of Quraysh*, p. 93.

negotiations between Charlemagne and Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil⁴⁵. It is said that the rear guard of Charlemagne's army was led by a knight from Brittany known as Hruodland or Roland. The Muslims and Basques attacked the guard, inflicting a devastating slaughter. The commander and his companions showed great valor and resilience, but Roland and most of the rear guard were killed and thrown into the valley. The attackers secured vast amounts of booty, and Charlemagne was unable to avenge his army⁴⁶. However, Charlemagne did not lose hope of returning soon; evidence of this is that he destroyed the walls of Pamplona so that the Roncevaux Pass would remain defenseless⁴⁷. This defeat is considered the only setback in Charlemagne's military history, casting a shadow over his previous victories⁴⁸.

The Muslim army succeeded in rescuing its prisoners from the defeated armies of Charlemagne, most notably Sulayman al-Arabi, who was brought

⁴⁷ Syed Ameer Ali, *A Short History of the Saracens*, p. 393. However, historical accounts do not fully detail who led the attack on the rear guard—whether it was the Arabs assisted by the Basques or the Basques assisted by the Arabs. Analyzing the events, we find that the reason for this attack was the revenge of the Saxon tribes against Charlemagne after he destroyed their city. This was carried out with the help of Arab elements, although sources do not specify their number. Here we refer to the participation of Sulayman al-Arabi's sons out of a desire to avenge their father's capture and liberate him, with the help of their father's army that had besieged Zaragoza.

⁴⁸ Husayn Mu'nis, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

back to Zaragoza. Among the captives, only Commander Thalaba remained, as they were unable to liberate him at that time; he stayed a prisoner until he was released following negotiations between Charlemagne and Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil⁴⁹. It is said that the rear guard of Charlemagne's army was led by a knight from the region of Brittany known as Roland. The Muslims and the Basques launched an attack on the rear guard, inflicting heavy casualties. Although the commander and his companions showed great bravery and steadfastness, Roland and most of Charlemagne's army were killed and cast into the depths of the valley. The attackers managed to seize a vast amount of booty, and Charlemagne was unable to avenge his army⁵⁰. Nevertheless, Charlemagne did not lose hope of a near return, as evidenced by his destruction of the walls of the city of Pamplona to ensure that the Roncesvalles Pass remained devoid of defenses⁵¹. This defeat is considered the only setback in Charlemagne's military history, casting a shadow over his

previous victories, which offered him no consolation⁵².

Sulayman al-Arabi and al-Husayn ibn Yahya al-Ansari returned to Zaragoza, yet they did not cease instigating unrest and calling for rebellion and defiance against the Emir of Al-Andalus, who eventually succeeded in silencing this front of insurgency in 166 AH⁵³.

What can be noted in this regard is that Arabs in general, and historians in particular, stood amazed by Charlemagne's campaign, as he had no need to gain new enemies, especially since his lands at that time were not subject to Arab attacks. However, historical studies have revealed a set of reasons that led him to undertake this campaign. Foremost among these was the desire for expansion beyond the Pyrenees and the fulfillment of a recurring dream: establishing an empire that would evoke the memory of the Roman Empire in terms of vastness and grandeur. Secondly, he sought to secure his southern borders from Arab threats by adopting a policy of "offense as a

⁴⁹ Al-Maadidi, *ibid.*, p. 89.

⁵⁰ Husayn Mu'nis, *op. cit.*, p. 302; Muna Hassan, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

⁵¹ Carlson, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁵² Herbert Fisher, *A History of Europe: The Middle Ages*, translated by Muhammad Muhammad Ziyada and Al-Sayyid al-Baz al-Arini, 6th ed., Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt, 1369 AH / 1950 AD, p. 95.

⁵³ In this regard, we mention how al-Dakhil managed to eliminate his Muslim opponents. Ibn al-Athir records concerning the elimination of the lord of Zaragoza: "Al-Husayn ibn Yahya broke his covenants with al-Dakhil in Zaragoza. Abd al-Rahman sent Ghalib ibn Thumama against him with a massive army; they fought, and a group of

the rebel's companions were captured, including his son Yahya. They were handed over to Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil, who executed them brutally. In 166 AH, al-Dakhil marched to Zaragoza himself, besieged it, restricted it, and set up catapults against it." The author of *Akhbar Majmu'a* mentions that he set up thirty-six catapults against the city and besieged its people severely until they submitted to him and al-Husayn was killed. See: Ibn al-Athir al-Jazari (d. 630 AH), *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, 1st ed., Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, Beirut, Lebanon, 1407 AH / 1987 AD, p. 249; Anonymous, *Akhbar Majmu'a*, p. 105; Husayn Mu'nis, *op. cit.*, p. 303; Ibn Idhari al-Marrakushi, *Al-Bayan al-Maghrib fi Akhbar al-Andalus wa al-Maghrib*, p. 57.

means of defense"⁵⁴. The direct cause—the incitement by Arab leaders—remained a secondary factor that Charlemagne exploited as an additional justification for invading Islamic Spain.

Negotiations between the Two Parties:

When both Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil and Charlemagne realized the strength of the opposing side and the difficulty of achieving a decisive victory, they opted for negotiations and truces as an alternative method through which both parties could feel secure. To culminate this, al-Dakhil dispatched a delegation to negotiate with Charlemagne. The purpose was to secure the release of Tha'laba, the commander of al-Dakhil's army. The delegation carried an offer to Charlemagne involving a truce and peace treaty between the two sides, and the situation indeed calmed down, albeit with extreme caution from both parties⁵⁵.

It appears that both sides were in need of peace. Charlemagne sought to consolidate his empire and increase its readiness to repel attacks from the Saxons, whom he fought for nearly thirty years before finally forcing them to convert to Christianity. On his part, Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil sought, through peace and truce, to consolidate his authority and devote his efforts to

suppressing opposition movements that followed one after another almost without end.

Nevertheless, Charlemagne, the Frankish tyrant, remained apprehensive of Emir al-Dakhil, treating him with great calculated caution. This was evidenced by his fortification of the regions situated on the Muslim borders, where he stationed combatants. He also unified Septimania and Aquitaine into a single kingdom, appointing one of his sons, Ludwig⁵⁶, over it.

What distinguished the reign of Abd al-Rahman ibn Mu'awiya was that he did not adopt an aggressive stance toward the rulers of the North in general, or the Franks in particular. He was always the first to seek truces and never rejected any delegation from any region seeking peace. He chose a strategy of defending his territories and repelling aggression against them⁵⁷.

The first signs of peace between the two parties emerged during the final days of Abd al-Rahman ibn Mu'awiya's rule over Al-Andalus. However, a close examination of the text provided by al-Maqqari in his book *Nafh al-Tib* leads to the conclusion that Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil was the one who initiated the peace and truce, despite the strength and vigor of his state. Al-Maqqari states: "And Abd al-Rahman addressed Qarluh [Charlemagne], the King of the

⁵⁴ Einhard, Life of Charlemagne, edited by Adel Zaitoun, Dar Hassan for Printing and Publishing, 1st ed., 1410 AH / 1989 AD, p. 74.

⁵⁵ Al-Ma'adhidi, op. cit. , p. 90.

⁵⁶ Muna Hassan, op. cit. , p. 182; Ibrahim Ali Tarkhan, Muslims in Europe in the Middle Ages,

Sijill al-Arab Foundation, Cairo, Egypt, 1966, p. 183.

⁵⁷ Ubada Abd al-Rahman Kuhaylah, Falcon of Quraysh: Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil, Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi for Printing and Publishing, 1968, p. 110.

Franks—who was among the tyrants of the Franks—after having contended with him for a time; he found him to be of solid mettle and complete virility. Thus, he inclined toward diplomacy with him and invited him to a marriage alliance; Charlemagne responded favorably to the peace, but the marriage alliance was not consummated⁵⁸.

In truth, the matter is shrouded in ambiguity and divided by differing perspectives. The historian Joseph Aschbach doubts who initiated the proposal, believing it most likely that the Emir of Al-Andalus, Ibn Mu'awiya, was the one who made the offer⁵⁹. Conversely, others argue that Charlemagne was the initiator and that al-Dakhil rejected the proposal. This problematic leads us to pose the following questions:

- Who worked to test the other and gauge their pulse regarding the proposal?
- Who was the first to act?
- Who offered peace and a marriage alliance to the other?

To understand the meaning of al-Maqqari's words, we must analyze the historical events preceding the resort to peace, truces, and the exchange of

delegations. Charlemagne did not launch any attack after the one he conducted alongside his Arab and Berber allies in 161 AH; he waited until after the death of Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil to seize Barcelona in 181 AH⁶⁰. Consequently, we can say that Charlemagne's realization of al-Dakhil's strength and the difficulty of engaging in a military conflict—which might cost him dearly, especially with non-Muslim adversaries lurking at the edges of his kingdom—was a decisive factor.

The second point to highlight is the humiliating loss suffered by the Frankish armies and the heavy casualties resulting from the final battle. These events shook Charlemagne's prestige and status; in such a situation, it was necessary for him to lean toward peace to rearrange his affairs and work on strengthening the army that had failed to seize Zaragoza or breach its fortifications. Furthermore, al-Dakhil's departure with the army of Cordoba to save the city reinforced Charlemagne's conviction that such an undertaking was no longer feasible, at least during the reign of Ibn Mu'awiya⁶¹.

Returning to al-Maqqari's aforementioned text to explain the phrase "...after having contended with

by Dr. Ihsan Abbas, Dar Sadir, Beirut, Lebanon, 1408 AH / 1988 AD, Vol. 01, pp. 330, 331.

⁵⁸ Muna Hassan, op. cit., , p. 182; Muhammad Muhammad Mursi al-Shaykh, The Frankish State and its Relationship with the Umayyads in Al-Andalus until the Late Tenth Century (755-976 AD / 138-366 AH), University Culture Foundation, 1401 AH - 1981 AD, p. 81.

⁵⁹ Ahmed ibn Muhammad al-Maqqari al-Tilmisani, *Nafh al-Tib min Ghusn al-Andalus al-Ratib wa Dhikr Wazirih Lisan al-Din ibn al-Khatib*, edited

⁶⁰ Abd al-Rahman Ali al-Hajji, Andalusian Diplomatic Relations with Western Europe during the Umayyad Period (138-366 AH / 755-976 AD): A Cultural Study, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, 2004, p. 174.

⁶¹ Abd al-Rahman Ali al-Hajji, , Ibid, p. 175.

him for a time, he found him to be of solid mettle and complete virility," it implies that Charlemagne was the one who tested the Andalusian Emir and found those qualities in him. Historical events prove that al-Dakhil did not involve himself in situations with Charlemagne to be tested; on the contrary, he was well aware of Charlemagne's previous victories. If we complete the descriptions provided by al-Maqqari in the subsequent pages, which he cited from Ibn Hayyan—such as: "...he established the administrative bureaus, raised the pavilions, fixed the stipends, unfurled the banners, and mobilized the armies... thus the great kings acknowledged him, feared his presence, and protected his domain, and it was not long before Al-Andalus submitted to him..."—it becomes clear that a person described in such terms is one to whom delegations and travelers would flock to forge various agreements⁶².

As for the matter of the marriage alliance, according to Ibn Hayyan, the historian of Al-Andalus, Charlemagne invited al-Dakhil to peace and a marriage alliance. Al-Dakhil accepted the peace but declined the marriage alliance⁶³, attributing the reason to his failing health, advanced age⁶⁴, and the

exhaustion he endured during the stages of establishing the Umayyad Emirate⁶⁵.

Conclusion:

The Franks never wavered in their pursuit to eliminate the Islamic presence in Al-Andalus, despite the policy of appeasement shown by their kings during the reign of Emir Abd al-Rahman ibn Mu'awiya. This pragmatic diplomacy was born of their realization that the parity of power at that stage rendered the task of southward expansion exceedingly difficult. This provides definitive evidence of the deeply rooted Crusading spirit within them, fueled by the incitement and blessing of the Church, which viewed every assault on Islamic territories as a "war of salvation" blessed—in their claim—by God. However, a period after the death of al-Dakhil, Charlemagne revived his expansionist military projects toward Al-Andalus in 185 AH. He succeeded in seizing Barcelona after a grueling siege, transforming it into a Frankish stronghold used to launch raids against the Islamic provinces.

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⁶² Abd al-Rahman Ali al-Hajji, , *Ibid*, p. 176.

⁶³ Abd al-Rahman Ali al-Hajji, *Ibid*, p. 176.

⁶⁴ Al-Maqqari's narrative is unclear as to who offered the marriage alliance, but 'Inan mentions that Abd al-Rahman requested to marry one of Charlemagne's daughters, possibly his eldest daughter, Rotrude. Reinaud suggests that the "Abd al-Rahman" intended here is Abd al-Rahman II (al-Awsat), the grandson of al-Dakhil, whose relationship with Charlemagne was good. See: 'Inan, *The Islamic State in Al-Andalus*, Vol. 1, p. 188.

⁶⁵ Ubada Abd al-Rahman Kahila, *Saqr Quraysh: Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil*, Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi for Printing and Publishing, 1968, p. 110.

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