

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

“By God, I was made for Glory” -Wallada bint al-Mustakfi:

How Women Exerted Agency in the Umayyad Dynasty of Al-Andalus

BY

MOLLY LYTLE

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Faculty Advisor: John McCallum

Preceptor: John McCallum

## “Well-behaved women seldom make history”- Laurel Thatcher Ulrich<sup>1</sup>

Historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s 1976 statement, quoted in the epigraph above, is relevant to any time, place or civilization from the past. The case of women in al-Andalus is just another example supporting Ulrich’s timeless and pithy quote. One of the most famous poets from this period, Wallada bint al-Mustakfi, was accused of being a harlot simply because she did not wear a veil when hosting mixed company.<sup>2,3</sup> In response, the famously sharp-witted Wallada had one of her dresses embroidered in gold with one of her own poetic verses:<sup>4</sup>

أنا والله أصلح للمعالي  
وأمشي مشيتي وأتى هُ تيهياً  
وأملكُ نَ عاشقي من صحن خَ دي  
وأعطي قبلتي مَنْ يشتهيها

“By God, I was made for glory

And I saunter heedlessly

And I place the saucer of my cheek to my lover

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<sup>1</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “Vertuous Women Found: New England Ministerial Literature, 1668-1735,” *American Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1976): pp. 20-40, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2712475>, 20.

<sup>2</sup> For this paper I have decided to use one common spelling of all Arabic names and terms throughout the essay. Since Arabic does not use the Latin alphabet, that both Spanish and English do, these words must be transliterated and/or translated to the other languages. The lack of a standard process of translation led to many individuals having more than one name and a variety of spellings. An example of this is Ibn Zaydun vs Ibn Zaidun vs Ibn Zeidun, all three spellings of the poet’s name are acceptable in English. This problem is made even more complicated by the fact that I used sources written in both Spanish and English, leading to even more discord between the orthography of the names and terms. An example used throughout this paper is Abd al-Rahman, referring to any of the patronymic incarnations, which is spelled as Abderramán in Spanish. In all cases I have chosen to go with the version that seems to be most commonly used and well-known throughout the scholarly world in English.

<sup>3</sup> Doaa Omran, “Wallāda Bint Al-Mustakfi: A Muslim Princess Speaking Passionately and Persistently in the ‘Palimpsest’ of Al-Andalus,” *Women's Studies* 51, no. 2 (March 17, 2022): pp. 120-136, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2022.2033241>, 125.

<sup>4</sup> Radwa Ashour et al., “Arab Women Writers,” trans. Mandy McClure, *Southwest Review* 94, no. 1 (2009): pp. 9-18, <https://doi.org/10.5743/cairo/9789774161469.001.0001>, 9-10.

And give my kiss to whomever is thirsty for it”<sup>5</sup>

Even the mythical women from this time are only worthy of mention because they broke societal norms. The legendary Florinda La Cava is infamously known as the woman whose rape led to the fall of Visigoth Spain.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, this is a story of victim-blaming as she is considered at fault for this calamitous event because she dared to report the rape to her father. This galvanized him to lead the Islamic army across the Strait of Gibraltar onto the shores of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>7</sup> Yet even in this dark story, some scholars have argued that, Florinda’s report

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<sup>5</sup> Doaa Omran, “Wallāda Bint Al-Mustakfi: A Muslim Princess Speaking Passionately and Persistently in the ‘Palimpsest’ of Al-Andalus,” *Women's Studies* 51, no. 2 (March 17, 2022): pp. 120-136, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2022.2033241>, 125-126.

<sup>6</sup> The earliest historical sources discussing Florinda La Cava are collected in Volume I of al-Maqqari’s comprehensive work *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*. Ahmed ibn Mohammed al-Maqqari was a North African scholar who wrote during the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Although writing more than 800 years after the earliest events mentioned, al-Maqqari’s text is actually better classified as a primary source considering that it is full of block quotations from historical works now lost to time. There are also direct quotes from extant sources like Ibn al-Khatib’s poetry, which can be found on the walls of the Alhambra, that historians were able to compare with the original. In all cases the quotes were accurate, which allows one to more confidently assume that the lost excerpts are also correct. Due to this wide compilation of primary sources, both volumes of this work are used extensively throughout the paper.

A full version of al-Maqqari’s *History* was published in French in 1855 and compiled in Arabic in 1863. An abridged English translation by Pascual de Gayangos was completed in 1840. Unfortunately for my purposes, a complete English translation is yet to be published as of 2022. And the abridged version is missing vital information pertaining to my research. The most significant example of this is the section pertaining to Wallada bint al-Mustakfi in Volume II. Gayangos translates half a paragraph about Wallada ending with the footnoted sentence: “The histories of the time are filled with entertaining anecdotes respecting this princess; but as we intend to treat her elsewhere...we need not relate them in this place.” Going to the relevant footnote, Gayangos justifies his decision to not translate the referred to section because “it contains only selections from the works of Andalusian poets”; al-Maqqari, trans. Pascual de Gayangos (Johnson Reprint Corp, 1964), Vol I, pp. 1-548, xiv-xv, xxxi-xxxiv, Book IV Chap. I p.255-257; Vol II, pp. 1-544, Book VII Chap. III p.243, 499.

<sup>7</sup> While unfamiliar to the majority of the world, any Spaniard would recognize the name of Florinda La Cava. Also simply called La Cava, this mythical woman was considered a historical figure in Spain for hundreds of years, until the 20th century when Roger Collins first proposed in his foundational 1983 work, *Early Medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity*, that neither Florinda nor her father ever actually existed. This claim has since been widely accepted as historical fact since, but La Cava is still an important figure in Spain’s foundational myth.

There are innumerable versions of her life because the story about her ‘relationship’ with the last king of the Visigoths, King Roderic, sometimes portrayed as a love story and at other times a tragedy, has inspired numerous works of arts including operas, poems, plays, ballads, novels, and most recently a musical. The simplest, and earliest version of her story has three main characters. The first is Count Julian, a Visigoth nobleman who is Florinda’s father. Depending on the source, he is also either the governor of Ceuta or the ambassador to that city. However, it does not really matter his official title, it is only important to know that Julian was loyal to and ruled by the Visigoth king, Roderic. Another important factor for the legend is the geographic location of Ceuta which is situated on the coast of North Africa and at one of the narrowest parts of the Strait of Gibraltar with only 16 miles separating the two land masses. The next character is King Roderic who ruled from the Visigoth capital of Toledo. He was an infamously corrupt and immoral ruler, although whether that is an accurate or anachronistic characterization is a subject for debate.

of her rape is actually a demonstration of her agency as it is her attempt to control her circumstances after a traumatic event.<sup>8</sup> Florinda's courage to report her rape impacted not just her own life, but the lives of a whole population. This is just one of the many acts of agency that I plan to explore in this paper.

In this work, I will argue that in contrast to the traditional image of a demure, obedient, and silent Muslim woman, the women of Al-Andalus exercised power and agency within their society far before the concept of female empowerment was 'introduced' by the West in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> During the medieval period, like most others, women were relegated to the position of

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With the stage set, Florinda's story begins with her father, Count Julian, sending her to Toledo to be educated in Roderic's court, a very common practice among noble families of the time. One day after arriving, while Florinda is bathing, Roderic stumbles upon her immodestly dressed figure and instantly decides that he must have her. At this juncture, the story gets a little murky because there are some sources that depict the relationship as a consensual love story. While others paint the picture of La Cava as the aggressive seductress who corrupted the king and not the other way around. However, these are reconfigurations of the tale, generally created centuries after the actual events of the tale. The earliest sources very clearly portray Roderic as a rapist with Florinda as his unfortunate victim. After the rape, Florinda writes a letter to her father, Julian. Like most aspects related to this story, the contents and purpose of this letter alter depending on the source one is examining. Sometimes it is a simple retelling of events, while in other documents the letter is an inflammatory accusation concocted by a jealous lover, La Cava. However, no matter its tone, Julian is naturally furious at Roderic for the violation of his daughter. This sets him on a path of revenge against the king that leads to Julian allying with the Berber commander Tariq ibn Ziyad. According to the legend, he lets Tariq's small army set sail from Ceuta overnight, allowing the Muslims to attack the Visigoths on the Iberian side before they were even aware an invading army had landed. And so just like that, the Iberian Peninsula came under the control of the Muslims, a state that it would remain in to varying degrees for the next seven hundred years.

For more sources analyzing Florinda La Cava's and her evolution over the centuries see: Elizabeth Drayson, *The King and The Whore: King Roderick and La Cava* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Patricia E. Grieve, *The Eve of Spain: Myths of Origins in the History of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Conflict* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Jared S. White, "Inaudible Resistance: How La Cava Found Her Voice," *MLN* 132, no. 2 (March 2017): pp. 255-271, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.2017.0016>, 255-271.

For some of the retellings of Florinda La Cava's story from over the centuries (in written, visual, or auditory forms) see: Manuel Fernández y González, *La Alhambra: Leyendas Árabes* (JJ Martínez, Desengaño, 10., 1856), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/49660/49660-h/49660-h.htm>; Georg Friedrich Haendel and Banzo Eduardo López. *Rodrigo*. CD. Naïve, n.d; Isidoro Lozano, *La Cava saliendo del Baño*. 1854, Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid, <https://www.academiacolecciones.com/pinturas/inventario.php?id=0333>. (accessed May 4, 2022); Franz Xaver Winterhalter, *Florinda*. 1853, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437944>. (accessed May 4, 2022); Mūsa, Rāzī, Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn, *Cronica Del Moro Rasis: Versión Del ajbār mulūk Al-Andalus De Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Mūsà Al-Rāzī, 889-955 ...* (Madrid: Seminario Menéndez Pidal, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> Jared S. White, "Inaudible Resistance: How La Cava Found Her Voice," *MLN* 132, no. 2 (March 2017): pp. 255-271, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.2017.0016>, 255-271.

<sup>9</sup> There is a vast amount of prior scholarship on a wide variety of topics that argue how the concept of women's empowerment was introduced to Islamic civilization through colonization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast, recent Western feminist-leaning scholars have begun to object to the "historical progressivism of Western civilization as

wife, mother, daughter, or slave. In all cases, they were defined by their relationship to the men in their lives. When thinking of Islamic societies, the image of the harem immediately springs to mind in which men of high socioeconomic standings had multiple wives and concubines ranging from Christian princesses to Jewish slaves. But what is absent from this picture is the half-siblings (both sons and daughters), female members of the court (like secretaries, aka *katib*, and various entertainers), and eunuchs, all whose inclusion greatly changes our understanding of women's power in medieval Iberia. The far-reaching aim of this research is to recover voices that have been either lost or silenced by the passage of time. Obviously, that is not a feasible goal for a master's thesis, so I have instead chosen a few specific women in order to describe how their acts and experiences exemplify a broader culture of Andalusian women's agency. This list of extraordinary ladies includes Wallada bint al-Mustakfi, Muhya bint al-Tayyani, Lubna de Córdoba, and Subh just to name a few. All of the women I will illuminate in this paper, occupied various positions of power and privilege during their lifetimes, yet they still all exercised differing degrees of agency over their circumstances in a restrictive patriarchal society.

There is no doubt that many of the women, both in and out of Andalusian harem culture, left writing and experiences of their lives behind. The academic curiosity about the lives of these women is one goal of this project, but more vital than that is the desire to make available to readers some of the narratives of the lives of these individual women. As we have very few extant primary sources, only a few examples can be offered, but that does not mean that valuable

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well as to conventional ideas about the oppression of women in the Islamic world" (Towns); Sahar Amer, "Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 2 (May 2009): pp. 215-236, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sex.0.0052>, 218-219, 221, 223-224, 236; Lisa Disch, Mary Hawkesworth, and Ann Towns, "Civilization," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 79-99, 81; Doaa Omran, "Wallāda Bint Al-Mustakfi: A Muslim Princess Speaking Passionately and Persistently in the 'Palimpsest' of Al-Andalus," *Women's Studies* 51, no. 2 (March 17, 2022): pp. 120-136, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2022.2033241>, 121-122.

information cannot be gleaned from them.<sup>10</sup>

While the territory of al-Andalus changed in size over the centuries it essentially refers to a region of the Iberian Peninsula that was conquered by Muslims in 711 and continued to be ruled by a variety of Islamic rulers until 1492, when the last Islamic stronghold Granada officially surrendered to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand.<sup>11,12</sup> This study ranges from 756 to circa 1100 CE when the more conservative Almoravids began to conquer the former Umayyad territory.<sup>13</sup>

Before continuing, it is necessary to issue a disclaimer about the false belief of a homogeneous Andalusian culture. There are inevitably going to be fluctuations and the 700-year

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<sup>10</sup> Recent research has shown that more than 90% of the manuscripts written in the Medieval period have been lost to time. And the farther back you travel, the fewer documents there are. The Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal seems like a great source on the surface, but it only dates back to 1175. Considering the very edge of my research ends in the 11th century, this entire database is impractical for my purposes. Similarly, the Archivo de la Universidad de Salamanca only has documents dating back to the 13th century. The PARES: Portal de Archivos Españoles only has one digitized document from between the 8th and 11th centuries throughout all 12 archives conveniently compiled together. This small pool of sources is further restricted by a variety of factors. There are translation issues of course, the specifics of which are enumerated in the essay paragraph following this footnote. There are also literal access difficulties in terms of distance, money, technological, and institutional or governmental restrictions. Many organizations that house these specific documents are logically located in Spain, diminishing easy access for a researcher located elsewhere. This is especially true since most of the documents are not digitized. If a researcher is able to get past all these obstacles, the Spanish government then provides even more by permitting limited or no viewing of many historical documents. The ones that are available to view cannot be seen without official authorization. This is rarely given to professional historians in Spain, let alone foreign students. However, in an ideal world I would of course decipher the non-digitized archives of Spain and Portugal; Mike Kestemont et al., “Forgotten Books,” *Forgotten Books* (Science Journal, February 17, 2022), <https://forgotten-books.netlify.app/>.

<sup>11</sup> See maps in Appendices A and B.

<sup>12</sup> The Iberian Peninsula is currently occupied by the modern countries of Portugal and Spain although neither of those countries actually existed at the time of the original Muslim invasion. In fact, although there is much debate around the official formation date of Spain, the earliest possible date is 1492 when the *reconquista* was completed, finally uniting the whole of the Iberian Peninsula under Christian rulers.

<sup>13</sup> For this paper, I have chosen to use the Gregorian Calendar, instead of the Jewish or Islamic calendars, both of which were in use by members of the Iberian population during this time, unlike the Gregorian one, which was not introduced until 1582. I have made this decision not only because it is the system that I am most familiar with, but also the one used most commonly throughout the secondary sources. Many primary sources are also known to modern scholars by titles referring to a Gregorian calendar date (e.g. *Crónica Mozárabe de 754*). In contrast to the solar-based Gregorian Calendar, the Islamic system follows the lunar cycle. The first year of this calendar correlates with 622 CE, the year that Muhammad made his first pilgrimage (hijra) from Mecca to Medina. It is important to note that this does not mean that Muslims believe there is no history before 622. In fact, they refer to all time before the Hijra as *‘jāhiliyyah’* or ‘Age of Ignorance’. Following the Islamic Calendar, the current Gregorian year of 2022 is actually 1443/1444 AH (Anno Hegirae, in the year of/after the Hijra). The Jewish or Hebrew Calendar is the oldest of the 3 and it follows a luni-solar model. According to it, the date of creation is October 1, 3761 BCE and the current year is 5782 AM (Anno Mundi, in the year of the world).

period of Muslim rule cannot be thought of as static. Even just the period of the Umayyad dynasty that is being reviewed here, a span of nearly 350 years, cannot be viewed as having a uniform culture. The difference between *mozárabes* and *mudejares* is the perfect example of the cultural changes that occur over time: the former is defined in the traditional sense as Christians living in al-Andalus, with a more accurate definition of ‘Arabicized’; the latter were Muslims who lived under Christian rule, specifically in the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>14,15</sup> As the borders dividing the Muslim world from the Christian one constantly shifted, so did the number of people who were defined by the above terms.

“When we exclude women from the Umayyad family tree and deny them a critical role in the formation of Andalusian culture and the reception and patronage of art, to whose patriarchy and concepts of race, gender and identity are we really bowing our heads?”<sup>16</sup> This enlightening quote from esteemed historian D.F. Ruggles concluded a 2004 article that contains one of the few Umayyad family trees depicting both parents, not just the patriarchal lineage. A more general version of this question could be applied to any period in history: When we exclude women from history and deny them a critical role in the formation of culture, to whose patriarchy and concepts of race, gender, and identity are we really bowing our heads? And while Ruggles’s original is too narrow and the latter too general for this paper, I believe this question can be tailored to any queer or gender study research topic. It also provides a justification for said research inherently through its phrasing. What questions remain not only unanswered but unasked because the lack of women in the archives has led many researchers, whether

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<sup>14</sup> Maribel Fierro, *‘Abd Al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 16-17.

<sup>15</sup> “Mudejar,” Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mudejar>.

<sup>16</sup> D. F. Ruggles, “Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty: Race, Genealogy, and Acculturation in Al-Andalus,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2004): pp. 65-94, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-34-1-65>, 88.

intentionally or not, to downplay their importance in arenas outside of the traditional ‘women’s work’? There are also less ideological but still relevant contributions that this paper is attempting to add to the current scholarship. One of my goals is to provide a more nuanced understanding of the women of al-Andalus and diverge from the trend of treating them as a monolith who experience the world the same as their male counterparts.<sup>17</sup> This paper is also an invitation for other scholars to further similar research using untranslated Arabic and Old Castilian documents that I was not able to access. Other aspirations include the hope that this will also lead to a surge in translation of the aforementioned documents so that they are more accessible to readers lacking Medieval language skills.<sup>18</sup>

There is a significant issue not only with primary sources for this topic, but also with the severe lack of secondary sources surrounding women’s varying positions throughout Andalusian society. There is a towering stack of books filled with historical research claiming to tell the accurate story of al-Andalus, but upon closer inspection, you find that half the population is absent from the conversation. As Kamila Shamsie so aptly pointed out in her 2016 article, “there is...nothing atypical about the index for Richard Fletcher’s *Moorish Spain*, published as recently as 2001, which has as many entries for ‘toothpaste’ as for all of womanhood (the sole woman in

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<sup>17</sup> See Roger Collins’ *Early Medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity, 400-1000* (2010), Richard Fletcher’s *Moorish Spain* (1992), and Mark Cohen’s *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (2008).

<sup>18</sup> A specific example where this hypothetical translation trend would have been helpful in my research for this paper would be the 13th century Castilian document, Alfonso X’s *Estoria de Espanna*. I did attempt a translation of the work, but I am in no way an expert in Old Castilian, a distinct dialect from modern Spanish. Despite that, I roughly translated a section titled ‘*De la fuerca que fue fecha a la fija o muger del cuende julian, et de como se coniuero por ende con los moros*’ [Of the force that was done to the daughter or woman of count Julian, and how he ... with or of the moors]. I know that there are many cases in Old Spanish where the ‘f’s look like ‘h’s as in the case of ‘fija’ which is actually ‘hija’ or ‘daughter’. I applied this same logic to the word ‘fecha’ which means ‘date’ in modern Spanish, something that does not make sense in the context of this translation. Replacing the ‘f’ with an ‘h’ changes the word to ‘hecha’, a conjugation of the verb ‘hacer’[to do], which translates to ‘done’. ‘Et’ is an earlier version of ‘e’ which is ‘and’ in Spanish. Unfortunately, I do not feel confident in translating ‘coniuero’ or ‘ende’ so I do not know the full phrase, but there is still enough to understand the gist of the section title. And while I believe my translation is fairly accurate, further perusal of Alfonso X’s *History of Spain* and similar documents quickly proved that was beyond my linguistic ability and time scope of the project. A likely case for most people and situations; Alfonso X, *Estoria De Espanna* (Madison: The Hispanic seminary of medieval studies, 1978), 307.



the index is Queen Isabella).”<sup>19</sup> There has been a scattering of publications in the intervening two decades, most of them being articles.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, the majority of the books published on this topic in these years are very broad, either in the geographical or temporal sense, rather than the exceedingly specific research that comprise other historiographies.<sup>21</sup> *Convivencia and Medieval Spain: Essays in Honor of Thomas F. Glick*, was published in 2019 and there is still only a singular mention of a woman in the index.<sup>22</sup> Upon investigation, that specific reference is not even in the only chapter explicitly written about women entitled, “Were Women Part of *Convivencia*?”.<sup>23</sup> Recently there seems to have been momentum building for this topic, primarily led by former University of Chicago professor David Nirenberg. Other leaders include Jessica Coope, D.F. Ruggles, and Sahar Amer. Before continuing, I must clarify that everything written above only applies to the historiographical tradition of English-speaking scholars, mainly American and British. I have absolutely no authority on the depth or richness of this historiography topic in Arabic or Islamic historical traditions as I do not read Arabic.

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<sup>19</sup> Kamila Shamsie, “Librarians, Rebels, Property Owners, Slaves: Women in Al-Andalus,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 52, no. 2 (2016): pp. 178-188, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2016.1164968>, 179.

<sup>20</sup> See Nada Mourtada-Sabbah’s and Adrian Gully’s “‘I Am, by God, Fit for High Positions’: On the Political Role of Women in Al-Andalus” (2003), Maya Shatzmiller’s “Women and Property Rights in Al-Andalus and the Maghrib: Social Patterns and Legal Discourse” (1995), and Janina M. Safran’s “Identity and Differentiation in Ninth-Century Al-Andalus,” (2001), and Jessica A. Coope’s “Marriage, Kinship, and Islamic Law in Al-Andalus: Reflections on Pierre Guichard’s ‘Al-Ándalus’” (2008).

<sup>21</sup> See Eukene Lacarra Lanz’s *Marriage, and Sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia* (2002) with a specific focus on Manuela Marin’s chapter “Marriage and Sexuality in al-Andalus” and Lanz’s chapter “Changing Boundaries of Licit and Illicit Unions: Concubinage and Prostitution”; Also see Mernissi’s *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1993), Louise Mirrer’s *Women, Jews, and Muslims in the Texts of Reconquest Castile* (1996), Denise K. Filios’s *Performing Women in the Middle Ages: Sex, Gender, and the Iberian Lyric* (2005), Simon Barton’s *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines: Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberian* (2015), Jessica Coope’s *The Most Noble of People: Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Identity in Muslim Spain* (2017), and Taef El-Azhari’s *Queens, Eunuchs and Concubines in Islamic History: 661-1257* (2019).

<sup>22</sup> Even more shocking than the singular mention of a woman, is which woman is mentioned. It is not someone universally known, like Queen Isabella, nor is it someone infamous like Florinda La Cava. Instead, the woman named was Mascarosa, a 13th century woman from Valencia of unknown religious origins, who was either the wife or concubine of a Muslim military leader. And unfortunately, that is the extent of the information known about her; Mark Abate and Thomas F. Glick, *Convivencia and Medieval Spain: Essays in Honor of Thomas F. Glick* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 215-218, 220, 221, 435-441.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 297-310.

The Spanish historiography is much more extensive than its English counterpart, simply because the process started there decades before it began to gain steam in English-speaking scholarship. In fact, many of my current grievances with both the primary and secondary sources surrounding this topic are echoed in the 1993 chapter *Las Mujeres en al-Andalus: Fuentes e Historiografía* [Women in al-Andalus: Sources and Historiography].<sup>24</sup> Marín laments how “the study of Andalusian society is faced with a series of problems of great complexity derived largely from the character of the historical sources available to the investigator.”<sup>25</sup> Due to this “the basic works that other disciplines have had since ancient times are missing.”<sup>26</sup> She also brings up a point relating to the recorded names of these women that I am going to talk about later in this paper. Marín states that there “exists a difference between the names of the mothers of the princes, usually of slave origin, and those of their daughters and sisters.”<sup>27</sup> The former category are generally referred to by pet names ( e.g. Halawah meaning ‘Sweetie’) while the latter followed the Islamic naming traditions of their fathers (e.g. Wallada bint al-Mustakfi).<sup>28,29</sup> It should be noted that this “distinction between the two types of names is not categorical- there are exceptions between both slaves and noble ladies- but it does seem to have a general character.”<sup>30</sup> The first Spanish language encyclopedic collection relating solely to women in al-

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<sup>24</sup> Celia del Moral and Manuela Marín, “Las Mujeres En Al-Andalus: Fuentes e Historiografía,” in *Árabes, Judías y Cristianas: Mujeres En La Europa Medieval* (Granada, Spain: Universidad de Granada, 1993), pp. 35-52.

<sup>25</sup> The above is my translation of the original Spanish: “El estudio de la sociedad andalusí se enfrenta con una serie de problemas de gran complejidad derivados en gran parte del carácter de las fuentes históricas de que dispone el investigador.”; Ibid, 35.

<sup>26</sup> This is my translation of the original Spanish: “...que se echan en falta determinados trabajos básicos que otras disciplinas tienen desde antiguo”; Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> This is my translation of the original Spanish: “...existe una diferencia entre los nombres de las madres de los príncipes, usualmente de origen esclavo, y las de sus hijas y hermanas.”; Ibid, 40.

<sup>28</sup> D. F. Ruggles, “Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty: Race, Genealogy, and Acculturation in Al-Andalus,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2004): pp. 65-94, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-34-1-65>, 71.

<sup>29</sup> The word ‘bint’ in Arabic translates to ‘daughter of’ and it parallels the male version of ‘ibn/bin’ meaning ‘son of’.

<sup>30</sup> This is my translation of the original Spanish: “La distinción entre ambos tipos de nombres no es tajante- hay excepciones tanto entre esclavas como entre damas nobles- pero sí parece tener un carácter general.”; Celia del

Andalus was published in 2000, a feat that has yet to be equaled in the English-speaking world.<sup>31</sup>

Notable leaders of the Spanish tradition are Manuela Marín, María Elena Díez Jorge, and María Jesús Viguera Molins.

An ongoing argument in both Spanish and English historiography is the concept of ‘*convivencia*’. This Spanish word which translates to ‘coexistence’, or more literally ‘living together’, is an academic concept that “has come to be associated with the complex interplay between religious, social, and cultural practices of Muslims, Christians, and Jews on the Iberian Peninsula during the middle ages.”<sup>32</sup> It was first coined by Spanish Medievalist historian and philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and has been considered controversial ever since.<sup>33</sup> His colleague, Américo Castro, popularized the term later in the century as a retort to the nationalistic narratives of his contemporaries.<sup>34</sup> Castro originally used

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Moral and Manuela Marín, “Las Mujeres En Al-Andalus: Fuentes e Historiografía,” in *Árabes, Judías y Cristianas: Mujeres En La Europa Medieval* (Granada, Spain: Universidad de Granada, 1993), pp. 35-52, 40-41.

<sup>31</sup> Marín Manuela, *Estudios Onomástico-Biográficos De Al-Andalus, XI: Mujeres En Al-Ándalus* (Madrid, Spain: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Filología, Departamento de Estudios Árabes, 2000), 11-781.

<sup>32</sup> Lourdes Maria Alvarez, “Convivencia,” Oxford Reference, 2010, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662624.001.0001/acref-9780198662624-e-1537?rskey=Z66tW8&result=1>.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Abate and Thomas F. Glick, eds., *Convivencia and Medieval Spain: Essays in Honor of Thomas F. Glick* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), vii.

<sup>34</sup> The term *convivencia* originally formed in response to the concept of the ‘*reconquista*’, translated to ‘reconquest’, that dominated Spanish academic circles in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *reconquista* is defined by Britannica as “a centuries-long series of battles by Christian states to expel the Muslims (Moors), who from the 8<sup>th</sup> century ruled most of the Iberian Peninsula. Visigoths had ruled Spain for two centuries before they were overrun by the Umayyad empire.”. Originally coined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term *reconquista* while still used in popular culture, has largely fallen out of favor with historians. It officially refers to the 700-year period stretch, where the Iberian Peninsula was mostly under control of Muslim rulers and reframes the historical narrative to imply that the disjointed Christian kingdoms fought together against the constant incursion of Muslims northward. In reality, there was not a concentrated effort to ‘reclaim’ previously Visigoth lands until the emergence of the *taifa* kingdoms in the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century (For more on the *taifa* kingdoms see footnote 71 on page 20). And the *reconquista* was still not officially completed till four centuries later in 1492 when Ferdinand and Isabella conquered the last Muslim kingdom of Granada. Besides being anachronistic and inaccurate, the term also has ties to Spanish right-wing nationalism and fascism. As with the other misinforming aspects of the term, *reconquista* implies that Ferdinand and Isabella were direct descendants and inheritors of the Visigoth kingdoms that controlled the Iberian Peninsula before the Islamic conquest. This may seem inconsequential on the surface but the idea of the ‘Visigoth Inheritors’ implies that absolutely no interfaith or interethnic relationships took place over the seven centuries of al-Andalus’ existence, a statement that is patently false. However, this lie was quite useful when creating a new Spanish identity, as Francisco Franco elevated the idea to a value that should be emulated by all Spaniards. For fellow Harry Potter fans,

the term to argue that the interaction between the three Abrahamic religions that inhabited the Iberian Peninsula was a “central, if unrecognized, constitutive element of Spanish civilization”.<sup>35</sup> Today there is still much debate on whether the word should be used in academic circles at all, much of it related to the ambiguity surrounding its definition, a problem perfectly articulated in the following quote: “Having appeared under the guises of ‘peaceful coexistence’, ‘acculturation’, and ‘daily interaction’, *convivencia* has become a byword that one can employ in any number of ways. *Convivencia* can be anything and everything: a rhetorical flourish, a nostalgic nod to a rich historiographical tradition, as well as an ambitiously construed notion that aspires to summarize the entire range of religious minorities’ experiences in medieval Spain.”<sup>36</sup> Critics will point out the aforementioned ambiguity and accuse it of being synonymous with the concept of ‘tolerance’.

There is also concern about whether this concept acknowledges or can even include women’s experiences, however, this is a criticism that one could make about most of the historical theories ever proposed. In an essay by Jessica Coope, she discusses the idea of women being left out of *convivencia*, which she defines as “the mixture of cooperation, prejudice, and cultural borrowings”, in religious and legal writings.<sup>37</sup> She acknowledges that there was

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it can be useful to think of the ideal Catholic Spanish citizen with ancestors dating directly back to the Visigoths as ‘purebloods’, while any people that had Jewish or Muslim ancestors (regardless of conversion status) were ‘mudbloods’. While much of this died with Franco, vestiges still remain in modern-day Spain and are still negatively associated with *reconquista*. While most historians are aware of these details and no longer use the term, as it conjures up an inaccurate picture of the historical events, there is still debate over what term to use in order to refer to this time period. Neither the Muslims in the South nor the Christians in the North had complete control throughout the entire time period, so it is hard to find a unifying term. *Convivencia* has been the proposed replacement for most of the past century; Michael Ray, ed., “Reconquista,” Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed March 9, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Reconquista>.

<sup>35</sup> Lourdes Maria Alvarez, “Convivencia,” Oxford Reference, 2010, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662624.001.0001/acref-9780198662624-e-1537?rskey=Z66tW8&result=1>.

<sup>36</sup> Maya Soifer. *Beyond ‘Convivencia’: Critical Reflections on the Historiography of Interfaith Relations in Christian Spain* JMIS I (2009): 19-35.

<sup>37</sup> Mark Abate, Thomas F. Glick, and Jessica Coope, “Were Women Part of ‘Convivencia’?,” in *Convivencia and Medieval Spain: Essays in Honor of Thomas F. Glick* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 297.

obviously *convivencia* taking place at a social and local level, especially for lower class women that could not afford to stay at home. However, she also argues that this idea does not exist as a concept in the more theoretical aspects of the Iberian community, like legal and religious law. This is most clear in the rules that regulated interfaith sexual interactions where the group in power “gave the men in its own group sexual access to women of any faith while limiting women to sexual relations within their own confessional group. Women of the dominant group who strayed were punished, as were men from the subject religions who had relations with dominant group women.”<sup>38</sup> It is also an extremely prevalent theme in the songs and poems of the time, with Muslim, Jewish, and Christian women being depicted as easily committing apostasy against their mother religion. They could even be accused of this if they were raped or forcibly married by a man outside of their religion.<sup>39</sup> In stark contrast, men were depicted as taking an enormous amount of persuasion to convert. Coope’s final argument is that in the bounds of legal and religious texts, women were not considered full members of their community and therefore cannot fully participate in *convivencia*, an inherently communal act.<sup>40</sup>

Whether or not this argument is convincing is irrelevant to the topic of this paper, because the interactions resulting from *convivencia* in my research take place in poems, histories, and sometimes even the women’s own words. It would also take a whole other essay to fully explain all the views surrounding the term. While there are many valid critiques, supporters of using *convivencia* claim, rightfully in my opinion, that it is an improvement of previous terms, like ‘*reconquista*’ that dismissed any interactions between Muslim, Jewish, and Christian neighbors. It describes a unique culture that may be hard to describe in modern terms but was

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 307.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 303.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 297-310.

still a medieval exception.<sup>41</sup>

Before further analysis, it is necessary to provide a background on the Umayyad family and how they came to rule al-Andalus. Prior to 756, the Iberian Peninsula was just a peripheral territory of the powerful Umayyad Caliphate headquartered in the capital of Damascus.<sup>42</sup> It was originally invaded in June 711 by Tariq ibn Ziyad under directions from al-Walid, the 6th Umayyad Caliph.<sup>43</sup> Although the force was small, the victory was secured by an alliance with three Visigoth princes and brothers.<sup>44</sup> Or at least that's how Ibn al-Qutiya tells the story.<sup>45</sup> In

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<sup>41</sup> For an 'anti-convivencia' perspective on the effectiveness of *convivencia* as a category, see David Nirenberg's two acclaimed books, "*Neighboring Faiths*" and "*Communities of Violence*"; David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), #.; David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998). Also, see Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), <https://hdl-handle-net.proxy.uchicago.edu/2027/heb.00003>.

For a 'pro-convivencia' perspective on the effectiveness of *convivencia* as a category, see Maria Rosa Menocal's "*The Ornament of the World*"; Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (New York, NY: Back Bay Books, 2012).

For a well-balanced and relatively impartial view on the effectiveness of *convivencia* as a category, see Simon Barton's "*Conquerors, Brides and Concubines*"; Simon Barton, *Conquerors, Brides and Concubines: Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> The Umayyads had ruled since their first Caliph Mu'awiya took control from the son of Ali, the last of the Rashidun (Rightly Guided) caliphs in 661. This group consists of the first four Caliphs that ruled the Islamic world after the death of Muhammad. There was controversy surrounding the succession but Abu Bakr (r. 632-634) eventually took control, followed by Umar (r.634-644), Uthman (r.644-656), and Ali (r.656-661). The differences between the two major sects of Islam have complex origins and dynamic definitions. In simplest terms, the Sunnis believe that all of the Rightly Guided Caliphs are valid and would have been approved by Muhammad. The Shi'as believe that Ali (Muhammad's son-in-law and cousin) should have been the Prophet's direct successor. Today, the Sunni sect is conservatively 87% of the population while the Shia sect comprises 13% of modern Muslims (almost 2 billion as of 2020).

<sup>43</sup> 'Umar Ibn al-Qūṭīyah Muḥammad ibn and David James, *Early Islamic Spain: The History of Ibn Al-Qutiya* (London, England: Routledge, 2011), 49.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>45</sup> Like many ancient and medieval historians, Ibn al-Qutiya (d. 977 CE) embellished his history. This discrepancy is not solely an Islamic or even Arabic trait but was actually a very common feature in many 'histories' throughout time and space, until the field of history began the processes of standardization and professionalization in the 19th century. Notable historians that participated in this historical trend include Ancient Greece's Herodotus (485- 425? BCE) and Britain's Geoffrey of Monmouth (1095-1155 CE). Ibn al-Qutiya added certain 'facts' to his history like unbelievable army numbers, mythical objects, supernatural events attributed to God, etc. These were all used in order to portray the Islamic conquerors in the best light: as warriors ordained by Allah that overcome insurmountable odds and accomplish great quests.

Yet, Ibn Qutiya's most interesting anecdote is about his purported ancestor, Sara the Goth aka Sara al-Qutiya. Sara was an 8<sup>th</sup> century Visigoth noblewoman who experienced the Islamic conquest of Iberia. She cooperated with the invaders and benefitted from this arrangement. When her inheritance from her father was stolen by her uncle, she decided to take her case to the Umayyad Caliph, then located in Damascus, Syria. He agreed that she was in the right, ordered the injustice be corrected and arranged Sara a marriage with one of his men. This is

reality, the Iberian Peninsula was conquered by a combination of treaties, e.g. *The Treaty of Tudmir (713)*, and battles, e.g. the Battle of Guadalete.<sup>46,47</sup> The Islamic forces continued gaining control over more Iberian territory until they were eventually stopped by Frankish forces at the Battle of Poitiers/Tours (modern-day France) in 732.<sup>48</sup> In 750, the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyad Caliphate, massacring almost the entire family, with the exception of Abd al-Rahman I. He narrowly escaped, eventually finding his way to the Iberian Peninsula and establishing the Emirate of Cordoba in 756.

Like the rest of the Islamic world, Islamic jurisprudence in al-Andalus classified Jews and Christians as ‘أهل الكتاب / Ahl al-Kitāb’ or ‘People of the Book’ in contrast to the *umma*, the Muslim community.<sup>49</sup> This granted them a special status called ‘ذمي / dhimmi’ or ‘protected people’, that gave rights and protection in exchange for following certain laws and paying the

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also the first time that Sara meets Abd al-Rahman I, the future first Emir of Córdoba. Purportedly, she had permission to “leave to enter the palace and visit the royal family” in Córdoba years after their first interaction.

The reasons for Ibn al-Qutayba’s family ‘*nisba*’ (an adjective indicating the person's place of origin, tribal affiliation, or ancestry used at the end of the name) originating from the woman’s family are still debated, varied and contradictory. However, I posit that he was drawing a distinct parallel connection between the close relationship of his ancestor and Abd al-Rahman I and with the relationship he aspired to have with his caliph, Abd al-Rahman III. I hesitate to classify this family connection and her life story as either a fact or an embellishment because there is still active debate among scholars about the historical validity of Sara al-Qutayba. This is fueled by discrepancies throughout sources. In some cases, Sara is the daughter of Almund, son of Witizia, while in other cases she is Almund’s sister and Witizia’s daughter; ‘Umar Ibn al-Qūfīyah Muḥammad ibn and David James, *Early Islamic Spain: The History of Ibn Al-Qutayba* (London, England: Routledge, 2011), 22-24, 49-51; al-Maqqari, trans. Pascual de Gayangos (Johnson Reprint Corp, 1964), Vol II, pp. 1-544, Book V Chap. II p. 14-15.

<sup>46</sup> “*The Treaty of Tudmir (713)*”. Translated by Olivia Remie Constable in *Medieval Iberia Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*. 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.) 45-46.

<sup>47</sup> al-Maqqari, trans. Pascual de Gayangos (Johnson Reprint Corp, 1964), Vol I, pp. 1-548, Book IV Chap. II p. 272-275.

<sup>48</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>49</sup> The term Islamicate was first coined by University of Chicago professor Marshall Hodgson in his 1974 work “*The Venture of Islam*”. This term is distinct from ‘Islamic’ which Hodgson defined as “of or pertaining to Islam in the proper, the religious, sense.” The term Islamicate is used “to describe things that ‘would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims.’” To put it simply, ‘Islamicate’ is the study of the different civilizations and cultures of Muslim groups throughout history, including their religion. while ‘Islamic’ is only the study of the religion specifically; Markus Dressler, Armando Salvatore, and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, “Islamicate Secularities: New Perspectives on a Contested Concept,” *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 44, no. 3 (169) (2019): pp. 7–34, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26747447>, 11-12.

‘جزية / *jizya*’, an annual tax paid by non-Muslims.<sup>50,51</sup> However, this classification is where the similarities end, and the al-Andalus region diverges to make their own racial divisions.

Outwardly, most Muslim rulers wanted to portray themselves as Arabic, as this legitimized their power through a continued connection with the fallen Umayyad Dynasty of Damascus. Despite their attempts at clinging to the past, the Muslims of al-Andalus inevitably started to develop a distinctly Andalusian culture. Although Umayyad rulers proudly traced their ancestry to the original Umayyad Caliph, there came to be a powerful trend toward a uniquely Andalusian identity.<sup>52</sup> This regional identity emerged through a combination of similarities and differences between the Andalusian conquest versus other Muslim conquests in different parts of the world. One of the most conspicuous differences was the lack of *junds* or garrison towns in Al-Andalus that traditionally kept the invading army separate from the defeated locals.<sup>53</sup> The most deliberate act of crafting this culture was the Umayyad’s explicit emphasis on distance from an Arab name and ancestry denoting limitations on status and power.<sup>54</sup> This unofficial policy had the positive impact of neutralizing some of the discrimination imposed upon and felt by new converts to

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<sup>50</sup> See “*The Pact of Umar*” for a specific treaty between Muslim and Christians, outlining the specific protections, rights, and expectations of the Christian dhimmi; “*The Pact of Umar*”. Translated by Bernard Lewis in *Medieval Iberia Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012,43-44.

<sup>51</sup> Although this tax was only supposed to be levied on non-Muslims, many early Islamic governments still often made recent Muslim converts pay it so that the Caliphate could ensure continued profits off their old religious status.

<sup>52</sup> Maribel Fierro, *Abd Al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 7.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>54</sup> As Muhammad and his followers began to grow in number and territory in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, emphasis on when someone converted in relation to Muhammad grew expediently. This precedence was termed ‘*sābiqah*’ and it had a direct impact on both the ‘*ghanimah*’, or ‘the spoils of war’ (treasure, weapons, horses, lands, etc.), esteem, power, etc. given to early Islamic soldiers and leaders. It became even more important after the Prophet’s death in 632 left a power vacuum. While having less real-world influence a century later and a continent away, the Umayyad rulers of al-Andalus originally had a similar mindset surrounding an individual or their ancestors’ conversion timeline. And although the initial direct correlation between Arabic heritage and Islamic conversion status with higher status and power eventually waned, the esteem and respect remained.



Islam of non-Arab descent and recently conquered Jews, and Christians.<sup>55,56</sup> The Iberian Peninsula also differed in population composition which consisted of ever-changing proportions of Christians, Muslims, and Jews cohabitating in varying degrees of proximity. This unusual distribution was treated with an equally unusual degree of religious tolerance best characterized as ‘discriminatory but not persecutory’.<sup>57,58</sup>

Other important terms that are necessary to understand this subject relate to the complicated racial relations and categories of the time.<sup>59</sup> There were quite a few different ‘racial’

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<sup>55</sup> Maribel Fierro, *Abd Al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 95.

<sup>56</sup> Although there is an assumed implicit connection between Arab and Muslim these are not mutually exclusive categories today, nor were they in the past. An example that precedes the Umayyad rule of al-Andalus can be seen in the term *mawla* which is a non-Arab Muslim that fell under the protection of *umma*.

The most tangible effect of the action of Arab ancestry limiting power opportunities can be seen in the historical chronicles filled with records of Jewish *viziers*, physicians, librarians, etc. who advised and worked closely with the Andalusian emirs and caliphs. Some examples include Hasdai Ibn Shaprut, Samuel ibn Naghrillah, and Yusef ibn Naghrillah among others. Ibn Shaprut was the personal physician, inspector general of customs, and the *vizier* of foreign affairs to both Abd al-Rahman III and his son, Hakam II. The other two men were a father and son duo that collectively served as the *viziers* for the *taifa* kingdom of Granada from 1038-1066. This phenomenon of Jewish men rising to positions of power in the Umayyad government of al-Andalus was so prevalent that by the 11th century, there was a noticeable backlash from some Muslim elite. This resentment grew so severe that it actually resulted in the violent death of Yusef and thousands of other Jews at the hands of a Muslim mob in the 1066 Granada massacre; Jacob Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Sourcebook, 315-1791*, (New York: JPS, 1938), 227-232.; Moshe Perlmann, “Eleventh-Century Andalusian Authors on the Jews of Granada,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 18 (1948): pp. 269-290, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3622201>, 269-290.

<sup>57</sup> Maribel Fierro, *Abd Al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 12.

<sup>58</sup> Despite all of the differences enumerated in the above paragraph, there were a good amount of similarities between Al-Andalus and the rest of the Islamic world. The most prominent ones were steadily increasing conversion rates to Islam, the prominence of the Maliki school of jurisprudence, and the existence of *viziers*. These trajectories follow the traditional patterns of initially low conversion rates, an outcome favored by both sides. However, after enough time the populations naturally mixed through marriage and childbirth, causing an increase in Islamic conversions. Another similarity was the predominance of Maliki thought among Andalusian scholars. This legal trend was associated with the city of Medina and in line with the Sunni sect of the Umayyads. The term ‘*vizier*’ (or *wazir*) refers to a high governmental position in the Islamic world that existed in different capacities depending on the time and place. While this position did exist in Al-Andalus, it was in a different capacity than in the rest of the Islamic world. While the role of *wazir* gained power and prestige to rival and eventually overpower the caliphate position in other Islamic territories (e.g. the Abbasids of Baghdad), it remained more honorific in Al-Andalus. The traditional power associated with a *vizier* was not lacking from the government of the region but instead filled by the *الحاجب* / *hajib* (translates to ‘chamberlain’) position. However, it along with the *wazir* position became increasingly short-term and volatile roles until Abd al-Rahman III ceased to appoint a *hajib* from 932 onward, a marked contrast to Muslim tradition; Ibid, 13-14, 22, 85, 89, & 121.

<sup>59</sup> It is important to remember that the term ‘race’ not only did not exist, but the closest equivalent concept had a very different historical definition than a modern understanding of the word. During the time period of this paper, this anachronistic term could refer to a difference in heritage (e.g. *muwallads*, *mozárabes*, etc.), a difference in religions (e.g. Jews), or difference in regional origin (e.g. Berbers, Basques, etc.).

categories used to distinguish sections of the population. Even after the Muslims became a majority of the population, a circumstance that did not occur until more than two centuries after the initial conquest, there were still new identities constantly being cultivated in Al-Andalus.<sup>60</sup> The previously defined *mozárabes* and the related term, *muwallads*, are both prime examples of this: the former is an ‘Arabicized’ Christian or Jew; the latter is similarly defined as “someone who [is] linguistically and culturally Arabicized with no indication of religion.”<sup>61</sup> These terms are unclear, shifting, and potentially overlapping because they directly reflect the fluid nature of identities in Islamic Spain. More clearly, *mozárabes* were the Spanish Christians living under Muslim rule (8th–11th century), who, while not necessarily converts of Islam, did adopt Arabic language and culture.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, *muwallads*, who were Muslims of mixed descent that lived in al-Andalus, could also apply to recent converts to Islam in al-Andalus.<sup>63</sup> Both the founding emir and the first Caliph of Córdoba, Abd al-Rahman I and III respectively, fell into the category of *muwallad* as his mother was a Christian concubine.<sup>64</sup> *Moriscos* were Muslims who converted to

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

<sup>62</sup> A great example of this is the existence of *Aljamiado*, a writing system that uses Arabic script to transcribe a Romance language like Castilian; “Mozarab,” Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mozarab>.

<sup>63</sup> “Muslim Spain,” Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Spain/Muslim-Spain#ref587339>.

<sup>64</sup> Al-Andalus was different from the rest of contemporary Islamicate civilization for a number of reasons but one of the most prominent was their hypocritical obsession with being perceived as Arab even though many of the descendants of the original conquerors looked considerably more European than Arabic as time went on. This was due to the common practice of Muslim rulers producing children with Christian and Jewish princesses or concubines. Since ancestry was traced through the father’s lineage, the mothers’ ethnicity and religion did not diminish their sons’ power or prestige. This trend can be seen clearly in many ‘ghazals’ or ‘lyrical romance poems’ of this time. Analyzed chronologically, it is easy to trace Islamic poets’ opinions on European features from fascination to admiration. The former is best exemplified by Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi’s late 9th century poem, *White Skin*: “I have never seen/ nor heard of such a thing/ her modesty turns/ pearl into carnelian/ Her face is so clear/ that when you gaze/ on its perfections/you see your own face/ reflected”. The latter is clearly shown in Prince Marwan ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman’s 11th century piece, *The Beauty at the Revels*: “Like a young tree in springtime/ her slim waist sways/ over the sand dunes of her hips/ From her branches my heart/ garners fruit of fire/ The blond hair falling over/ her temples draws a *lām*(ل)/ on the page of her cheek/ silver flowed over gold/ The glass of red nectar/ between her white fingers/ is the day being born/ of the dawn/ The wine is the rising sun/ her mouth is the setting sun/ the hand of the assiduous/ cupbearer, the east/ The wine-sun setting/ in the delicious west/ of her lips/ brings

Christianity as well as their descendants<sup>65</sup>. Finally, *mudejares* were also defined earlier in this paper.<sup>66,67</sup> This term was mainly applicable to the period of the *taifa* kingdoms and the later ‘*reconquista*’ so it will not be used much in this paper.<sup>68</sup> It should be noted that while these terms are anachronistic, people living during this time were aware of similar types of group distinctions and viewed them as ‘racial’, though today we would categorize them as religious or ethnic.

As previously mentioned, not all members of the harem were the wives or concubines of the ruler. Much of this community consisted of the children produced from these sexual (and sometimes romantic) relationships, who were raised together. There are, of course, extensive primary and secondary sources on the male progeny that went on to follow in their father’s footsteps; their siblings were rarely recorded as existing outside of a statistic. The most striking example I have of this is the fact that Abd al-Rahman II was recorded to have had 86 children (44 sons and 42 daughters), and yet only 4 of their names are remembered today, none of them being a daughter.<sup>69</sup> Thankfully, there are a few exceptions to this disappointing pattern in the

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dawn to her cheeks”; Mūsá Ibn Sa‘īd ‘Alī ibn and Gómez García Emilio, *Poems of Arab Andalusia*, trans. Cola Franzen (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1989), 1,10.

<sup>65</sup> “Morisco,” Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Morisco>.

<sup>66</sup> See page 6.

<sup>67</sup> “Mudejar,” Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mudejar>.

<sup>68</sup> For more information on ‘*taifa* kingdoms’ see footnote 71 on page 20; Originally coined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term *reconquista* while accepted in popular culture, is a point of contention for historians. It officially refers to the 700-year period stretch, where the Iberian Peninsula was mostly under control of Muslim rulers and reframes it as if the disjointed Christian kingdoms fought together against the constant incursion of Muslims north. In reality, there was not a concentrated effort to ‘reclaim’ previously Visigoth lands until the emergence of the *Taifa* kingdoms in the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century. And the ‘reconquest’ was still not officially completed till four centuries later in 1492 when Ferdinand and Isabella conquered the last Muslim kingdom of Granada. While most historians are aware of these details and no longer use the term *reconquista*, as it conjures up an inaccurate picture of the historical events, there is still debate over what term to use in order to refer to this time period. Neither the Muslims in the south nor the Christians in the North had complete control throughout the entire time frame, so it is hard to find a unifying term.

<sup>69</sup> Ibn Idhari Marrakusi, *Historia De Al-Andalus*, trans. González Francisco Fernández, 2nd ed. (Málaga, Spain: Aljaima, 1999), 115.

records.

The most notable case is the aforementioned Wallada bint al-Mustakfi Billah Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman, the daughter of Caliph Muhammad III (r.1024-1025). This famous poet, more commonly known as Wallada bint al-Mustakfi, is much less widely known presently, than she was in her own time. Her date of birth is unknown, with the years 994, 1001, and 1011 all cited as her possible birth year, but it is certain that she was born and died in Córdoba. The date of her death is similarly unclear with the years 1087 or 1091 both being posited.<sup>70</sup> If the latter is accurate, her death was rather symbolic as it happened in the same year that Córdoba fell to the Almoravids. She was one of the last vestiges of the Umayyads’ power and her death coinciding with a successful invasion and conquering of their former territory by a foreign Berber dynasty would be quite a compelling end. Not only did Wallada live in unprecedented times, she was also a woman of unique social circumstances being an elite member of the ruling class.<sup>71</sup> This afforded her certain privileges like her enormous wealth and excellent education; circumstances that most women, and even men, of her time would not have had access to. Although it is necessary to acknowledge her advantages, I am arguing that there are aspects of Wallada that are not unique, but rather more characteristic of the relative agency of Andalusian women.

The previously mentioned story of Wallada’s response to the supreme judge of Córdoba,

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<sup>70</sup> al-Maqqari, trans. Pascual de Gayangos (Johnson Reprint Corp, 1964), Vol II, pp. 1-544, Book VII, Chap. III, 243.

<sup>71</sup> Although Muslims continued to control much of the Iberian Peninsula until the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (e.g. the Almoravids, the Almohads), it was now split into many different kingdoms (*taifas*) each independent and in competition with each other. *Taifa* (meaning ‘faction’ or ‘party’) kingdoms described “any of the petty kings who appeared in Muslim Spain in a period of great political fragmentation early in the 11th century after the dissolution of the central authority of the Umayyad caliphate of Córdoba. . .civil war reduced the caliphate to a puppet institution and allowed the various *taifas* to establish themselves in independent and short-lived kingdoms throughout the Iberian Peninsula. There were at least 23 such states between 1009 and their final conquest by the Almoravids of North Africa in 1091.”; Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "taifa." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 23, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/taifa>.

Ibn Rushd aka Averroes, calling her a harlot is the most commonly cited case of her exercising agency over her own life. This was quite a statement at the time not just because of the brazen words stitched into her clothes, but because of the contemporary association of bare headedness with prostitution. A document of market regulations from a bit after Wallada's time has a clearly stated rule that "Prostitutes must be forbidden to stand bare-headed outside the houses. Decent women must not bedeck themselves to resemble them."<sup>72</sup> And while critiqued for her 'abnormal' behavior, Wallada's decision to not wear a veil was not some radical novelty that originated from her. This custom can be traced back to the harem of the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid and his powerful *umm walad* Al-Khayzuran (r.786-809).<sup>73</sup>

The earlier stated rule goes on to detail specific actions that decent women must not do: "They must be stopped from coquetry and party making among themselves, even if they have been permitted to do this [by their husbands]."<sup>74</sup> Wallada blatantly defied both these societal norms with her sensuous poetry and her literary salon which attracted great minds, regardless of gender, from all over the Islamic world.

In regards to her poetry, recent scholarship has pointed out how Wallada defies both conventional courtly love and "the stereotypical image of the aloof female beloved in pre-Islamic

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<sup>72</sup> "Ibn 'Abdun on policing the market (bazaar) in Seville". Translated by Bernard Lewis in *Medieval Iberia Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia, PA; (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) 227-231, 231.

<sup>73</sup> See page 32 for a detailed discussion of *umm walad*; Doaa Omran, "Wallāda Bint Al-Mustakfi: A Muslim Princess Speaking Passionately and Persistently in the 'Palimpsest' of Al-Andalus," *Women's Studies* 51, no. 2 (March 17, 2022): pp. 120-136, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2022.2033241>, 127; Fatima Mernissi, "Khayzuran: Courtesan or Head of State?," in *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 51-67.

<sup>74</sup> "Ibn 'Abdun on policing the market (bazaar) in Seville". Translated by Bernard Lewis in *Medieval Iberia Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia, PA; (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) 227-231, 231.

*jāhiliyah* [جَاهِلِيَّة] poetry.”<sup>75</sup> This gender role reversal can be clearly seen in the first line of Wallada’s below poem to her famous lover Ibn Zaydun, where she invites him to wait for her in the safe garden, while she makes the perilous journey past guards and other dangerous obstacles to meet him for a secret tryst. This invitation exemplifies her own desire, initiative, and choice in choosing her own sexual partners, rather than ones being chosen for her.

ترقب إذا جَنّ الظلام زيارتي  
فإني رأيت الليل أكرم للسّر  
وب ي م ن ك م ال و ك ا ن ب ال ش م س ل م ت ل ح  
وبالبدر لم يطلع وبالنجم لم يسر

“When the evening descends, await then my visit,

because I see the night is the one who keeps secrets best [ is best keeper of secrets].

I feel a love for you, which – if the sun would have felt a similar love, she would not rise; and the moon, he would not appear and the stars, they would not undertake their nightly travel.”<sup>76</sup>

While these may seem like radical lines at the time, the confidence and erotic undertones present were actually quite in line with the customs of Arabic women’s poetry predating the advent of Islam. One of the most influential Arabic poets, al-Khansa (575-646), is said to have replied to the flippant comment “If Abu Basir had not already recited to me, I would have said that you are the greatest poet of the Arabs. Go, for you are the greatest poet among those with

<sup>75</sup> The time before the advent of Islam in Muslim history is known as the *jahiliyyah/ jāhiliyah* or ‘the era of ignorance’. The term *jahili* / الشعر الجاهلي (or ‘the ignorant poetry’) is a derivative of this and refers to pre-Islamic Arabic poetry; Iman Said Darwish, "Courtly Culture and Gender Poetics: Wallada bint al-Mustakfi and Christine de Pizan," Master thesis, (American University in Cairo, 2014) 16; Doaa Omran, “Wallāda Bint Al-Mustakfi: A Muslim Princess Speaking Passionately and Persistently in the ‘Palimpsest’ of Al-Andalus,” *Women's Studies* 51, no. 2 (March 17, 2022): pp. 120-136, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2022.2033241>, 129.

<sup>76</sup> Iman Said Darwish, "Courtly Culture and Gender Poetics: Wallada bint al-Mustakfi and Christine de Pizan," Master thesis, (American University in Cairo, 2014) 16.

breasts.” with the scathing remark “I am the greatest poet among those with testicles, too.”<sup>77,78</sup>

As Shamsie aptly put it “frank discussions of sexuality weren’t particular to the daughter of a Caliph.”<sup>79</sup> The Andalusian poetess, Hafsa bint al-Hajj al-Rakuniyya, who lived in Granada in the twelfth century (d.1190) continued this sensual tradition with her poem titled “Speaking to Lightning”: “Speak to lightning, a memento of my beloved/—plunging into still dark—if he remembers how he thundered me/ gave my heart a beating,/a raining of blows.”<sup>80</sup> This theme can additionally be seen in her following verse: “I praise that mouth, and upon my word, I know what I say/ I do it justice, I would not lie before God; it is sweeter than wine to the taste”<sup>81</sup> But Hafsa also wrote poetry that showed her indignation, rather than reverence towards her lover: “So you think you are the world’s best judge of beauty/ And of all things amorous?/ I received your poem, all right, but that doesn’t mean/ I agree with what you say/ Oh pretentious one! Don’t you know a lover’s despair/ Only tightens the reins he’s held by?/ You have gone quite astray, and have quite failed/ To lead me anywhere at all...”<sup>82</sup>

A contemporary fellow Granadian poet of Hafsa, Nazhun bint al-Qila’i was known for her improvisation abilities and the assertiveness of her poems. When a blind male poet failed to respond to the line “If only you had eyes to see with whom you speak”, Nazhun interjected with “You’d be struck dumb by the sight of her anklets/ With the full moon rising from her gown/

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<sup>77</sup> Abu Bashir aka al-A’sha was a widely traveled and revered *jahiliyyah* Arabic poet, contemporary with al-Khansa.

<sup>78</sup> Radwa Ashour et al., “Arab Women Writers,” trans. Mandy McClure, *Southwest Review* 94, no. 1 (2009): pp. 9-18, <https://doi.org/10.5743/cairo/9789774161469.001.0001>, 9.

<sup>79</sup> Kamila Shamsie, “Librarians, Rebels, Property Owners, Slaves: Women in Al-Andalus,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 52, no. 2 (2016): pp. 178-188, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2016.1164968>, 184.

<sup>80</sup> Will Pewitt, tran., “Five Poems of Hafsa Bint Al-Hajj Ar-Rakuniyya in Translation,” *Columbia Journal* (Columbia University School of the Arts, November 29, 2020), <http://columbiajournal.org/five-poem-of-%E1%B8%A5af%E1%B9%A3a-bint-al-%E1%B8%A5ajj-ar-rakuniyya-in-translation/>.

<sup>81</sup> Salma Khadra Jayyusi and Maria J. Viguera, “Asluhu Li ‘l Ma’ali: On the Social Status of Andalusian Women,” in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 709-723, 711.

<sup>82</sup> T.J. Gorton, tran., *Andalus: Moorish Songs of Love and Wine* (London, England: Eland, 2007), 107.

Enclosing in its folds a slender bough.”<sup>83</sup> In one of her surviving written works she bemoans about a man who refuses to accept her rejection: “Who will rid me of this stupid suitor/ With his insolent gestures and rude behavior?/ He wants me to make love! Even if he wanted a slap/ I would refuse: his wretched head should be hidden in a bag/ His ugly face covered with a mask”<sup>84</sup>

While both these Andalusian poetesses were praised for their specific contributions to many artistic and poetic styles, they should also be remembered alongside Wallada for carrying the long burning torch of Islamic women claiming their voices.

Although Wallada was centuries ahead of the similar trend later practiced by her European counterparts in the Enlightenment, her literary salon in Córdoba was not a revolutionary concept in the Islamic world.<sup>85,86</sup> In fact, she was simply following another long established Islamic tradition, called المجلس/‘*majlis*’ (pl. مجالس/‘*majālis*) which translates to ‘sitting room’.<sup>87</sup> The main quality that was desired in a *majlis* was known as ‘*zarf*’, translating to ‘sophistication/ elegance/ refinement’.<sup>88,89</sup> This cultural practice was mainly spread through the *majālis* of women like Wallada, who routinely hosted members of both sexes to engage in complex intellectual discourse. She was uniquely suited to cultivate this environment because of

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>85</sup> Salons were venues where intellectual discussion and engagement between people from all levels of society occurred freely, during the 17th and 18th centuries. They were a well-known fixture in Enlightenment era Europe, especially Paris. Just like Wallada’s 11th century gatherings, these meetings were usually hosted by single women, of independent wealth.

<sup>86</sup> Sahira Oleiwi Hussein and Hussein Hassoun, “The Foundation of bint al-Mustakfi and Her Literary Salon,” *Elementary Education Online*, Vol. 19, no. 2 (2020): pp.1310-1314, <http://ilkogretim-online.org>, doi:10.17051/ilkonline.2020.02.696721, 1310-1314.

<sup>87</sup> This phenomena actually dates back to the direct female relatives of the Prophet Mohammed, who hosted *majlis* ‘*Ilm* aka ‘a meeting for teaching Islamic Sciences’ ; Doaa Omran, “Wallāda Bint Al-Mustakfi: A Muslim Princess Speaking Passionately and Persistently in the ‘Palimpsest’ of Al-Andalus,” *Women’s Studies* 51, no. 2 (March 17, 2022): pp. 120-136, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2022.2033241>, 125.

<sup>88</sup> Sahar Amer, “Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 2 (May 2009): pp. 215-236, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sex.0.0052>, 229-232.

<sup>89</sup> María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Schiendlin, and Michael Sells, eds., *The Literature of Al-Andalus* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2006), 306.



her position as her father's sole heir, allowing her to become a woman of independent wealth. In contrast to the patriarchal and restrictive inheritance laws pertaining to women in Medieval Europe, Islamic law that governed al-Andalus allowed women to own property.<sup>90,91</sup> Historian Maya Shatzmiller concluded that “the majority of Muslim women owned property independently at some point in their lives...acquired property at every stage of the life-cycle, and... played an important role in the intergenerational transmission of property”<sup>92</sup> Wallada was no exception to this rule, and chose to use an inherited property to host *majālis*, perform her impressive original poetry, and foster the great minds of Córdoba.

While she was rightfully celebrated for the beauty and intricately woven witty phrases of her poetry, it is important to note that Wallada's words were more than just aesthetically pleasing. They held real power. In the following series of verses, that could potentially be from the same poem, Wallada accuses her former lover, Ibn Zaydun, of having sex with men.<sup>93,94</sup>

إِنَّ ابْنَ زَيْدُونَ لَهُ فَفَحَّةٌ  
تَعْشُقُ قُضْبَانَ السَّرَاوِيلِ

<sup>90</sup> See An-Nisa' 4:1-14 in the Quran.

<sup>91</sup> There were two ways for the Muslim conquerors of al-Andalus to gain control of land: '*anwatan*', meaning property conquered by force of arms in the Muslim invasion; the second was '*sulhan*' or property obtained through a treaty, making the land and its people subject to Islamic authority and its laws, but it is not actually owned by a Muslim. When Christian or Jewish women with inherited land married Muslim men, that land then passed to their husband and eventually to their Muslim children. These categories were not as relevant by the time Wallada received her inheritance; Simon Barton, *Conquerors, Brides and Concubines: Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 17; Maya Shatzmiller, “Women and Property Rights in Al-Andalus and the Maghrib: Social Patterns and Legal Discourse,” *Islamic Law and Society* 2, no. 3 (1995): pp. 219-257, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568519952599204>, 222.

<sup>92</sup> Maya Shatzmiller, “Women and Property Rights in Al-Andalus and the Maghrib: Social Patterns and Legal Discourse,” *Islamic Law and Society* 2, no. 3 (1995): pp. 219-257, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568519952599204>, 219.

<sup>93</sup> This claim cannot be confidently concluded, because no full poem of Wallada's survives to this day. And of the few pieces that do still exist, they were all preserved as brief quotations removed from their context in order for the citing author to back-up their stereotypically misogynistic and negative opinion of Wallada. I am arguing that since both verses are addressing a similar theme, there is the possibility that they originated from the same poem, the full version of which is now lost to time.

<sup>94</sup> I chose to use the phrasing 'sex with men' instead of the modern terms 'homosexuality' or 'bisexuality' in relation to the sexual acts of Ibn Zaydun because these latter terms are anachronistic. See the paragraph on Wallada and her potential sapphic relationship with her student, Muhya bint al-Tayyani, for a more detailed discussion on this topic on pages 28-30.

لو أبصرت أيرا على نخلة  
صارت من الطير الأبايل

“Ibn Zaydun, famous as he may be,  
is in love with trouser-legs!

When he sees the penis of a date-palm,  
he flies to it like the swiftest bird around!<sup>95</sup>”

ولقبت المسّس وهو نعت  
تفارك الحياة ولا يفارق  
وديوث وقرنان وسارق  
قلوطي ومأبون وزان

“He’s known as the ‘Hexagon’<sup>96</sup>,

And that’s a name, he’ll never shake

Though he shake off life itself!

Queer, sodomite, fornicator, pimp, cuckold, and thief!<sup>97</sup>”

This poem was the tip of the iceberg when it came to Ibn Zaydun’s unpopularity and he was exiled from his hometown shortly after the Emir of Córdoba read Wallada’s inflammatory accusation.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Original Arabic text from: Iman Said Darwish, "Courtly Culture and Gender Poetics: Wallada bint al-Mustakfi and Christine de Pizan," Master thesis, (American University in Cairo, 2014) 24; Translation from: T.J. Gorton, tran., *Andalus: Moorish Songs of Love and Wine* (London, England: Eland, 2007), 101.

<sup>96</sup> Since I do not speak Arabic, I cannot confirm that this theory is true, however, I posit that the term ‘hexagon’ is a clever play on words that references the six alleged indiscretions in the last line of the poem and the fact that all hexagons have six sides and six angles. This theory is further backed up by a slightly different translation of this same verse found in another source. In that version, ‘hexagon’ is translated as ‘sixer’, a word that also connects with the six-sided polygon and list of six insults; Iman Said Darwish, "Courtly Culture and Gender Poetics: Wallada bint al-Mustakfi and Christine de Pizan," Master thesis, (American University in Cairo, 2014) 23.

<sup>97</sup> Original Arabic text from: Iman Said Darwish, "Courtly Culture and Gender Poetics: Wallada bint al-Mustakfi and Christine de Pizan," Master thesis, (American University in Cairo, 2014) 23; Translation from: T.J. Gorton, tran., *Andalus: Moorish Songs of Love and Wine* (London, England: Eland, 2007), 101.

<sup>98</sup> Doaa Omran, “Wallāda Bint Al-Mustakfi: A Muslim Princess Speaking Passionately and Persistently in the ‘Palimpsest’ of Al-Andalus,” *Women's Studies* 51, no. 2 (March 17, 2022): pp. 120-136, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2022.2033241>, 133.

Yet while exercising her own agency through her writing, she was not exempt from the patriarchal system of the time. Occasionally, she was even an active participant in limiting the control that other women had over their lives. However, this ability to oppress others could be argued as just another way that Wallada showed her own autonomy in a patriarchy dominated world. For example, when she found out that Ibn Zaydun was cheating on her with one of her dark-skinned slave girls, ‘Utba, she penned a disparaging poem, ridiculing them both, while simultaneously exalting her own desirable qualities. The lines referencing ‘Utba are particularly brutal. Wallada compares herself to a fertile tree branch, overflowing with fruit, while her competition is depicted as barren. She also insults her darker skin tone in contrast to Wallada’s own pale complexion.<sup>99</sup>

لو كنت تنصف في الهوى ما بيننا  
 لم تهو جاريتي ولم تتخير  
 وتركات غصنا مثمرا بجمالها  
 وجنحت للغصن الذي لم يثمر  
 ولقد علمت بأئني بدر السما  
 لكن دهيت لشقوتي بالمشتري

“If you did justice to our love,  
 you would not desire nor prefer my slave girl  
 Nor would you forsake a fertile branch, in its beauty,  
 And turn to a branch devoid of fruit  
 You know that I am the Moon in the sky,

<sup>99</sup> We know that Wallada had the lighter skin tone that resulted from centuries of Muslim men having children with northern Christian, Jewish, and Basque women because of a poem by Ibn Zaydun where he praises her “light skin [and] beautiful golden hair” ; Iman Said Darwish, "Courtly Culture and Gender Poetics: Wallada bint al-Mustakfi and Christine de Pizan," Master thesis, (American University in Cairo, 2014) 15.

but burn, to my chagrin, for Jupiter.”<sup>100</sup>

In contrast to this anecdote, there is also the fact that she educated a diverse group of women in her literary salon.<sup>101</sup> The most prominent example of this is Muhya bint al-Tayyani, an assumed lower-class woman from Córdoba who wrote several poems of her own.<sup>102</sup> Continuing the dismal trend seen throughout this section, very little of her work survives. One of the few verses that still remains directly addresses her mentor Wallada. The words have been widely interpreted from playfully sarcastic to viciously accusatory:<sup>103</sup>

وَلَادَةَ صِرْتُ قَدْ وَّلَادَةَ  
الْكَاثِمِ فَضَحَ بَعْلٌ غَيْرِ مِنِ  
لِكَيْتِهِ مَرْيَمَ لَنَا حَكَّتْ  
قَائِمٌ دَكَّرَ هَذِي تَخْلَةَ

“Oh Wallada! Your secret’s out, your baby’s born,  
with never a husband in sight!  
You’re like the Virgin Mary, but instead of a palm-tree,  
You’ve leaned upon an erect penis!”<sup>104</sup>

Those that err on the side of an accusatory and jealous interpretation are more likely to

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<sup>100</sup> Original Arabic text and English translation from: Iman Said Darwish, "Courtly Culture and Gender Poetics: Wallada bint al-Mustakfi and Christine de Pizan," Master thesis, (American University in Cairo, 2014) 19-20.

<sup>101</sup> Doaa Omran, “Wallāda Bint Al-Mustakfi: A Muslim Princess Speaking Passionately and Persistently in the ‘Palimpsest’ of Al-Andalus,” *Women's Studies* 51, no. 2 (March 17, 2022): pp. 120-136, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2022.2033241>, 126.

<sup>102</sup> Marín Manuela, *Estudios Onomástico-Biográficos De Al-Andalus, XI: Mujeres En Al-Ándalus* (Madrid, Spain: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Filología, Departamento de Estudios Árabes, 2000), 644.

<sup>103</sup> This verse is categorized as “típicas de la sátira árabe [typical of Arabic satire]” by Teresa Garulo. Poet and professor Mahmud Sobh in contrasts describes the tone as more scathing and provoked by conflict between the women; Teresa Garulo, *Diwan De Las Poetisas De Al-Andalus* (Madrid, Spain: Hiperión, 1998), 105-106; Mahmud Sobh, *Historia De La Literatura Árabe Clásica* (Madrid, Spain: Ediciones Cátedra, 2002), 952-953.

<sup>104</sup> Original Arabic text from: Iman Said Darwish, "Courtly Culture and Gender Poetics: Wallada bint al-Mustakfi and Christine de Pizan," Master thesis, (American University in Cairo, 2014) 25; Translation from: T.J. Gorton, tran., *Andalus: Moorish Songs of Love and Wine* (London, England: Eland, 2007), 102.

believe the rumor that Wallada and Muhya were lovers.<sup>105</sup> While it is too far to pigeonhole either women as a lesbian or bisexual, their potential relationship and the associated actions can be described as queer. I have chosen to use the term queer because the many modern classifications of homosexuality are by their very nature anachronistic. Most of the ideas and official categorizations relating to queer people and their experiences were invented and disseminated by the West, making them foreign and sometimes incompatible concepts to other cultures.<sup>106</sup> A number of 21<sup>st</sup> century studies have reinforced this statement, with the most prominent issue being the concept of ‘coming out’, a Western notion where one’s sexuality is an integral part of their identity and therefore should be public knowledge. This same connection between sexuality and identity is not seen in other parts of the world. For queer Muslims, “same-sex sexual practices do not necessarily manifest in identities.”<sup>107</sup> And while a millennium has passed, remnants of the separation between action and identity could have easily survived in Islamic culture.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> A near contemporary of both women, Ibn Sa’id al-Maghribi (1213-1286), telling the life story of Muhya, stated that “Se prendó Wallada de ella y se dedicó a enseñarle la literatura hasta que llegó a ser poetisa” The second half of the translation is widely agreed upon as “she [Wallada] dedicated herself to teaching her [Muhya] until she became a poetess.” It is the first half of the statement, “Se prendó Wallada de ella”, that is a source of contention as it translates to “Wallada was captivated by/fell for her [Muhya]”. Some historians have argued that is simply describing a close female friendship, while others claim it as clear evidence of a homosexual relationship between the two women; Mahmud Sobh, *Historia De La Literatura Árabe Clásica* (Madrid, Spain: Ediciones Cátedra, 2002), 953; Sahar Amer, “Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 2 (May 2009): pp. 215-236, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sex.0.0052>, 231.

<sup>106</sup> Amer concisely concludes that “The notions of sexuality, heterosexuality, and homosexuality as sexual deviance seem to be part of the Western imperial legacy to the Arab world today. Ironically, and despite its promised of ‘modernizing’ and ‘liberating’, the hegemony of the Western cultural and intellectual capital has ended by erasing the more extensive and flexible medieval Arabic model of sexuality, declared it ‘deviant’, and imposed instead a binary view of sexuality onto the Arab world.”; Sahar Amer, “Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 2 (May 2009): pp. 215-236, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sex.0.0052>, 224.

<sup>107</sup> Gerard Coll-Planas, Gloria García-Romeral, and Belén Masi, “The Incorporation of Cultural and Religious Diversity in LGBT Policies: Experiences of Queer Migrants from Muslim Backgrounds in Catalonia, Spain,” *Religions* 13, no. 1 (December 31, 2021): pp. 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.3390/re113010036>, 6.

<sup>108</sup> For more information on how queer Muslims view and navigate their environments, especially in the context of immigrants in Europe, see: Gerard Coll-Planas, Gloria García-Romeral, and Blai Martí Plademunt, “Doing, Being and Verbalizing: Narratives of Queer Migrants from Muslim Backgrounds in Spain,” *Sexualities* 24, no. 8 (2020): pp. 984-1002, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460720944589>; Gerard Coll-Planas, Gloria García-Romeral, and Belén Masi, “The Incorporation of Cultural and Religious Diversity in LGBT Policies: Experiences of Queer Migrants

It is easy to write off Wallada and Muhya's sapphic relationship as a simple tidbit, but Sahar Amer makes the strong case about how queer behavior "speaks...to the emancipatory possibilities of the history of sexuality."<sup>109</sup> She points to the fact that there are a large amount of extant texts comprising a variety of categories that depict "same-sex love and desire between women in the medieval Islamic world".<sup>110</sup> Along with the blatant sensuality and self-confidence depicted in Andalusian poetesses works, these surviving texts "paint medieval Arab and Muslim women with unexpected agency over their social and sexual lives."<sup>111</sup> Whether or not Wallada and Muhya had simply a mentor-mentee relationship, or something more complicated, it is clear that both women had a profound impact on each other and were able to exert their agency through their lyrical and imaginative words.

The other noteworthy woman in Wallada's life was the aforementioned 'Utba, although her role in Wallada's life was as a catalyst rather than the more central position that Muhya held. 'Utba was a *jariyya* (pl. *jawari*) or a concubine specifically chosen for their beauty and/or artistic talents like singing, dancing, and reciting poetry.<sup>112</sup> Outside of the *jawari*, women in the harem occupied a number of other roles. They broadly fell into 3 categories: a wife aka 'al-hurra'

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from Muslim Backgrounds in Catalonia, Spain," *Religions* 13, no. 1 (December 31, 2021): pp. 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010036>; Fatima El-Tayeb, "'Gays Who Cannot Properly Be Gay': Queer Muslims in the Neoliberal European City," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 19, no. 1 (2012): pp. 79-95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506811426388>; Trinidad Lara, "Queer, Muslim, and Maghrebi: An Intersectional Analysis of Immigrant Identities in Contemporary France," *Journal for Undergraduate Ethnography* 12, no. 1 (2022): pp. 33-53, <https://doi.org/10.15273/jue.v12i1.11312>.

<sup>109</sup> Sahar Amer, "Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 2 (May 2009): pp. 215-236, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sex.0.0052>, 236.

<sup>110</sup> In Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the act of adultery (*zina*) was considered the most abhorrent sexual sin, above both homosexuality (*liwat*) and lesbianism (*sahq*). In medical texts, lesbianism was categorized "as both innate and lifelong". It is something that can only be treated, mainly through 'rubbing', not cured and was not necessarily viewed negatively. Even in literature, same-sex female love is not only present, but in some cases celebrated. The earliest surviving Arabic erotic treatise, *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, tells the pre-Islamic lasting love story of Christian Hind bint al-Nu'man and Arabic al-Zarqa. Their undying devotion to each other is presented as proof that women are more loyal than their heterosexual male counterparts and lauded as an example to follow; *Ibid*, 222-223.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 236.

<sup>112</sup> Simon Barton, *Conquerors, Brides and Concubines: Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 33.

(literally translating to ‘free woman’), a concubine aka ‘*suriyya*’ (plural ‘*sarari*’), or daughters.<sup>113</sup> Wives were free Muslim women of noble descent while, *sarari* were enslaved Jewish or Christian women generally originating from the lower class.<sup>114</sup> The latter was not always the case though as some of the Christian concubines were originally of noble birth as part of treaty agreements between their male relatives and the Muslim rulers.<sup>115</sup>

One of the first known examples of this can be found in the life of Egilona. She was a Visigoth noblewoman, who was either the wife or daughter of King Roderic, the last King of the Goths.<sup>116</sup> When the Muslim army successfully invaded the Iberian Peninsula, defeating and killing Roderic, Egilona married ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Musa, the first governor of al-Andalus. He only ruled for 2 years (714-716) before being assassinated on the orders of the Umayyad Caliph. The reasoning behind this decision was rumors that ‘Abd al-‘Aziz had become corrupted by his wife into becoming/acting like a Christian king because she suggested he wear a crown and have his subjects bow to him.<sup>117</sup> Just like the case of Florinda La Cava, Egilona’s small acts of agency were twisted until the blame of a man’s actions rested squarely on her shoulders. Also, like La Cava’s story, there are debates about whether Egilona was a real historical figure, but that fact is

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<sup>113</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1993), 14; Simon Barton, *Conquerors, Brides and Concubines: Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 33.

<sup>114</sup> According to the *sharia* (divine law), Muslims cannot enslave other Muslims and therefore all the concubines were either Christian or Jewish. For further discussion on this topic, see the manumission paragraph on page 40-41; Dror Ze’evi, "Slavery." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*. *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e074>.

<sup>115</sup> Simon Barton, *Conquerors, Brides and Concubines: Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 34.

<sup>116</sup> This title is actually a misnomer because at least two more kings (Achilla II, Ardo) succeeded Roderic after his death in 711. King Roderic is also the man who rapes Florinda La Cava leading to his kingdom’s downfall. See footnote 7 on pages 3-4.

<sup>117</sup> Ibn Abd-El-Hakem, *Ibn Abd-El-Hakem's History of the Conquest of Spain*, trans. John Harris Jones (Goettingen, London: Williams and Norgate, 1858), 26-27; Kenneth Baxter Wolf, tran., “The Chronicle of 754,” in *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, 2nd ed. (Liverpool, England: Liverpool University Press, 2011), pp. 91-128, 110; al-Maqqari, trans. Pascual de Gayangos (Johnson Reprint Corp, 1964), Vol II, pp. 1-544, Book V Chap. IV p.30-31.

not relevant because her story mirrors the theme for this Andalusian practice. This custom was so prevalent that many rulers of al-Andalus were sons of this type of union, including the first Caliph of al-Andalus, Abd al-Rahman III, whose mother, Muzna, was a Christian concubine of Basque or Frankish origin.<sup>118,119</sup>

A *surriya* could further be described as a *jariyya*, as seen in ‘Utba’s case. *Jawari* were seen as a status symbol for the men that owned them. This value is clearly illustrated in the following line written by King al-Mu’tamid of Sevilla in his poem *Night of Festivities*: “So it is with me here on Earth/ I walk amid squadrons of beautiful women/ who add luster to high rank.”<sup>120</sup> *Sarari* could also become ‘*umm walad*’/ أم ولد’ which literally translates to ‘mother of the child’. This term referred to a concubine who gave birth to her master’s child.<sup>121</sup> This commonly gave the woman a higher status and special privileges over her fellow enslaved women.<sup>122</sup> Her child was also considered equal in status to their half-siblings and had a presumably equal chance of becoming the next ruler, only if they were male of course.<sup>123</sup> Before

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<sup>118</sup> D. F. Ruggles, “Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty: Race, Genealogy, and Acculturation in Al-Andalus,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2004): pp. 65-94, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-34-1-65>, pg.73.

<sup>119</sup> The term Franks was used by Muslims in the medieval ages to refer to people who inhabited modern-day Europe in general. It evolved from Islamic interaction with Christians from many different kingdoms in the Crusades; David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 21.

<sup>120</sup> Mūsá Ibn Sa‘īd ‘Alī ibn and Gómez García Emilio, *Poems of Arab Andalusia*, trans. Cola Franzen (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1989), 86-87.

<sup>121</sup> For more information on this topic see Younus Mirza’s article *Remembering the Umm al-Walad - Ibn Kathir’s Treatise on the Concubine-Mother*; Simon Barton, *Conquerors, Brides and Concubines: Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 33; Younus Y. Mirza, “Remembering the Umm Al-Walad,” *Oxford Scholarship Online*, October 19, 2017, pp. 297-321, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190622183.003.0016>.

<sup>122</sup> Caliph Abd al-Rahman III awarded the title of *al-sayyida al-kubra*, translating to ‘Great Lady’, to his favorite *jawari* and mother to his successor, Murjana, elevating her status above other *umm walads* in the harem; Simon Barton, *Conquerors, Brides and Concubines: Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 38.

<sup>123</sup> Anas Mālik ibn, *Al-Muwaṭṭa’: The Recension of Yaḥyā B. Yaḥyā Al-Laythī (d. 234/848): A Translation of the Royal Moroccan Edition*, ed. Connell Monette, trans. Mohammad H. Fadel (Cambridge, MA: Program in Islamic Law, Harvard Law School, 2019), 467; Katz, Marion H. “Concubinage, in Islamic Law.” Brill. Brill, October 1, 2014. [https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/concubinage-in-islamic-law-COM\\_25564](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/concubinage-in-islamic-law-COM_25564).



continuing, it is important to emphasize that no matter their distinction all *jawari*, *sarari*, and the majority of *umm walads* were enslaved servants and therefore had extremely limited autonomy, if any. Even the distinction of *umm walad* only ensured a title change, not the women's status as a slave. These women were subject not only to the whims of their masters, several of whom were notably violent, but also vulnerable to any power changes. Since they were viewed as property, when there were political shifts the harem members of the losing party were raped and tortured.<sup>124</sup> 'Utba was unquestionably treated like Wallada's property and of the miniscule information that we do know about her, there is no evidence of her exerting any agency over her life. Even her affair with Ibn Zaydun cannot prove this, because there is no evidence as to whether it was consensual or not. However, there are historical examples of other women in 'Utba's position that did break the mold.

Quite a few Andalusian *jawari* stand out as women who stretched the limits of their strict boundaries because they "operated within the caliph's palace itself, in the bed and heart of the man whom the law set up as the absolute master of souls and possessions."<sup>125</sup> This movement is prevalent enough across the Islamic world that feminist scholar Fatima Mernissi even argued in her 1990 work, "*The Forgotten Queens of Islam*", that that first Islamic slave revolt was not actually the 9<sup>th</sup> century Zanj Rebellion 869-883 against the Abbasids, but in fact a subtler and more pervasive rebellion carried out by the *jawari* well before and after the Zanj revolt ceased to

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<sup>124</sup> While showering gifts and titles upon his favorite *umm walad*, Abd al-Rahman III is reported to have poured hot wax directly onto the face one of his *sarari* who rejected his sexual advances. Caliph Hisham II's *hajib* al-Mansur apparently executed two *jawari* for reciting poetry that displeased him; Simon Barton, *Conquerors, Brides and Concubines: Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 38; Marín Manuela, *Estudios Onomástico-Biográficos De Al-Andalus, XI: Mujeres En Al-Ándalus* (Madrid, Spain: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Filología, Departamento de Estudios Árabes, 2000), 688-689.

<sup>125</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1993), 37-38.

be consequential.<sup>126</sup> Throughout the 3 centuries that this research covers, there were a number of women that made significant and ascertainable impacts on the environment around them.<sup>127</sup>

The most famous example is Subh (938-999), an *umm walad* of al-Hakam II (r. 961-976) and mother to his heir, Hisham II (r.976-1009, 1010-1013). Originally from the Christian regions of Basque or Navarra, she was brought to Córdoba to be a *jawari* at a young age.<sup>128</sup> Like many other powerful *jawari*, much of Subh's influence was attributed to her appearance. But in sharp contrast to the traditional feminine beauty associated with the harem, she was described as a more masculine-looking woman aka *ghumaliyya* (pl. *ghumiliyyat*).<sup>129</sup> Her appearance is how she apparently caught the eye of al-Hakam II, who was said to be more attracted to men. Subh further cemented her position when she gave birth to her first son in 962, officially becoming an *umm walad*.<sup>130</sup> For the last decade of his life, the caliph became a recluse, retreating into the many books that filled his libraries and neglecting his political duties. With his full trust and her position as the *umm walad* of the heir apparent, Subh essentially became the de facto ruler of the

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<sup>126</sup> The Zanj revolt is widely considered to be the first large-scale slave revolt in Islamic history. The name 'zanj' refers to a geographical location in present-day Sudan and its' Bantu speaking inhabitants that were enslaved by the Abbasids Caliphate. After their forceful capture and relocation, they were forced to drain the salt marshes near Basra, Iraq until in 869, they decided to protest their working conditions as a violation of *shari'a* (divine law). By the end, thousands of people had died, and the Abbasid capital of Baghdad had been cut off from communications with the Persian Gulf for years. Eventually the rebels were defeated in 883; Ibid, 37-39.

<sup>127</sup> For a family tree of the Andalusian Umayyads including the *umm-walads*, see Appendix D.

<sup>128</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1993), 49; Simon Barton, *Conquerors, Brides and Concubines: Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 33.

<sup>129</sup> This Arabic term refers to "slave girls who cross-dressed as boys (at times even with painted mustaches)"; Sahar Amer, "Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 2 (May 2009): pp. 215-236, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sex.0.0052>, 226; D. F. Ruggles, "Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty: Race, Genealogy, and Acculturation in Al-Andalus," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2004): pp. 65-94, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-34-1-65>, 73; India Kotis, "'She is a Boy, or if Not a Boy, Then a Boy Resembles Her': Cross-Dressing, Homosexuality and Enslaved Sex and Gender in Umayyad Iberia," *The Macksey Journal: Vol. 1*, Article 119 (2020): pp.1-23, <https://www.mackseyjournal.org/publications/vol1/iss1/119>, 1-3.

<sup>130</sup> Unfortunately, this child died in childhood. Her second son and future Caliph, Hisham II, was born in in 966; Francisco Prado-Vilar, "Circular Visions of Fertility and Punishment: Caliphal Ivory Caskets from Al-Andalus," *Muqarnas Online* 14, no. 1 (1997): pp. 19-41, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22118993-90000368>, 23.

Andalusian Caliphate.<sup>131</sup> When al-Hakam II died in 976, his designated heir was still a child, and under normal circumstances, the title would be transferred to the eldest son or even uncle.<sup>132</sup> In this case, al-Hakam had an half-brother, al-Mughira, who was expected to take over the role of Caliph.<sup>133</sup> But Subh was not about to relinquish power and used her influence over the *الحاجب*/*hajib* (chamberlain) to ensure her son's rule with the assassination of his uncle.<sup>134</sup> In this same bold political move, she also appointed herself al-Hisham's regent, a foreign concept in the Islamic world at the time.<sup>135</sup> As a result of these events, she was essentially the sole ruler of Córdoba for 20 years.

Even with all these accomplishments, Subh's lasting impact was on the position of the *hajib*. She exerted her power to raise Muhammad Ibn Abi 'Amir aka al-Mansur out of his obscure position as a *katib* to the *vizier* equivalent in al-Andalus.<sup>136</sup> He of course repaid her support by arranging al-Mughira's death. However, her continued loyalty also allowed al-Mansur to strip the caliph position of all power and authority, so that by the time al-Hisham II was an adult, he was essentially a figurehead rather than a ruler.<sup>137</sup> Analyzing the combined

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<sup>131</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1993), 47.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>133</sup> al-Maqqari, trans. Pascual de Gayangos (Johnson Reprint Corp, 1964), Vol I, pp. 1-548, Book VI Chap. VI-VII, 174-178; Nada Mourtada-Sabbah and Adrian Gully, "'I Am, by God, Fit for High Positions': On the Political Role of Women in Al-Andalus," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 2 (November 2003): pp. 183-209, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1353019032000126527>, 193.

<sup>134</sup> See footnote 58 on page 17 for a more complete definition of *hajib*; Francisco Prado-Vilar, "Circular Visions of Fertility and Punishment: Caliphal Ivory Caskets from Al-Andalus," *Muqarnas Online* 14, no. 1 (1997): pp. 19-41, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22118993-90000368>, 23.

<sup>135</sup> al-Maqqari, trans. Pascual de Gayangos (Johnson Reprint Corp, 1964), Vol I, pp. 1-548, Book VI Chap. VII, 178-180; Nada Mourtada-Sabbah and Adrian Gully, "'I Am, by God, Fit for High Positions': On the Political Role of Women in Al-Andalus," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 2 (November 2003): pp. 183-209, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1353019032000126527>, 193.

<sup>136</sup> *Katib* translates to 'clerks/secretaries/scribes'. Throughout Islamic societies, the superb skills of the *katib* in Arabic were so widely employed that the position grew to be an essential part of the bureaucracy; For more on influential *kuttāb*, see page 41-43.

<sup>137</sup> Nada Mourtada-Sabbah and Adrian Gully, "'I Am, by God, Fit for High Positions': On the Political Role of Women in Al-Andalus," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 2 (November 2003): pp. 183-209, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1353019032000126527>, 192-195.

impact of her actions, researchers Nada Mourtada-Sabbah and Adrian Gully argue that in her quest to secure power for her son, she ‘sowed the seeds of ...*fitna* [civil war]...that was to lead to a lack of stability in al-Andalus with the establishment of the party [*taifa*] kingdoms.’<sup>138</sup> Quite a feat for a Christian women who arrived in Córdoba as a sex slave.

Just like the case of Wallada, there were influential *jawari* before Subh that helped pave her path to power. The reign of Abd al-Rahman II (r.822-852) is particularly intriguing because there were multiple powerful women in his harem. Of his many *sarari* his favorite was Tarub and for the majority of his reign her son, Abd Allah, was his heir apparent.<sup>139,140</sup> Abd al-Rahman II ruled for an exceptionally long time (31 years), and towards the latter part of his reign he began to favor another son, Muhammad I (r.852-886). He was the son of Buhair, an *umm walad* who died when he was very young, so he was subsequently raised by another one of his father’s *jawari*, al-Shifa.<sup>141</sup> When Tarub learned about this shift in favoritism she schemed to ensure that her son succeeded his father as Caliph by attempting to poison Abd al-Rahman II and Muhammad I. Her plan ultimately failed because a fellow *sarari*, Fakhr, forewarned the

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 195.

<sup>139</sup> Abd al-Rahman had a recorded 87 children (some sources claim up to 200 offspring) so it is safe to assume that he had a couple dozen *umm-walads* and even more *jawari* and *sarari*. Besides Tarub, there are several other named *sarari* including Buhair, al-Shifa, Fakhr, Mut’a, Qalam, and Mudathirah; D. F. Ruggles, “Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty: Race, Genealogy, and Acculturation in Al-Andalus,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2004): pp. 65-94, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-34-1-65>, 71-72,76; al-Maqqari, trans. Pascual de Gayangos (Johnson Reprint Corp, 1964), Vol I, pp. 1-548, Book VI Chap. IV, 126.

<sup>140</sup> Tarub is said to have had so much influence over the Caliph that in order to appease her after an argument, he placed so many “bags of dirhams” in front of her door that he actually blocked it. Upon opening her door to rebuke his apologies she saw the mountain of money and immediately forgave him; al-Maqqari, trans. Pascual de Gayangos (Johnson Reprint Corp, 1964), Vol I, pp. 1-548, Book VI Chap. IV, 125-126.

<sup>141</sup> Although it is clear that mothers of the harem would fight for their children just as fiercely as any other parent, not much is actually known about their day-day interactions with their children. The case of al-Shifa is a “welcome exception to the textual silence, because she is identified as a wet nurse, an adoptive mom..., as well as the birth mother of a son (al-Mutarrif) with Abd al-Rahman II.” This could potentially indicate that there may have not been a strict separation between the free and enslaved women of the harem; D. F. Ruggles, “Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty: Race, Genealogy, and Acculturation in Al-Andalus,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2004): pp. 65-94, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-34-1-65>, 71.

Caliph.<sup>142</sup> All of these women fought for control of the Caliphate through their sons in clear, explicit acts of agency.

Assassinations were not the only way to exhibit agency. Many wives and daughters of the harem employed subtler and more socially acceptable ways of showing power. The most diffuse illustration of this was patronage of the arts. Umm Salama, *al-hurra* of Muhammad I, was the patron of a large cemetery outside Córdoba.<sup>143</sup> Multiple *umm walads*, *jarari* and daughters of the rulers had mosques constructed in their honor. For example, al-Baha', daughter of Abd al-Rahman II, "patronized the construction of a mosque in the suburb of al-Rusafa."<sup>144</sup> Similarly, 'Ajab and Mut'a (*sarari* of al-Hakam I, r. 796-822), and at least four *sarari* of Abd al-Rahman II (Tarub, Fakhr, al-Shifa, and Mut'a), all commissioned mosques throughout the city during their lifetimes. Murjana, *umm walad* of Abd al-Rahman III (r.912-961) and mother of al-Hakam II, founded a mosque as well as endowing several charitable institutions.<sup>145</sup> Considering several of these women never even achieved the status of *umm walad* it is even more impressive that they were able to "make their mark on history as patrons."<sup>146</sup> Due to the nature of the harem and the elevated status of *umm walads*, women of extremely underprivileged backgrounds could be

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<sup>142</sup> 'Umar Ibn al-Qūṭīyah Muḥammad ibn and David James, *Early Islamic Spain: The History of Ibn Al-Qutiya* (London, England: Routledge, 2011), 112.

<sup>143</sup> D. F. Ruggles, "Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty: Race, Genealogy, and Acculturation in Al-Andalus," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2004): pp. 65-94, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-34-1-65>, 71-72.

<sup>144</sup> This is my translation of the Spanish "patrocinó la construcción de una mezquita en el arrabal de al-Rusafa"; Marín Manuela, *Estudios Onomástico-Biográficos De Al-Andalus, XI: Mujeres En Al-Ándalus* (Madrid, Spain: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Filología, Departamento de Estudios Árabes, 2000), 341.

<sup>145</sup> Marín Manuela, *Estudios Onomástico-Biográficos De Al-Andalus, XI: Mujeres En Al-Ándalus* (Madrid, Spain: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Filología, Departamento de Estudios Árabes, 2000), 340-343; D. F. Ruggles, "Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty: Race, Genealogy, and Acculturation in Al-Andalus," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2004): pp. 65-94, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-34-1-65>, 72, 91.

<sup>146</sup> D. F. Ruggles, "Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty: Race, Genealogy, and Acculturation in Al-Andalus," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2004): pp. 65-94, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-34-1-65>, 72.

recorded by history.

The stories of the women above help to dispel the myths and stereotypes surrounding the harem.<sup>147</sup> It was not a sexualized space full of lounging naked women, but a unique domestic sphere filled with a combination of political intrigue, rivalry, love, and loyalty. It was also a space which allowed women more agency and privacy than traditionally believed. Especially in contrast to the public space. In a document consisting of ‘*bazaar*’ (market) regulations in early 12<sup>th</sup> century Sevilla, almost a quarter of it consist of rules pertaining to women’s behavior, dress, and permitted areas. One curious rule was that women could not relax by the Río Guadalquivir if any men were present, even if the women were there first. But this almost seems reasonable in comparison to a law that advised the ‘*muhtasib*’ (market inspector) to attentively watch over all women sellers since “The women who weave brocades must be banned from the market, for they are nothing but harlots.”<sup>148</sup> In addition to these regulations, women in public were expected to dress and act certain ways, all in deference to men. Inside the harem though, there were virtually no men, with few exceptions.

The physical layout of the harem within a royal palace simultaneously cements and

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<sup>147</sup> It is important to remember that not all concubines of the harem were female. Abd al-Rahman III and al-Hakam II (the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Caliphs of Cordoba respectfully) are some notable examples of potentially queer rulers, although these terms are anachronistic, who openly had male sexual partners (catamites) in their harems. This is quite interesting because the below quote is from a *hisba*, or manual that market inspectors used to enforce economic and moral rules, and in direct contradiction to the actions of the hypocritical rulers.

“Catamites must be driven out of the city and punished wherever any one of them is found. They should not be allowed to move around among the Muslims nor to participate in festivities, for they are debauchees accursed by God and man alike”

However, not everyone was able to break this law without consequence as seen in the case of Ibn Zaydun, who was imprisoned and then cast out of Cordoba for an accused homosexual relationship with his servant Ali. See Wallada’s poem: “Ibn Zaydun, famous as he may be,/ Reproaches me- blameless as I am!/ Every time we pass each other, he glares malignantly at me/ As though I was about to castrate Ali”; Olivia Remie Constable and Damian Zurro, *Medieval Iberia Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 227-231; Doaa Omran, “Wallāda Bint Al-Mustakfi: A Muslim Princess Speaking Passionately and Persistently in the ‘Palimpsest’ of Al-Andalus,” *Women's Studies* 51, no. 2 (March 17, 2022): pp. 120-136, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2022.2033241>, 133; Translation from: T.J. Gorton, tran., *Andalus: Moorish Songs of Love and Wine* (London, England: Eland, 2007), 101.

<sup>148</sup> Olivia Remie Constable and Damian Zurro, *Medieval Iberia Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 227-231.

facilitates this freedom. The living quarters of the harem was located in a secluded area of the palace, separated from public spaces that allowed women an area to be themselves without the constant gaze and judgment of male eyes.<sup>149</sup> In fact, the only males allowed inside this space besides the sovereign and the children were the eunuch guards.<sup>150</sup> Unfortunately, there is very little remaining of the original structure of the Madinat al-Zahra, the royal palace of Córdoba where the Caliph and his harem would have lived.<sup>151</sup> In fact, it was buried over time and was not rediscovered until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, leaving it an archeological site full of questions.

Although out of this research's time period, the Alhambra of Granada is a great example of how an Islamic palace, like Madinat al-Zahra in Córdoba, would have been designed.<sup>152</sup> The Alhambra is a sprawling, mountainside complex that was built in stages over a number of decades. Construction first began in earnest in 1238 when the founding Nasrid ruler, Muhammad I (r.1238-1244) moved his household into the Alcazaba, a structure formerly used as a military fortress.<sup>153</sup> Gradual improvements, including an aqueduct system, and new buildings were added sporadically over the years, but the most iconic landmarks were constructed under Emirs Yusuf I (r.1333-1354) and Muhammad V (r.1354-1359, 1364-1391). This included the Palacio de Comares (Comares Palace) and the Patio de los Leones (Courtyard of Lions).<sup>154</sup> The Emir, his

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<sup>149</sup> Gonzalo De Lázaro, "En Femenino ¿Donde Vivían Las Mujeres Nazaríes En La Alhambra?," Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife (Alhambra Y Generalife, November 12, 2021), <https://www.alhambra-patronato.es/en-femenino-donde-vivian-las-mujeres-nazaries-en-la-alhambra>.

<sup>150</sup> Cristina de Puente, "Eunuchs in the Emirate of Al-Andalus," *Identity in the Middle Ages*, 2021, pp. 179-200, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781641892599.009>, 185.

<sup>151</sup> According to al-Maqqari, this palace was actually named after Caliph Abd al-Rahman III's favorite *jariyya*, al-Zahra, whose name meaning 'radiance' translates Madinat al-Zahra to 'The Radiant City'; al-Maqqari, trans. Pascual de Gayangos (Johnson Reprint Corp, 1964), Vol I, pp. 1-548, Book III Chap. III, 232.

<sup>152</sup> A clear example showing the similarities between the two palaces is the presence of sophisticated aqueduct systems at both sites, Cordoba and Granada; al-Maqqari, trans. Pascual de Gayangos (Johnson Reprint Corp, 1964), Vol I, pp. 1-548, Book III Chap. IV, 241-242; Robert Irwin, *The Alhambra* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 23.

<sup>153</sup> The Nasrid Kingdom, aka the Emirate of Granada, was established by Muhammad I in 1238. It was the last Muslim stronghold on the Iberian Peninsula and its fall in 1492 when Muhammad XII surrendered to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella.

<sup>154</sup> Robert Irwin, *The Alhambra* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), vi.

family, and servants, etc. all lived in the main building of the Nasrid Palace. An exception to this rule was during the summer when the royal family retired to the Generalife, a palace designed to be cooler and surrounded by lush gardens.

There has been debate on where specifically in the Nasrid Palace the harem was located.<sup>155</sup> Art historian Elena Díez Jorge of the University of Granada is a proponent of the most commonly posited space: the courtyard and upper rooms off the Patio de los Leones.<sup>156</sup> Called the Patio del Harén (Courtyard of the Harem), it is a simply designed courtyard with a view of the beautiful garden deep in the Nasrid palace famous for its center fountain of 12 ornately carved lions surrounding a marble basin.<sup>157,158</sup> Other theories on the location of the harem include the apartments above the Patio de los Arrayanes (Courtyard of Myrtles) or the more progressive hypothesis that the palace rooms did not have specialized functions but rather were adapted for multiple purposes as the need arose.<sup>159</sup> But no matter the theory, there was clearly a great emphasis on privacy for the harem. This conclusion can be drawn because all the potential locations are deep within the Alhambra where they are more secluded. And in the absence of records with specific details of the women's private lives within the physical space of the harem, it can be safely assumed that women had more freedom in the harem than in public.<sup>160</sup>

There were of course detrimental aspects for members of the harem, the most obvious

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid, see the Introduction and Chapter 1: The Fairy-Tale Palace?.

<sup>156</sup> See Appendix E; Gonzalo De Lázaro, "En Femenino ¿Donde Vivían Las Mujeres Nazaríes En La Alhambra?," Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife (Alhambra Y Generalife, November 12, 2021), <https://www.alhambra-patronato.es/en-femenino-donde-vivian-las-mujeres-nazaries-en-la-alhambra>.

<sup>157</sup> See Appendix E; Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> See Appendix F; "Palacios Nazaríes - La Joya De La Coronación De La Alhambra," Palacios Nazaríes - La Joya de la Coronación de la Alhambra (Alhambra Granada), accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.alhambra-granada-tickets.com/es/nasrid-palace/>.

<sup>159</sup> Robert Irwin, *The Alhambra* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 45,48.

<sup>160</sup> This type of data would not be recorded because it was not considered important in great histories. Even women who made significant cultural contributions to Islamicate culture only had pieces of their works briefly and haphazardly quoted in other authors works. Unlike their male counterparts, women writers did not have their various works later compiled into a complete volume of collected works. See women poets section on pages 20-28.



being the previously stated point that the majority of the women in it were enslaved. However, there were several notable exceptions to this general rule. As previously stated, the children born to women in the harem were free upon birth and raised Muslim, no matter the status of their mother.<sup>161</sup> Also aforementioned, the official Muslim wives (*al-hurra'*) were automatically free due to their inherent status as a Muslim woman.<sup>162</sup> And even the enslaved women had the possibility of gaining their freedom. Manumission is highly encouraged in the Quran and hadiths as forms of both penance and *zikat* (alms).<sup>163</sup> It was also required for Caliphs to release their *umm walads* upon their own death.<sup>164</sup> Consequentially upon the death al-Hakem II, Subh lived the last two decades of her life not only as an influential political force, but as a free woman.

Outside of the harem, there were many other women who worked in the royal palace. This included the usual lady maids, cooks, and other servants. But there also was the position of *کاتب/katib* or scribe (pl. *kuttāb*) which translates to ‘clerks/secretaries/scribes’. Throughout Islamicate societies, the superb skills of the *katib* in Arabic were so widely employed that the position grew to be an essential part of the bureaucracy. While there is definitive proof that

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<sup>161</sup>Anas Mālik ibn, *Al-Muwatta': The Recension of Yahyā B. Yahyā Al-Laythī (d. 234/848): A Translation of the Royal Moroccan Edition*, ed. Connell Monette, trans. Mohammad H. Fadel (Cambridge, MA: Program in Islamic Law, Harvard Law School, 2019), 467.

<sup>162</sup>Dror Ze'evi, "Slavery." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*. *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0747>.

<sup>163</sup>There are multiple places where the freeing of slaves is written about positively in the Quran. It is attributed as the act of a righteous man on multiple occasions (Al-Baqarah 2:177). The most famous of these being Al-Balad 90:12-13, in which a righteous man faces two paths: a difficult but correct one and an easy, incorrect one. Allah asks his followers “And what can make you know what is [breaking through] the difficult pass? It is the freeing of a slave”. Freeing a slave is an acceptable form of *zakat* or alms, one of the five pillars of Islam (Al-Taubah 9:60). It is also one of the main ways, and only way in the case of interfaith murder, that a crime can be forgiven and resolved (Al-Ma'idah 5:89, An-Nisa' 4:92, Al-Mujadila 58:3-4).

<sup>164</sup>Both of these situations arise from Islamic law that can be found in the earliest collection of hadiths from the 8th century, the *Muwatta*. Hadiths are words, actions, or assumed silent approval that can be traced directly back to the Prophet or one of his immediate companions. Although not explicitly in the Quran, Muslims believe that since all hadiths can be connected to the Prophet, they are equivalent to law; Mālik ibn Anas, *Al-Muwatta': The Recension of Yahyā B. Yahyā Al-Laythī (d. 234/848): A Translation of the Royal Moroccan Edition*, ed. Connell Monette, trans. Mohammad H. Fadel (Cambridge, MA: Program in Islamic Law, Harvard Law School, 2019), 424-425.

hundreds of women were employed in this position, due to poor or no record keeping we hardly have any of their names.<sup>165</sup> Although they may not have been producing their own original work, these women were still able to read, write, and understand multiple languages, distinguishing them from the majority of their contemporary European counterparts.<sup>166</sup> Unfortunately, many of these women will forever remain unnamed.

A rare exception is Lubna de Córdoba. The exact dates of her birth and death are unknown, as well as her social status and family origins, but she did serve Caliph al-Hakam II so we know that she lived during the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. She was most likely an enslaved woman, although not a *sarari* which has a sexual connotation. Yet there was the possibility that she was a ‘literary freed slave’.<sup>167</sup> Described by a 12<sup>th</sup> century biographer as “an intelligent writer, grammarian, poetess, knowledgeable in arithmetic, comprehensive in her learning; none in the palace was as noble as she”, Lubna was certainly influential. However, the extent of that influence is debated as sources describe her in a wide array of circumstances, ranging from an enslaved copyist to an invited intellectual speaker to al-Hakam II’s private secretary.<sup>168</sup> No matter the source though, it is clear that Lubna’s intellectual abilities are the reason her name is remembered. This phenomenon is even clearer with the case of a woman named Ana al-Qriqiya (Ana the Greek). She is credited with being instrumental in “the transmission of Hellenistic sciences to al-Andalus”, but other than this fact, there is virtually no

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<sup>165</sup> In just one neighborhood of Córdoba during the reign of al-Hakam II, there were a recorded 127 women transcribing the Quran; Kamila Shamsie, “Librarians, Rebels, Property Owners, Slaves: Women in Al-Andalus,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 52, no. 2 (2016): pp. 178-188, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2016.1164968>, 182.

<sup>166</sup> Kamila Shamsie, “Librarians, Rebels, Property Owners, Slaves: Women in Al-Andalus,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 52, no. 2 (2016): pp. 178-188, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2016.1164968>, 182.

<sup>167</sup> José Miguel Puerta Vilchez, “Qurtuba's Monumentality and Artistic Significance,” in *Reflections on Qurtuba in the 21st Century*, ed. Rosón Javier (Madrid, Spain: Casa Arabe, 2013), pp. 29-67, 64-65.

<sup>168</sup> Kamila Shamsie, “Librarians, Rebels, Property Owners, Slaves: Women in Al-Andalus,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 52, no. 2 (2016): pp. 178-188, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2016.1164968>, 181.

other historical data on her. It is not even clear what century she lived in.<sup>169</sup> While most of the women scribes were most likely simply transcribing copies of the Quran, “the fact that the significant work of reproducing the Holy Book was given to women in large numbers suggests a world in which women’s education is not an anomaly.”<sup>170</sup> A small subset of these women, like Lubna, were even instrumental in the successful administration of the government as they recorded vital information in their *katib* position . All of these wonderful women exemplify the fundamental truth that education is always an avenue to liberation.

As has been demonstrated, one of the many drawbacks of the available sources is the historical fact that women were rarely considered important, and those that were named predominately were only because they bore successful heirs. Adding further insult to injury is the fact that regardless of their backgrounds, most women were not even recorded by their real names but rather sobriquets, presumably given to them by their masters, or as the ‘mother of [insert sovereign]’<sup>171</sup>. It should be noted that the majority of these women’s names were not demeaning or insulting but rather translated to terms of endearment. The previously mentioned *jawari* Muzna, Subh, Buhair, and al-Shifa, translate to ‘Raincloud’, ‘Dawn’, ‘Dazzling’, and ‘Healing’, respectively.<sup>172</sup> Other named women include Halawah (Sweetie), Durr (Pearl), al-Zahra (Radiance)<sup>173</sup>. This common practice by contemporary historians and record keepers only

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<sup>169</sup> This is my translation of the Spanish “la transmisión de la ciencia helenística hacia al-Andalus.”; Marín Manuela, *Estudios Onomástico-Biográficos De Al-Andalus, XI: Mujeres En Al-Ándalus* (Madrid, Spain: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Filología, Departamento de Estudios Árabes, 2000), 654-655

<sup>170</sup> Kamila Shamsie, “Librarians, Rebels, Property Owners, Slaves: Women in Al-Andalus,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 52, no. 2 (2016): pp. 178-188, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2016.1164968>, 182.

<sup>171</sup> D. F. Ruggles, “Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty: Race, Genealogy, and Acculturation in Al-Andalus,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2004): pp. 65-94, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-34-1-65>, 71.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, 83-84.

<sup>173</sup> Halawah was an *umm walad* of Hakam I and mother to Abd al-Rahman II. Durr was the an *umm walad* of Abd Allah (r. 888-912). And al-Zahra was the *jawari* that Abd al-Rahman supposedly named his palace-city after; D. F. Ruggles, “Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty: Race, Genealogy, and Acculturation in Al-Andalus,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2004): pp. 65-94, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-34-1-65>, 71-72; ; al-Maqqari, trans. Pascual de Gayangos (Johnson Reprint Corp, 1964), Vol I, pp. 1-548, Book III Chap. III, 232.

adds to the obscurity surrounding these women. Another layer of complication in identifying these women, and therefore tracing their stories, lies in the translations, or mistranslations, of traditionally Christian and Jewish names from their Romantic and Hebraic origins into Arabic. Muhammad I's mother Buhair was additionally recorded as Buhayr, Tahr, and Tahtazz.<sup>174</sup> The ambiguity surrounding the real first names let alone full names of these women can be chalked up to patriarchal and misogynistic views of the medieval age that just did not put any importance on women. However, there may have been more deliberate reasons for this vagueness. The main reason for purposely obscuring a concubine's name was because the Islamic rulers wanted to downplay their mother's Christian or Jewish ancestry while simultaneously highlighting the Arab ancestry of their fathers. As described earlier, the importance of the link between an Arab genealogy and legitimacy cannot be understated. Despite this problem of consistency, these women still managed to make it into the historical record, ensuring that their stories continue to live on for over a thousand years.

Most of the women from the Medieval Period in Iberia remain clouded in mystery. If they even received the dignity of being named, the details about them remain remarkably scant. But that does not mean their impact was lost to time. A goal of mine when first starting the process for this paper was to be able to refute the following quote from Jessica Coope: "They [Muslim, Christian, and Jewish women] did not actively determine their own or their group's identity; like Ibn al-Arabi's Tablet, their identity was written upon them by the male."<sup>175</sup>

Through their writings, sexualities, and power-adjacent positions, the women of al-Andalus

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<sup>174</sup> Other examples include Fakhr vs Fayr vs Fajr, Muzna vs Muna vs Muzayna and Yamal vs Hulal vs Halal; Marín Manuela, *Estudios Onomástico-Biográficos De Al-Andalus, XI: Mujeres En Al-Ándalus* (Madrid, Spain: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Filología, Departamento de Estudios Árabes, 2000), 54; al-Maqqari, trans. Pascual de Gayangos (Johnson Reprint Corp, 1964), Vol II, pp. 1-544, Book VI Chap. III p. 95.

<sup>175</sup> Mark Abate, Thomas F. Glick, and Jessica Coope, "Were Women Part of 'Convivencia'?" in *Convivencia and Medieval Spain: Essays in Honor of Thomas F. Glick* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 303.

expressed themselves boldly and confidently. Poets like Wallada and Muhya relied on their quick-wittedness to carve out a space in their society, while *umm-walads* like Subh and Tarub exploited their connections with the ruler to bend circumstances to their will. Others like Lubna de Córdoba and Ana al-Qriqiya were able to use their intellect to put their stamp on history. I am not trying to argue that women of al-Andalus had more freedom than women from other contemporary civilizations, nor am I attempting to argue that they had more freedom than their counterparts within other regions of the Islamicate civilization of the Medieval era. Both of those projects would require a much more extensive comparative project that I do not have the time or current expertise to complete with any authority. Instead, I am arguing that in spite of all the obstacles they faced, both the contemporary and the issues relating to sources, a wide variety of Andalusian women were clearly able to shape history by exercising their agency.



<sup>176</sup>“Guidelines for Teachers,” De tre monoteistiske traditioner i middelalderens Spanien og Sicilien (Intercultural Education through Religious Studies (IERS), accessed February 28, 2022, [http://iers.grial.eu/modules/spain-and-sicily/spaguide\\_dk.html](http://iers.grial.eu/modules/spain-and-sicily/spaguide_dk.html), Medieval Spain: The Birth of Al-Andalus Map.

## Appendix B<sup>177</sup>



<sup>177</sup> “Guidelines for Teachers,” De tre monoteistiske traditioner i middelalderens Spanien og Sicilien (Intercultural Education through Religious Studies (IERS), accessed February 28, 2022, [http://iers.grial.eu/modules/spain-and-sicily/spaguide\\_dk.html](http://iers.grial.eu/modules/spain-and-sicily/spaguide_dk.html), Medieval Spain: The Beginning of the Reconquista Map.



**Appendix C**<sup>178</sup>

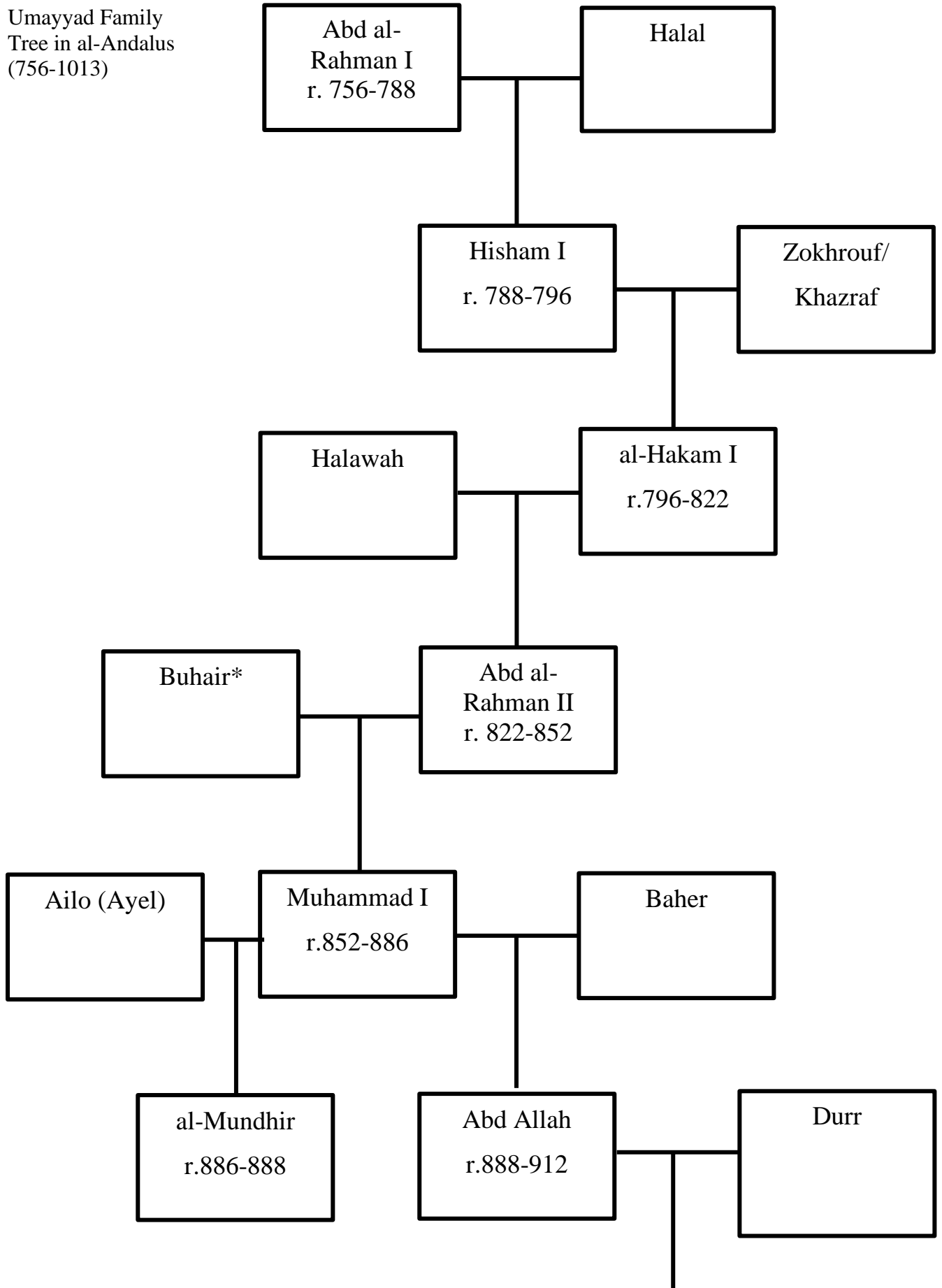


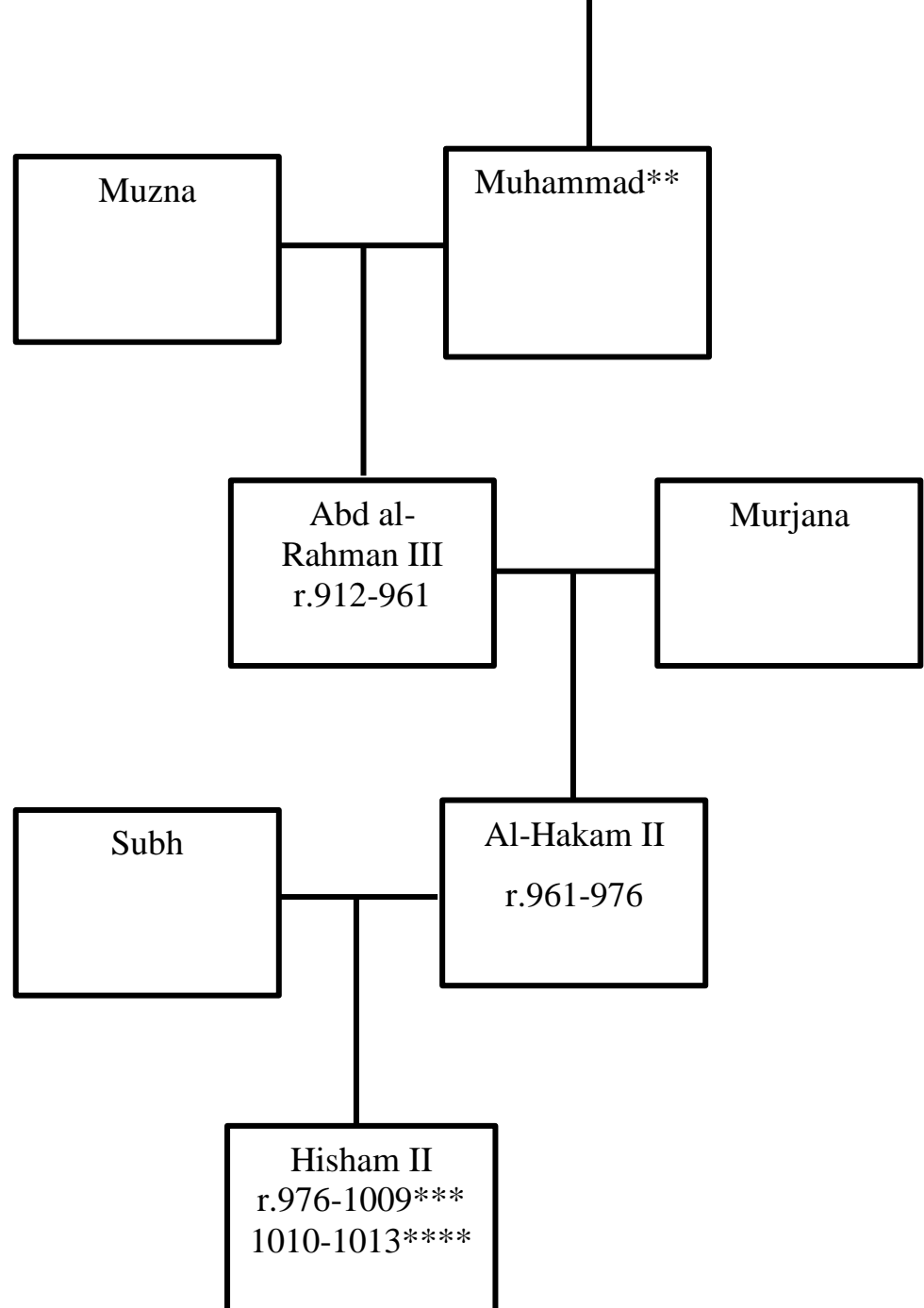
<sup>178</sup> “Conquista Musulmana De La Península Ibérica,” Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, July 7, 2022), [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conquista\\_musulmana\\_de\\_la\\_península\\_ibérica#/media/Archivo:Invasiónislámicaespañola.svg](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conquista_musulmana_de_la_península_ibérica#/media/Archivo:Invasiónislámicaespañola.svg).



**Appendix D**

Umayyad Family  
Tree in al-Andalus  
(756-1013)





<sup>179</sup>\* She died shortly after the birth of her son Muhammad I, so another one of Abd al-Rahman II's *sarari* became Muhammad I's wet nurse and adoptive mother.

\*\* The first-born son of Emir Abd Allah, Muhammad was never the ruler of Córdoba himself because he was assassinated by his half-brother in the same year (891) that his only son, Abd al-Rahman III, was born. And when Abd Allah died in 912, he designated his grandson, Abd al-Rahman III, to be the next ruler, even though he had 4 adult sons at the time.

\*\*\* Hisham II was briefly deposed in 1009. However, when he was restored to power in late 1010, he was essentially a puppet king. It is assumed that he was murdered in 1013, but there are no records to confirm this information.

\*\*\*\*Between the end of Hisham II's reign in 1013 to 1024 when Wallada's father, Muhammad III, takes the throne there are 8 different rulers. And after Muhammad III's short and contemptuous year-long reign, there were only 2 more Caliphs before the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba officially collapsed in 1031. Due to this constant change up and Hisham II's reign being considered the start of the decline of the Umayyad Caliphate in al-Andalus, I have chosen to end the family tree here.

**Appendix E**<sup>180,181,182</sup>



VS



<sup>180</sup> Lucia Rivas, *Vista Del Patio Del Harén*, photograph, *Alhambra Y Generalife* (Alhambra, Granada, May 13, 2021), <https://www.alhambra-patronato.es/en-femenino-donde-vivian-las-mujeres-nazaries-en-la-alhambra>.

<sup>181</sup> Lucia Rivas, *Patio Del Harén*, photograph, *Alhambra Y Generalife* (Alhambra, Granada, May 13, 2021), <https://www.alhambra-patronato.es/en-femenino-donde-vivian-las-mujeres-nazaries-en-la-alhambra>.

<sup>182</sup> Washington Irving, *Cuentos De La Alhambra*, ed. Miguel Sanchez; photog. Angel Sanchez (Granada, Spain: Ediciones Miguel Sánchez, 2002), 112.

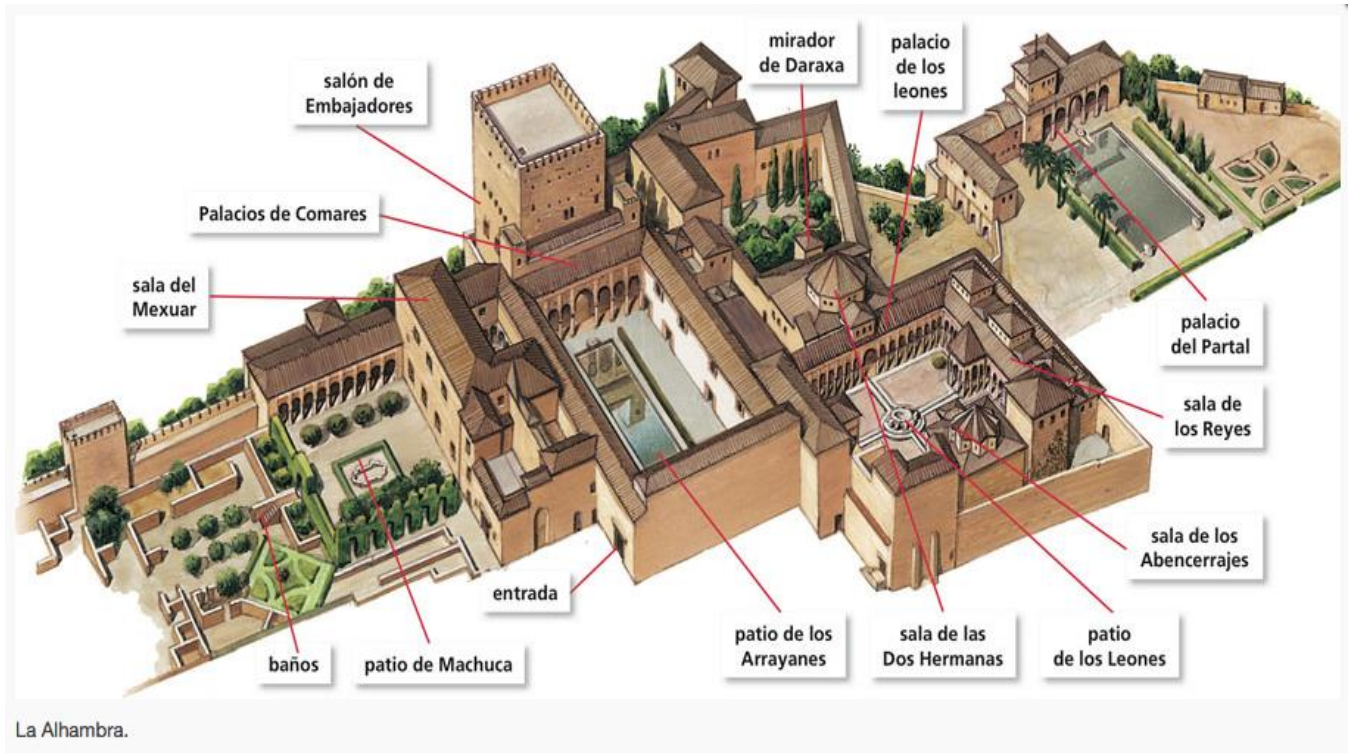
## Appendix F<sup>183</sup>



<sup>183</sup> “Alhambra Granada Spain,” Alhambra Granada (Alhambra Valparaiso Ocio y Cultura SL), accessed July 6, 2022, <https://www.alhambra.org/en/alhambra-parts.html>.



**Appendix F continued**<sup>184</sup>



<sup>184</sup> Paula Wynne, "Alhambra Palace Layout," *The Luna Legacy* (Paula Wynne, 2019), <https://paulawynne.com/the-luna-legacy/alhambra-palace-layout>.

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