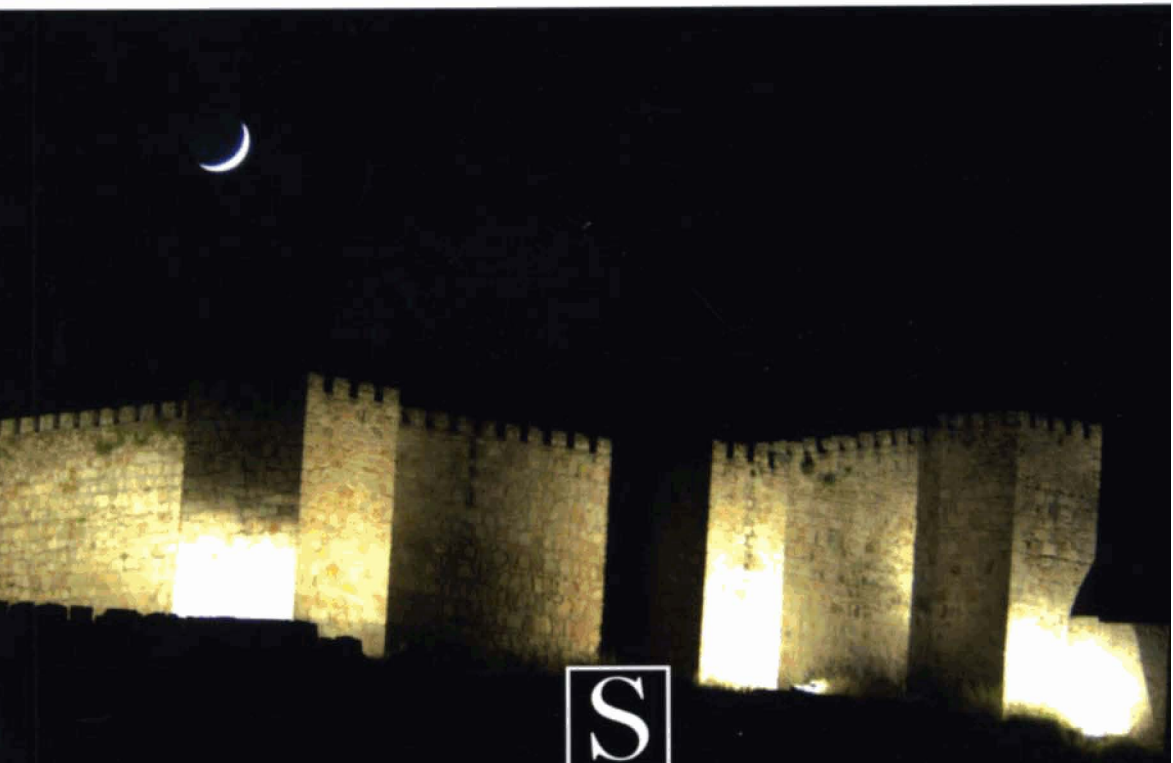




Clive Finlayson

# AL-ANDALUS

*How nature has shaped history*



SANTANA BOOKS

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Photography by the author



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## **al-Andalus**

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## Foreword

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by José S Carrión, Professor of Evolutionary Botany, University of Murcia

*The natural inheritance of everyone who is capable of spiritual life is an unsubdued forest where the wolf howls and the obscene bird of night chatters*

– Henry James, Sr.

Al-Andalus is a book on natural history. It is also a survey on individual wonders and collective stupidities, a novel and an account, an essay and a report, everything written with chatty style and deep knowledge of the facts. This is a masterpiece, and I feel honoured to write the foreword for this book.

I do not share the common viewpoint that we scientists must keep professional activity free from emotional input. I simply cannot believe our brain allows us to do that anyway. On the contrary, every report we write, project we start and every decision we take is coloured by our personal background. Only then are we free to think for ourselves and recount our discoveries to students and non-scientists.

It follows that these lines were unavoidably affected by the moods this book has rescued from deep inside me. Interestingly, it deals with interactions, boundaries, and jumps of scale among conceptual things that science and philosophy have traditionally considered disparate, if not opposing. I am talking especially of the artificial abyss that “academics” have created between social and natural sciences. But, like art or poetry, they all depend for progress on inspiration. And this book is the outcome of a surely long-time gestated stock of good ideas about the interplay between individual men, societies and environment.

First at all, it is pertinent to introduce the author. Finlayson’s scientific output has been prodigious. He is a confirmed evolutionary ecologist, although I have never seen him completely happy with the air of apparent inevitability of explanations based on natural selection. It is clear that both ecological and evolutionary patterns arise, in his eyes, from something more erratic, let me say more wonderful.

As a researcher, Finlayson has mounted two major campaigns. The first has been in support of the late survival of Neanderthals in the south-western extreme of Europe and about the circumstances of this unexpected permanence. He has been able to build a model of survival and extinction from a very complex set of interacting factors, a balanced scenario depicted from patterns of climatic variability, catastrophic events, genetics and ecology. The second bone of contention in Finlayson’s scientific career, has been that an ecological approach would facilitate getting out of the impasses in the debate on human origins. The solution to Finlayson has been to go decidedly for a population approach which would make many issues that remain conjectures or are unresolved accessible to research.

As a scientist, too, Clive Finlayson is one of the brightest I have ever met. He has been blessed by quick intelligence, artistic temperament, and a great ability to communicate – maybe of such success as to encourage plagiarism among reputed colleagues. I must



