In 711, General Tariq ibn Ziyad led an army of Islamic Berbers across the Straits of Gibraltar into southern Spain. In the period following, numerous other Berber and Arab troops poured in and within a few short years seized the southern and eastern two-thirds of the Iberian Peninsula from a faltering Visigothic Kingdom (Burckhardt and Morris 410). To assume that the relative “speed with which the Muslims absorbed the Iberian Peninsula was solely a function of their military prowess would be incorrect” (Crowne). Rather, their success was a result of their willingness to offer favorable terms of surrender to those Christians living in Spain at the time of conquest. Under such terms, Christians were allowed to practice their faith and govern their own communities. While it was customary for Muslims to force conversion of all polytheistic peoples they conquered, Christians were different in that they worshipped the same God, and thus were tolerated as “Peoples of the Book” (“Singular and Plural” 16). As a result, many Christians, especially those living in urban areas, assimilated rapidly to Islamic culture. Esposito et al. argues that “for those Christians, however, who refused to accommodate Islamic culture, the century and a half following the conquest was one of great spiritual anxiety” in which they struggled to maintain their religious identities in an age of necessary coexistence (45-46).

The fifty years following the conquest were marked with great political disagreement to maintain control over their newly conquered Christian territories.
Works Cited


