Al-Ḥīrah, the Naṣrids, and Their Legacy: New Perspectives on Late Antique Iranian History
Isabel Toral-Niehoff and Jesús Lorenzo Jiménez

Abstract

This paper argues that the famous conqueror of al-Andalus, Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr, who originally came from ʿAyn al-Tamr, a town under the hegemony of Naṣrid al-Ḥīrah, transmitted aspects of Sasanian administrative practice to al-Andalus and hence to Europe, as evidenced by the taxation terms tasca and kafiz attested in Latin and Romance texts. This specific argument is embedded in a larger argument about cultural hybridity centering on the city of al-Ḥīrah as a pre-Islamic and Islamic contact zone among cultures—Roman, Iranian, Arab; Christian, Muslim; tribal and urban. It thus links the processes of transculturation observable in al-Ḥīrah with developments in the far edges of the Islamic world through the person of the conqueror Mūsā b. Nuṣayr.

doi: 10.17613/3ty6-9y21
Mizan 3 (2018): 123–147
Introduction

Over the last decades, Late Antiquity has been increasingly apprehended as a temporal category having its own significance, defined by the binding elements of empire and monotheism, and less as a period interpreted under the sign of antique decadence, as it was before.¹ This reconceptualization has caused its timeline to be gradually extended right into the third/ninth and even the fourth/tenth century, leading to the inclusion of the Umayyad and (partially) the Abbasid Caliphate, to now be interpreted as forms of late antique monotheistic empire.² Furthermore, the geographical focus has shifted towards including the areas located at the eastern and southern peripheries of the Roman Empire, whose peoples regularly interacted with Greco-Roman culture and participated in the gradual conversion to monotheistic religions. Against this background—especially given that the Sasanian Empire was not only the main rival and competitor of Rome, but also in continuous contact with it as its most powerful neighbor—it does not come as a surprise that the late antique period in Iran is receiving increasing scholarly attention.³

In this context, it is crucial to investigate liminal contact zones between both empires that acted as spaces of cultural contact, exchange, and cross-pollination, thus spreading late antique models beyond the Roman frontiers and simultaneously functioning as focal points of “Iranization.” The following study concentrates on one of these hotspots, namely the Naṣrid principality in Iraq, an Arab petty state around the city of al-Ḥirah in southern Iraq, whose dominion reached as far as al-Anbār, Dūmat al-Jandal and ʿAyn al-Tamr, and which played a crucial role in functioning as a transitional and translational zone between Iran, Arabia, and Rome.⁴ The purpose of this article is to provide a survey on the current state of research about al-Ḥirah, as well as to sketch recent discoveries and innovative approaches in this critical subfield of late antique Iranian history.
Al-Ḥīrah and the Naṣrids in the east: New discoveries and innovative approaches

Considering the above-mentioned shifts in the study of Late Antiquity, as well as the relevance of al-Ḥīrah for the investigation of late antique Iran, it might come as a surprise that its investigation has only gained momentum in the last few years. Here we may rely on a monograph by one of the authors of this article published in 2014, as well as on several recent articles, in addition to diverse novel studies that discuss topics relevant to the broader historical context. This state of affairs is in contrast to the many studies published over previous decades on the Jafnid petty kingdom, the most obvious parallel of the Naṣrids, a tribal state that played a very similar role at the fringes of the Roman Empire in Greater Syria in the same period. The imbalance is partly due to the difficulties in the source material. In the case of the Jafnids, archaeological, numismatic, and epigraphic evidence abounds and has been investigated broadly by Roman archaeologists and ancient historians. Furthermore, as allies of the Romans, the Jafnids have a significant presence in contemporaneous Greek and Roman historiography. The material remains of the Naṣrids of al-Ḥīrah, in contrast, have much less frequently been investigated, and have suffered from the general shortcomings of late antique archaeology in Mesopotamia. In addition, as Persian allies, the Naṣrids rarely appear in Greek, Roman, and Syriac sources, and since Sasanian historiography is mostly lost, we must rely on later Arabic reports from Islamic times.

Concerning the archaeology of al-Ḥīrah, the situation has indeed been complicated for a long time, but will hopefully improve soon. Until recently, we have had to rely on the sketchy results from a preliminary excavation undertaken in the 1930s and a brief campaign in 1946, complemented by those of a German survey of the area in the 1970s and that of a Japanese excavation in the 1980s in the nearby site of Ain Shai’a. The ruins of al-Ḥīrah, located in the outskirts of modern, rapidly growing Kufa and Najaf, have almost disappeared and partly been overbuilt, and the long-lasting military conflicts in the zone have impeded
any continuous archaeological research for a long time. However, the current calming of the situation in southern Iraq may provide opportunity to investigate the zone anew: there is an ongoing German-Iraqi archaeological survey that has been taking place since 2015 that pursues an integrated approach, focusing on questions of settlement and urban development, and which promises to yield very significant new insights soon. It has already brought to light interesting minor findings such as pottery, fragments of glass vessels, stucco plaques with incised and colored crosses, and copper coins.\textsuperscript{16} It is to be said that al-Ḥīrah has an advantage in that the site has not been disturbed by building activities until recently, so that, despite the difficulties already mentioned, we may expect exciting new insights.

In terms of the written record, the study of al-Ḥīrah must draw mainly on the rich Arabic tradition of historiography, which has the disadvantage of having been composed centuries later during Islamic times, and so requires critical assessment based on a good knowledge of the peculiarities of the Arabic textual tradition.\textsuperscript{17} However, the strand in this tradition relevant to al-Ḥīrah is most probably based on local Ḥīran traditions collected in nearby Kufa such as local chronicles, informants, and dynastic lists,\textsuperscript{18} which permits one to grasp the insider’s perspective, in contrast to the case of the Jafnids, whose traditions are much less attested in Arabic sources.\textsuperscript{19} In this regard we may also expect new insights, as is shown by recent discoveries. From the 1980s, we have the publication of the \textit{Manāqib al-mazyadiyyah} of Abū‘l-Baqā\textsuperscript{20}, a very valuable source of the fifth/eleventh century, that was already used in manuscript by M. J. Kister in the 1960s,\textsuperscript{21} and contains numerous passages not preserved in the usual well-known sources used by Rothstein.\textsuperscript{22} Furthermore, the recent discovery of the so-called “Haddad Chronicle,”\textsuperscript{23} which has been identified as a missing portion of the \textit{Chronicle of Seert}, permits us to increase our knowledge of the early history of al-Ḥīrah, for example, by shedding light on its early tribal composition.\textsuperscript{24}

Beyond the discovery of new evidence, the application of new interpretative frameworks on the already known material is opening fresh perspectives on al-Ḥīrah and its legacies. For example, Greg Fisher
has taken concepts from anthropology and analyzed the Arabs in the limes or boundary zone from the point of view of state-tribe interaction, highlighting aspects of tribal leadership in peripheral polities at the Roman frontier.\textsuperscript{25}

Another approach that promises to be fruitful is to look at al-Ḥīrah as an example of a borderland area and as a cultural translation zone, both in the pre-Islamic and in the Islamic period, as is illustrated by the following.

The petty state of al-Ḥīrah can be interpreted as an Iranian frontier state that parallels the multifaceted nature of Roman frontier states like the foederati in North Africa and Germania. This is, first of all, the consequence of its geographic location at the banks of the Middle Euphrates. On the one hand, its proximity to Ctesiphon, the Sasanian capital—located 100 kilometers to the northeast—ininserted al-Ḥīrah into the Persian sphere of influence and ended up transforming the petty-kings of al-Ḥīrah from allies into dependent “vassals” of the Sasanian King of Kings; on the other hand, its location at the western frontier of the Sasanian Empire, looking westwards to the Syrian desert and ultimately to the Roman Empire, as well as southwards to the Arabian Peninsula, determined its key strategic function for the Sasanians as buffer state.

As a consequence, the Naṣrids were commissioned by the Persians first to wage proxy wars against the allies of the Romans, the Jafnids, with the aim to keep the conflict between both empires on a manageable level, and second, to serve the Persians as both a protective shield against the Arab tribes from the peninsula and also as useful mediators with aggressive Bedouin.\textsuperscript{26} In addition, al-Ḥīrah became a neutral zone populated by very diverse religious communities that suffered persecution elsewhere, like Monophysite monks and Manichaeans, tolerated by the pagan dynasty of the city that sought to maintain room to maneuver in a period when political considerations, especially negotiating alliances, had come to be inflected by questions of religious identity.

In cultural terms, this condition as frontier state meant that al-Ḥīrah occupied an in-between space, typical for borderland areas, characterized by a high degree of diverse cultural, linguistic, and societal
hybridity. The population was composed of various communities bearing a broad and often overlapping spectrum of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious features: tribal and urban Arabs, Persian noblemen and soldiers, Syriac Christians, pagan Aramaeans, Manichaean, and Jewish communities. A telling example is the polyglot ‘ibād, the local Christian Arab community, whose members can be characterized as multilingual transcultural agents and brokers. Cultural innovations associated with Late Antiquity such as literacy, monotheistic notions of spiritual salvation and political power, and biblical narratives and religious organization all reached the Arabian Peninsula principally via transmitters like these ‘ibād. The cultural hybridity in al-Ḥirah further parallels its structural diversity: the simultaneous coexistence of tribalism and semi-nomadism with peculiar forms of Arab urbanism and semi-state monarchical structures is attested in this period; we also find highly developed ecclesiastical and monastic structures and building activities. As a hybrid frontier zone, al-Ḥirah thus became a crucial bridge between the Romans, the Sasanians, and the Arabs—in other words, a space of cultural translation.

The historical importance of the Arab-Iranian matrix of al-Ḥirah is further to be seen in its role as long-term mediator and translation zone of late antique models to what became classical Islam. Classical Islam—here understood as the canonized cultural and religious model of the “Golden Age” in Baghdad—was the product of the society of the early Abbasid period, and was shaped in Iraq, namely in Kufa, Basra, and Baghdad. As a consequence of this, we must assume that the Naṣrid legacy in Iraqi al-Ḥirah was much more important as a late antique substratum for Islam than the Jafnīd legacy, simply because of its proximity to the cultural centers of the Abbasid period.

Indeed, the Arabic textual tradition tells us that al-Ḥirah served as an important historical reference and model, and that it functioned as a site of memory and remembrance, a symbol of the theme of sic transit Gloria mundi, and as a frequent topos in literature, in which al-Ḥirah became the main site associated with pre-Islamic kings, poets, vineyards, monasteries, and luxury, but also with the abhorrent jāhiliyyah of pagan kings. The vicinity of al-Ḥirah with its Islamic successor-heir city Kufa,
one of the birthplaces of the study of Arabic history and antiquities as well as grammar and philology, further explains the prominence of al-Ḥirah in Arabic historiographical and adab narratives, since Ḥirān and Kufan informants were thus able to inscribe and glorify their history as an essential part of the (re)constructed pre-Islamic Arab past.\textsuperscript{31}

These early Arabic scholars and philologists, men like the philologist Ibn al-Mufaḍḍal, the antiquarian Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabīb, and the family of al-Kalbī, would establish the canon of classical Arabic culture and memory.\textsuperscript{32} They managed to establish therein the Ḥirān court of the Naṣrids, of al-Mundhir and al-Nuʿmān, and canonized al-Ḥirah as the splendorous center of early pre-Islamic poetry, especially of wine-poetry and early panegyrics.\textsuperscript{33} Al-Ḥirah also became the emblematic site where Arab-Iranian cultural contacts had taken place, as reflected in the legends surrounding Bahram Gūr, the Sasanian prince of the fifth century CE who lived as young man among the Arabs of al-Ḥirah, where he learned Arab ways of hunting, but also introduced such Iranian customs as polo—a veritable cultural hero who embodies the long-lasting history of endemic cultural contact between Arabs and Iranians.\textsuperscript{34}

The late antique legacy as mediated through al-Ḥirah would also affect Islamic history in an indirect way, since the early decades of Islamic history would take place in another geographical setting, namely in the northwestern Arabian Peninsula, in the Ḥijāz. The Arabs dwelling there had never been direct allies of the great powers of the day, but nevertheless they did not fall outside of the late antique world thanks to their contacts with the Naṣrids and the Jafnids.\textsuperscript{35} In the sixth century, Yathrib (later Medina) had fallen under the suzerainty of the Naṣrids and thus into the sphere of Sasanian influence.\textsuperscript{36} The well-known local hegemony of the Jewish tribes in Medina is probably to be seen in this context, since the Sasanians tended to foster the Jews as a counterbalance to the Christian Arabs allied with Rome.\textsuperscript{37} Merchants, probably from al-Ḥirah, seem to have introduced Manichaeism, probably Christianity, and even the knowledge of Iranian epics into Yathrib/Medina.\textsuperscript{38} Poets who frequented the court in al-Ḥirah spread the news about Arab Christianity and the community of ḥibād all over the peninsula, as well as the know-
ledge that there were literate, Iranized, and urban Arabs. The Naṣrids also controlled the caravan routes in central Arabia on behalf of the Sasanians. Mecca and the Quraysh, in contrast, remained independent, but had close commercial connections to Syria and to the tribes dwelling there.

The results of this late antique imprint are to be felt in our main source for the origins of Islam, i.e., in the Qurʾān itself. The Qurʾānic kerygma not only claims to constitute a continuation of the earlier revealed religions of Late Antiquity, i.e., of Christianity and Judaism. It also reflects the religious language of the contemporary universal religions by combining late antique notions of universal leadership and monotheism with the birth of a new community that surpasses tribal and ethnic boundaries. Furthermore, Muḥammad’s idea of prophethood incarnates values associated with the holy man of Late Antiquity (e.g., individual morality, asceticism) that were further amalgamated with ideas of charismatic political authority modeled according to the concept of imperial rule. In addition, the Qurʾān addresses an Arabic-speaking audience that was not only imbued with a mixture of polytheistic creeds and tribal values, but that was also familiar with biblical legends, monotheism, and ideas about scripture. Thus, we can state that the Naṣrids and the Jafnids contributed first to familiarizing the Arabs with late antique cultural and political models and second to shaping the Meccan milieu where the Prophet Muḥammad proclaimed the Qurʾānic message.

*Al-Ḥīrah in the west: New perspectives on al-Andalus*

The importance of al-Ḥīrah and its people as mediators and cultural translators of Late Antique Iran can be seen in unexpected and very distant regions, as will be shown in the following example that further exemplifies the fruitfulness of considering unusual source material such as—in this case—Latin and Romance sources.

The Iranian influence in the Islamic West has often been minimized or reduced to cultural elements, mediated by personalities of Abbasid
background like the famous musician Ziryāb or the historians of the al-Rāzī family, who originally hailed from Baghdad and came to al-Andalus in the third/ninth century introducing the Iranian/Abbasid model of courtly culture into the then-provincial Umayyad court of al-Andalus.\(^\text{43}\)

However, as will be shown in the following, the Iranian presence in al-Andalus may be dated already to the arrival of the first Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula, and continued for several centuries in spheres linked to political and economic power such as taxation and systems of weights and measures. The bearer of this Iranian influence was none other than Mūsā b. Nuṣayr (d. 97–98/716), the famed conqueror of al-Andalus, who originally came from ‘Ayn al-Tamr, a town already mentioned as within the dominion of the Naṣrid king of al-Ḥīrah, and, as we will see, similarly populated by Arab Christians.\(^\text{44}\)

**Mūsā b. Nuṣayr**

In 11/633, the caliph Abū Bakr sent his commander, Khālid b. al-Walid, to Iraq at the head of an army of Muslims, thus initiating the swift conquest of Mesopotamia. The first city to fall was al-Ḥīrah, which would negotiate its surrender. From there, Khālid moved toward al-Anbār, whose inhabitants also came to terms with the conquerors and capitulated, and then marched with his soldiers in the direction of the nearby ‘Ayn al-Tamr. Unlike in previous cities, they confronted there a mixed army of Persians and Arabs loyal to the Sasanians.\(^\text{45}\) The Muslims arrived at the gates of the city and, after the resistance of the garrison had vanished, plundered it.

The event was memorialized by numerous informants, whose accounts, all very similar, became part of several compilations.\(^\text{46}\) According to the version of events in Ṭabarī, it was Khālid himself who entered the city, where he found forty young men (ghilmān), who would be held as hostages, at the moment when they were studying the scriptures inside a church (kanīṣah). Among them was Nuṣayr, the father of Mūsā. This account raises several questions of interest connected to the origins of Mūsā b. Nuṣayr.
The first question concerns the important presence in ‘Ayn al-Tamr in 12/633–4 of Arabs who collaborated with the Persians. As has been mentioned above, the Arab kingdom of al-Ḥīrah based its existence as a buffer and frontier state on successful collaboration between the Naṣrid monarchs and the Sasanian emperors, but while al-Ḥīrah and al-Anbār had refused to resist the Muslim conquerors and negotiated a peaceful surrender, ‘Ayn al-Tamr offered resistance. This indicates either that the Persian presence was particularly strong there, or that the local Arabs felt a special loyalty towards the Sasanian sovereign.

The second issue is the great weight that Christianity seems to have had in the city. From the point of view of church history, the existence of Christians in ‘Ayn al-Tamr is not surprising at all, since Christianity had had a significant presence on Persian soil for centuries before the arrival of Islam in the region. From 410 CE onwards, the Persian church even counted on an independent ecclesiastical organization that would pursue the “Nestorian” doctrine, a development that was tolerated and even supported by the Sasanian dynasty, eager to counterbalance the aggressive religious policy of the Roman Empire since Constantine.

The third concerns the fact that the ghilmān were captured while learning the scriptures, that is, receiving ecclesiastical education and formation (probably in Syriac), which suggests that their families enjoyed a high status among the Arab tribes. Apparently the Christians in ‘Ayn al-Tamr played a similar role as the famous ʿibād from al-Ḥīrah, forming a local, urbanized, and literate Arab elite. In any case, given their status as Arabs, their social rank would always be lower than that of the Persian aristocracy, which, after the suppression of al-Ḥīrah’s kingdom in 602 CE, occupied the highest positions in the local administration. Their hostage status supports this hypothesis: the practice of taking hostages among the children of prominent families functioned as warrant of their loyalty or of non-aggression; it is understandable in the period preceding the Islamic conquest, when relations between the Sasanian authorities and the Arab tribes were going through very tense moments.

The chroniclers have not preserved much evidence about Nuṣayr, the father of Mūsā. The texts repeat again and again that his son Mūsā
was a mawla of the Marwānid Umayyads, a condition that he presumably inherited from his father. However, despite the prominence of the Umayyads in the conquest of Syria, there is no testimony that allows us to locate specific members of the Umayyad lineage taking part in the conquest of Iraq. When and how did the encounter between the captive Nuṣayr and the Umayyad Marwānids take place? In the absence of information, we can only speculate. Thus, several compilers transmit the notice that the captives of ʿAyn al-Tamr were dispatched to Medina and delivered to the caliph ʿUthmān.\textsuperscript{50} The only report we have about Nuṣayr after his captivity places him, like his fellow captives, in conditions very far from what could be expected of a servant or manumitted slave. The unique notice, which must date to sometime after 41/661, places Nuṣayr in the closest circle of the caliph Muʿāwiyah b. Abī Sufyān (r. 41/661-60/680), as a member of his bodyguard no less.\textsuperscript{51}

Mūsā was born in Syria, in the village (qaryah) of Kafr Mary, in the year 19/640.\textsuperscript{52} The first decades of his life remain totally obscure and we will have to wait until the 60s/680s to find an isolated but very revealing indication that allows us to state that, as with so many other mawāli, Mūsā continued to prosper under the Umayyads. It is a report mentioning his participation in the civil war between the supporters of the Marwānid Umayyads and those of the anti-caliph ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr. In this conflict, Egypt favored the latter, so that the Marwānids sent an army there under the command of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Marwān (d. 85–86/705), future governor of the region. In that army also came Bishr ibn Marwān, son and brother of caliphs, and next to him appears Mūsā b. Nuṣayr.\textsuperscript{53} There is no further mention of Mūsā’s participation in this war, although Ṭabarī notes the strong involvement of Bishr in favor of his brothers in Mesopotamia.\textsuperscript{54}

At an indeterminate date between 73/692 and 76/695, Mūsā appeared alongside Bishr b. Marwān in the government of Iraq, his country of origin.\textsuperscript{55} The text of the chronicler Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871) does not indicate his position, but one source points out that he held the office of vizier and counsellor (wāzir wa-mushīr); another, that he was appointed by the caliph himself as the collector of the kharāj or
land tax in Basra.\textsuperscript{56} We might note first his proximity to his family’s place of origin, ‘Ayn al-Tamr, and second, as Morony has pointed out, that this was a region where the taxation system of the Sasanian era still had very considerable weight.\textsuperscript{57}

The death of Bishr in 75/694–5 seemed first to be a setback for Mūsā, since it revealed that there were problems in the economic management, which brought him the enmity of the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik. According to a testimony collected by Ibn ‘Idhārī, Mūsā was accused of appropriating money from the public treasury (\textit{al-amwāl}), wherefore the caliph ordered him to be apprehended and condemned him to death.\textsuperscript{58} Mūsā then asked for the protection of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, who was already governor of Egypt, and it was agreed that the sentence should be commuted to the payment of a considerable sum valued at 100,000 dinars, half of which came from the account of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz himself. Having thus resolved the conflict, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz brought him to Egypt, and a few years later, on a date between 78–79/698 and 89–90/708, appointed him governor of Ifrīqiyyah, a position subordinate to the governor of Egypt.\textsuperscript{59} From Ifrīqiyyah, Mūsā would make the leap to al-Andalus in the year 92–93/711. He would never return to Iraq; other campaigns awaited him in the western Mediterranean, which would transform him into a semi-legendary character and the hero of the conquest of al-Andalus, at the side of Tāriq b. Ziyād.

Having established that Mūsā’s origin in ‘Ayn al-Tamr points to a good knowledge of administrative and political practices ultimately rooted in late antique Iranian traditions, and given his eminent role in the first years of al-Andalus, it is unsurprising to detect traces of Iranian taxation and measure systems in the Islamic West, as will be shown in the following.

\textit{The fossilization of Persian elements in Romance language: Taxes and measures}

The year 92–93/711 marked the beginning of the Islamic conquest of the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo and the establishment of al-Andalus under Islamic government, first under the suzerainty of the \textit{wilāyah} (rule)
of Ifrīqiyyah, then under the Umayyad Emirate. In the following years, Islamic expansion there would continue, coming to embrace almost the whole Iberian Peninsula as well as dominating the province of Septimania, to the north of the Pyrenees.

However, halfway through the second/eighth century, the conquests halted, and now began the process of expansion of the Latin kingdoms at the expense of the Andalusian territory. First came the Carolingians, to the north of the Pyrenees, advancing into the northeast of the peninsula, conquering Narbonne in the year 141–142/759, Girona in 168–169/785, and Barcelona in 184–185/801. At the same time, new political entities started to emerge in the Cantabrian area, gradually evolving into the Latin kingdoms of the north of the peninsula. In their advance towards the south, these political entities would take on many of the Islamic institutions of the conquered territory, which becomes visible in the surviving documentation of these states, written in Latin and Romance. In particular, the Latin kingdoms would adopt Islamic taxation and measures systems; thus, the Arab origin of Romance forms like the tax of the alcabala, or measures like the almud, the arroba, and the arrobada is well known. 60

This peculiarity of the Iberian Peninsula allows us to reconstruct the first layer of these institutions as they existed at the time of the Islamic conquest through—paradoxically—the Latin documentation, which provides data that otherwise would have been lost. As in other territories of the Dār al-Islām, the early institutions of the conquest period in al-Andalus evolved and disappeared, supplanted and superseded by the canonical Islamic system that was developed later. However, in the territories conquered by the Latin kingdoms, fossilized names reveal a reality that the later Arabic texts seem to ignore. Among these institutions, we can recognize several of Iranian origin, and that can be attributed to the time of the conquest carried out by Mūsā b. Nuṣayr.

The accounts of the conquest of Mesopotamia repeatedly mention the imposition of a certain tribute, the ṭasqā, and the obligation to pay taxes in various measures, including the qafīz. Both terms, ṭasqā and qafīz, appear centuries later in Romanized versions in a place as remote as the
western end of the Mediterranean, in al-Andalus, and do so in a context that stopped being Islamic after its conquest by the Latin kingdoms. These references demonstrate the great weight of the Persian element in the conquest of al-Andalus.

The earliest mention of ṭasqā is found in the Babylonian Talmud, a text that contains a broad set of rules governing the lives of Jews living on Sasanian soil. Among these rules is the obligation to pay the ṭasqā tax, a tax that was justified by the fact that the state was the sole owner of arable land. Those who exploited it, with the right of usufruct, had to satisfy the payment of a fee to the state—of proportional character—that authorized them to exploit these lands.61 With the Islamic conquest, the ṭasqā was levied on the crops of state lands conquered by force (arḍ ‘anwah)62 and was still proportional: in the fourth/tenth century, Qudāmah b. Ja‘far (d. ca. 75/948) still defined the ṭasqā as “taxes (that) are levied on state lands in accordance with the terms of the leases and the quality of the land, and half of the share in crops was levied on the lands.”63 Despite these late references, we can perceive a gradual displacement of the term in favor of kharāj, which ultimately replaces it completely. Unlike the term ṭasqā, probably Iranian Persian, the term kharāj has Qur’ānic resonances.64 However, on the other side of the Mediterranean, and in a Latin context, this tax did not disappear, but rather survived until the late Middle Ages.

The earliest mention of this tax in the Latin sources appears in a document dated 802 CE, which includes the obligation to satisfy the abbey of Caunès (Minervois) with the payment of tascaset decima.65 This first mention of the tax of the tasca appears in an area that had been part of al-Andalus in the Septimania, where the presence of Islam was brief, between 719 and 759 CE, but, according to this document, intense. The references to this tax, the tasca or tascha, are repeated in the Latin documentation on both sides of the eastern end of the Pyrenees, in Septimania and Catalonia, until the later medieval centuries.66 This is not just a question of nomenclature; as Viladrich has shown, as its Eastern equivalent, the tasca/tascha is a tax that is applied for the usufruct of
land for life and has a hereditary character.\textsuperscript{67}

Like \textit{tasqā}, the term \textit{qafīz} has a Persian origin as a measure for aggregates and liquids; it dates at least as far back as the fourth century BCE, when it first was mentioned by Xenophon in the \textit{Anabasis} in an Iranian context.\textsuperscript{68} The Muslims adopted this measure and the Islamic jurists consecrated it as a canonical measure by associating it with the first caliphs. Thus, Abū Yūsuf pointed out in his \textit{Kitāb al-Kharāj} that “when ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb surveyed the lands of al-Sawād, he found them to measure 36,000,000 \textit{jarīb}s, and levied on each \textit{jarīb} of cereal-growing land taxes per dirham or per \textit{qafīz} of yield.”\textsuperscript{69} Note, first, that the appraisal is carried out in an area where the Persians had ruled for centuries, and second, that the surface measure used, the \textit{jarīb}, is also of Persian origin.\textsuperscript{70}

The same term appears in the Latin and Romance documentation of the Iberian Peninsula from the late third/ninth century in the form \textit{kafīz}, \textit{cafiz}, or \textit{cahiz}, as well as its derivative, \textit{kafizada}. The earliest mention in Latin is in a document dating back to 894 CE, which includes the sale of a vineyard in the Maresme, that is, in the eastern end of the Pyrenees, and where the term \textit{kafīcada} is used as a unit of area.\textsuperscript{71} Another mention of the \textit{kafīz}, now as a measure of capacity, is documented in the Ribagorza, in the central Pyrenees region, dated in the year 925 CE.\textsuperscript{72} In the year 931 CE we can document another similar mention in Viguera, in the Ebro valley.\textsuperscript{73} It is evident that by the end of the fourth/tenth century, \textit{kafīz}, as a reference to area or a measure of capacity, was well known throughout the Pyrenean region.\textsuperscript{74}

In both cases, the use of \textit{tasca} and \textit{kafīz} in Latin and Romance indicates an Iranian influence that can only be explained as going back to the oldest layer of Islamic administrative practice in the Iberian Peninsula, which in its turn has roots in a Mesopotamian and Iranian substratum. Having stated this, we must suppose that the governor Mūsā b. Nuṣayr, and maybe other Iranized Arabs from around al-Ḥīrah who had come to form part of the leading elite in the early Umayyad Caliphate, applied their expertise in administrative and taxation matters and thus left an Iranian imprint in a region as far away as al-Andalus.
Conclusion

This survey has shown that the discovery of new evidence in terms of written and archaeological material on the one hand, and the reassessment of already known material inspired by innovative approaches in cultural studies on the other, may yield new insights in the study of al-Ḥīrah and the Naṣrids, and contributes to a better understanding of their role in the context of late antique Iran. It further highlights the key role played by the Christianized and Iranized Arabs of Iraq, soon to become members of the leading elite in the caliphate, as catalysts of cultural contact and Iranization not only in pre-Islamic, but also in Islamic times, when the conquests widened their radius of movement enormously. This process is exemplified by the case of Mūsā b. Nuṣayr, the conqueror of al-Andalus. Finally, it has demonstrated that, by analyzing material that normally falls outside of the scope of a Middle Eastern historian such as Latin documentation, one might detect Iranian influence in unexpected corners of the Mediterranean.
Notes


2. Al-Azmeh has argued extensively in favor of seeing Islamic civilization as the “most successful crystallization” of Late Antiquity; ibid., 2, *et passim*.


28. Greg Fisher has dedicated much of his work to the tribal aspects of the Naṣrid state and to the interactions between the Roman Empire and the Arab tribes.


33. Kirill Dmitriev is preparing a study on the poetical school of al-Ḥīrah in the context of Late Antiquity.

34. Toral-Niehoff, Al-Ḥīra, 68; eadem, “Late Antique Iran and the Arabs,” 120–122.

35. For the relationship between al-Ḥīrah, the Ḥijāz, and other Arabic tribes in particular, cf. Kister, “Al-Ḥīra,” passim.


37. Idem, “Were the Ghassānids and the Byzantines behind Muḥammad’s hijra?,” in Denis Genequand and Christian Julien Robin (eds.), Les Jafnides, des rois arabes au service de Byzance (Vie siècle de l’ère chrétienne) actes du colloque de Paris, 24–25 novembre 2008 (Orient & Méditerranée 17; Paris: Éditions De Bocard, 2015), 268–286. Lecker has even suggested that the Ghassānids—and their Byzantine overlords—were active behind the scene of the hijrah, encouraging the Anṣār to provide Muḥammad and his Companions with a safe haven, and thus to counteract the Jews as Sasanian agents.


39. For example, via poems like the “Creation Poem” by the Ḥīran

40. Garth Fowden, Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Neuwirth et al., The Qurān in Context; Angelika Neuwirth, Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010).


42. Neuwirth, Der Koran als Text der Spätantike, passim.


44. Cf. note 4 above.


47. This border region, however, became also the retreat of disidents, like many Syrian Monophysites and heretic ascetics persecuted by Justin and Justinian. We have reports that the oasis of ʿAyn al-Tamr, known as Payram in Christian sources, became the refuge of the fanatic Monophysite sect of Julian of Halicarnassus; cf. Theresa Hainthaler,
48. For these developments in Persian church history, and particularly in regard to al-Ḥīra, see the survey in Toral-Niehoff, Al-Ḥīra, 151–210.

49. “The Rahā‘in were youths from Arab tribes taken by the kings of al-Ḥīra as hostages guaranteeing that their tribes would not raid the territories of al-Ḥīra and that they would fulfill the terms of their pacts and obligations between them and the kings of al-Ḥīra. They counted—according to a tradition quoted by Abū’l-Baqā‘—500 youths and stayed 6 months at the court of al-Ḥīra. After this period they were replaced by others”; see Kister, “Al-Ḥīra,” 167. As we can deduct from the statement about these hostages in ‘Ayn al-Tamr, the Persians continued this effective practice after their seizure of power in 602 CE.


59. The historians disagree about the date of this event, ranging from 78/697–8 in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (*History of the Conquest of Egypt, North

60. Arnald Steiger, Contribución a la fonética del hispano-árabe y de los arabismos en el ibero-románico y el siciliano (Madrid: CSIC, 1991 [1932]).


63. Ibid., Kitāb al-Kharāj, 221.


67. Ibid., 50.
72. Ramón d’Abadal i de Vinyals, Catalunya Carolíngia, vol: 3/2: Els Comtats de Pallars i Ribagorça (Barcelona: Institut d’Estudis Catalans, 2007), 354: terra juris meis quem abeo de ruptura parentum meorum in castro Avileto, ubi dicitur cubile... et est ad seminandum I k(afiz) (May 925).