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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL ANDALUSIAN ARABIC STORY-TELLING

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Our aim in this paper is to collect anecdotes about women whose existence is well established in history, and to determine why they have been considered worth mentioning in literary or historical works. The material often presents a mixture of imagination and reality. Sometimes a mixture of prose and poetry of which - contrary to the famous adage - the poetry is a more reliable testimony than the prose which tries to explain or locate the poems. I have limited my subject to a choice of Andalusian women from the eleventh century of our era onwards, but I start with a short survey of earlier Eastern Arabic literary sources, in which we find the same types of women which appear later on in Andalusian Arabic literature.

Among the most conspicuous sources about women are the *Kitāb al-Nisā'* by Ibn Qutayba¹ and the chapter of the same title in Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's *'Iqd al-Farīd*.² In the chapter by Ibn 'Abd Rabbih anecdotes are mentioned about marriages and divorce, anecdotes about conjugal fidelity even after the death of the husband, such as in the case of Nā'ila bint al-Farāfiṣa who was married to the caliph 'Uthmān,³ or even frustrated conjugal fidelity as in the case of Fāṭima bint al-Ḥusayn which is recorded because of her marriage to 'Abdallāh ibn 'Amr following the death of her husband 'Abdallāh ibn al-Ḥasan.⁴ Famous as well as painful divorces are mentioned such as the case of al-Farazdaq and Nawār or an-Nawār. Although he divorced her, his heart kept following her.⁵

Other sources are the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* which contains separate sections about the pre- and early Islamic poetess al-Khansā' whose

¹ Cf. Ibn Qutayba (d. 889), *'Uyūn al-Akhbār*, Vol. I-IV (Cairo 1925-30). Chapter 10 deals with women (*al-Nisā'*).

² Cf. Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (d. 940), *'Iqd al-Farīd*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn et al., Vol. 1-7 (Cairo, reprint Beirut 1962). Chapter 21 (*al-marjāna* 2 in vol. 6, 82-143 deals with women (*Fi l-nisā' wa-sifātihinna*).

³ Cf. *'Iqd*, VI, 91.

⁴ Cf. *'Iqd*, VI, 91-92.

⁵ Cf. *'Iqd*, VI, 124. In the *'Iqd* there is also a little chapter on bastards and the venereal faculty or appetite at the end of the chapter, in which women play a role too.

real name was Tumādīr bint 'Amr.⁶ Separate entries are devoted to the previously mentioned Nā'ila bint al-Farāfiṣa,⁷ and to the 'Abbāsid princess 'Ulayya bint al-Mahdī⁸ and the female singers 'Arīb and Shāriya.⁹ About the latter two singing girls *akhbār* collections were composed during their lifetime.¹⁰ Collections of letters composed by 'Arīb herself also existed.¹¹ Other important women from the earliest Islamic times, such as Sukayna, have no separate entry, nevertheless they are frequently mentioned in the *akhbār* about other people.¹²

Following on from slave girls and women of noble birth, the next category of women who play a role in eastern works consists of the fierce poetesses who composed satires like men, notably the Umayyad poetess Laylā al-Akhyaliyya,¹³ who exchanged satires with Nābigha al-Ja'dī and Ḥumayda bint Nu'mān ibn Bashīr,¹⁴ a poetess with a sharp opposing and evil tongue (*shā'ira dhāt lisān wa-ārida wa-sharr*) who composed invective poems about her husbands, who repudiated her. In addition to these free women, female slaves and singing girls such as Faḍl al-shā'ira, were also noted for their sharp tongue.¹⁵

All of this gives us an indication of the many different types of women represented in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*: free women by birth, princesses born of slave girls, and female singers, who were usually slaves, except in early Islamic times.

⁶ Cf. Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī (d. 967), *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, ed. Dār al-kutub (Cairo 1923-1975) III: 9-10; XV: 76-110.

⁷ Cf. *Aghānī* XVI: 322-327.

⁸ Cf. *Aghānī*, X: 162-186.

⁹ Cf. for 'Arīb or 'Urayb: *Aghānī*, XVIII: 175-192; Cf. Michael Stigelbauer, *Die Sängerinnen am Abbasidenhof um die Zeit des Kalifen al-Mutawakkil, nach dem Kitāb al-Aghānī des Abu-l-Faraḡ al-Iṣbahānī und anderen Quellen dargestellt* (Wenen [VWGÖ] 1975) 18-31; on p. 18 [note 98] he defends his vocalisation 'Arīb instead of 'Urayb; cf. for Shāriya, Cf. *Aghānī*, XIV: 105-110; Stigelbauer, *op. cit.*, 39-49.

¹⁰ Cf. the sources mentioned in note 9.

¹¹ Cf. the sources mentioned in note 9.

¹² Many remarks about Sukayna crop up in the chapter on her father al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, Cf. *Aghānī*, XVI: 137-174.

¹³ Cf. *Aghānī*, XI: 204-249; 'Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla, *A'lām al-nisā' fī 'alāmay al-'arab wal-islām* (Beirut 1982) IV: 321-334.

¹⁴ Cf. *Aghānī*, XVI: 53-54; Kaḥḥāla, I: 253.

¹⁵ Cf. *Aghānī*, XXI: 114-120; Stigelbauer, *op. cit.*, 31-34.

Other sources about singing girls, mentioned by Stigelbauer¹⁶ in his dissertation, are the *Risālat al-Qiyān* by al-Jāḥiẓ, and history works such as the *Tārikh Baghdād* by Ibn Ṭayfūr, the *Tarikh al-Rusul wa-l-Muluk* by al-Ṭabarī and the *Kitāb al-Wuzarā'* which contain reports about 'Arīb, and *adab*-works such as al-Shabustī's *Kitāb al-Diyārāt* and Tanūkhī's *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara*. The book by al-Sā'ī entitled *Nisā' al-khulafā'* contains many anecdotes about singing girls such as 'Arīb, Banān, Bid'a, Faḍl, Farīda, Maḥbūba and Nāshib.

Dealing with Andalusia specifically: its literature reached a peak of development especially in the eleventh century AD (=fourth century AH). Our most important sources about this literature are anthologies and historical works that appeared in the early twelfth century immediately after the period of the *ṭawā'if* kings, works such as Ibn Bassām's *Kitāb al-Dhakhira* and Faṭḥ ibn Khāqān's *Qalā'id al-'Iqyān*. Later sources of importance are Ibn Sa'īd's *al-Mughrib fī Ḥulā al-Maghrib* and, last but not least, al-Maqqarī's *Nafḥ at-Ṭib*.¹⁷ The latter work even has a special section on women poets. If we combine this chapter with the data we can gather from Ibn Bassām and Ibn Sa'īd, and Ibn al-Khaṭīb's *al-Iḥāṭa fī Akhbār Gharnāṭa*,¹⁸ we get a reasonable picture of some of Andalusia's famous women personalities. This is the field Mahmud Sobh,¹⁹ Teresa Garulo²⁰ and, more recently, María Jesús Rubiera Mata²¹ have been working in.

The poems of these poetesses are often interwoven into stories and romantic anecdotes. Our aim will be to look at some of these

¹⁶ Stigelbauer, *op. cit.*, 7-16. Cf. also Wiebke Walther, *Die Frau im Islam* (Mainz 1980).

¹⁷ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Ibn Bassām al-Shantarīnī (d. 1147), *Kitāb al-dhakhira fī mahāsīn al-jazīra*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās, 4 Vols. (Beirut 1979); Faṭḥ Ibn Khāqān (d. 1141), *Qalā'id al-'Iqyān* (Tunis 1966); Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī (d. 1274), *al-Mughrib fī Ḥulā al-Maghrib*, ed. Shawqī Dayf, 2 Vols. (Cairo 1953-55); id. *El libro de las banderas de los campeones* (*Kitāb Rāyāt al-Mubārizin*), ed. Emilio García Gómez (Madrid 1942); al-Maqqarī (d. 1632), *Nafḥ al-ṭib min ghuṣṣ al-Andalus al-ra'iib*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās, 8 Vols. (Beirut 1968).

¹⁸ Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 1374), *Al-Iḥāṭa fī Akhbār Gharnāṭa*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh 'Inān, 4 Vols. (Cairo 1393/1973-97/77).

¹⁹ Mahmud Sobh, *Poetisas árabeandaluzas*, edición a cargo de..., Diputación Provincial de Granada, s.d.

²⁰ Teresa Garulo, *Diwān de las poetisas de al-Andalus* (Madrid [Hyperion] 1985).

²¹ María Jesús Rubiera Mata, *Poesía femenina hispanoárabe* (Madrid [Castalia] 1989).

stories and to determine what kind of women were regarded as interesting enough to be recorded in the books of Andalusian literature and history.

Two Andalusian women whose lives echoed long in history and literature were the women connected with the Sevillian 'Abbādid dynasty, which came to such a tragic end. In the sources we find reports about Rumaykiyya²² called I'timād when she became the 'Abbādid king al-Mu'tamid's wife. Originally Rumaykiyya was a washerwoman, who made a deep impression on the Sevillian king who was walking with his minister Ibn 'Ammār along the Great River or Guadalquivir. She had just completed a line of poetry whose first hemistich was composed by al-Mu'tamid and which had to be finished by Ibn 'Ammār. She became a legendary woman because of her whims. In medieval Castilian literature such as Don Juan Manuel's *El Conde Lucanor* there are also stories which refer to this trait of character, especially story XXX, entitled 'De lo que aconteció al rey Abenabet de Sevilla con Ramayquía, su muger'.²³ The story is well-known. In it Rumaykiyya wants the courtyard to be paved with petals of perfumed white flowers in order to have the illusion that she is walking through snow, the snow she admired so much in the Sierra Nevada. In her whimsicality, however, she is no different from Eastern caliphs such as the 'Abbāsid caliph al-Mu'tamid, who, when he became drunk, wanted the floor to be paved with citrus fruit.²⁴

Fortune was not kind to the house of al-Mu'tamid. In 1091 he was deposed by Yūsuf ibn Tashufin and imprisoned with his family in Aghmāt.²⁵ His daughter Buthayna was sold to a slave dealer. She resisted, however, a marriage which was not approved of by her father. A poem by Buthayna directed to her father and her mother

²² See A.R. Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry and its Relations with the Old Provençal Troubadours* (Baltimore 1946) 139-141; *Nafḥ* IV: 211 sqq.

²³ Don Juan Manuel, *El Conde Lucanor*, ed. José Manuel Blecua (Madrid 1971 [2]), 174 sqq.

²⁴ Cf. Abu 'Alī al-Muḥassin al-Tanūkhī, *Al-Faraj ba'da al-Shidda*, ed. Abood Chelji (Beirut 1979) II: 243 [no. 206].

²⁵ Cf. David Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party-Kings, Politics and Society in Islamic Spain, 1002-1086* (Princeton 1985) 289.

tells us of these emotional events. But her parents answer that she must adapt to her new circumstances.²⁶

In addition to those of the 'Abbādid family, there are other high families with notable female offspring. Wallāda bint al-Mustakfi,²⁷ the daughter of the caliph Muḥammad III al-Mustakfi - a caliph who carried out his function (the caliphate) for only seventeen months (1024-25) and was murdered some months later - had her own salon in which she competed with poets and literati.²⁸ Her successful years were in the thirties and forties in the period of the Jahwarid republic. The historians compared her with princess 'Ulayya²⁹, daughter of the 'Abbāsid caliph al-Mahdī (775-785). Her beauty, education, literary gifts and honesty had been likewise praised. But Wallāda was more beautiful.³⁰ She led a free, unveiled life. Yet like 'Ulayya, a princess who did not drink and was full of virtues, she was leading a respectable life. She remained chaste in spite of her unconstrained life style.

One particularly famous anecdote concerns the motif embroidered in gold on her shoulders, namely that she had high ambitions and that her lovers were allowed to touch her cheek. Ibn Bassām, however, is more impressed with her obscene poems. He mentions some of them, but adds that he does not want to mention all her invective poems because these obscene poems are not worth repeating.³¹ She created the following poem about one of her lovers, named Aṣḥabī who apparently did not succeed in acquiring her favours:³²

O Aṣḥabī, be glad, how many favours reached you from the Possessor of the Throne, the Lord of benefits.

You have perpetrated between the buttocks of your son, what you could not get from the vagina of Būrān [wife of al-Ma'mūn], the daughter of al-Ḥasan [ibn Sahl].

²⁶ For Buthayna, see Teresa Garulo, *op. cit.*, 63-65; *Nafḥ* IV: 284-285; Henri Pères, *La poésie andalouse en arabe classique au XI^e siècle* (Paris 1953 [2]) 430-431; Kaḥḥāla, I: 118-119; Muṣṭafā Shaka'a, *Al-adab al-Andalusī, Mawḍi'ānu-hu wa-funūnu-hu* (Beirut 1986 [6]) 169-172.

²⁷ Cf. Garulo, *op. cit.*, 141-146; Ibn Bassām, *op. cit.*, I: 1, 429-433; *Nafḥ* IV: 205-211; Kaḥḥāla V: 287-290.

²⁸ Cf. Wasserstein, *op. cit.*, 77.

²⁹ For 'Ulayya bint al-Mahdī, cf. *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, IX: 83-95.

³⁰ *Nafḥ* IV: 208.

³¹ Ibn Bassām, *op. cit.*, I: 1, 432.

³² Metre *sarīc*; rhyme *an*.

Her former lover Ibn Zaydūn was attacked by several short invective poems, in which Ibn Zaydūn was portrayed as a homosexual.³³

Your nickname is *musaddas* or the man with six faces. It is a name which never will leave you, even when life leaves you. You are a homosexual, a weak person, a whoremonger, an insignificant person, a cuckold and a thief.

Ibn Zaydūn slanders me unjustly, in spite of his excellence, and in me is no fault;
He looks askance at me, when I come along; it is as if I have come to castrate 'Alī.

Because of his love for the rods in the trousers, Ibn Zaydūn, in spite of his excellence,
If he would see a penis in a palm tree, he would belong to the birds called *abābil*.

There are also a few love poems from her hand in which she herself takes the initiative. She is the one who wants to pay a visit to her lover, which apparently is contrary to established custom, as we will see when dealing with another poetess. Wallāda said in her love poem:³⁴

When the evening descends, await then my visit, because I see the night is the one who keeps secrets best [is the 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.

Nazhūn bint al-Qalā'ī was another Andalusian poetess.³⁵ She was of lower origin than the Andalusian women we have so far mentioned. She came from Granada where she met the contemporary twelfth century poets al-Makhzūmī and Ibn Quzmān.³⁶ From the biography

of al-Makhzūmī, which is to be found in Ibn al-Khaṭīb's *Ihāṭa*, we read as follows:³⁷ "Abū 'l-Ḥasan ibn Sa'īd has said in his book *aṭ-Ṭālī' al-sa'īd*: 'Al-Makhzūmī arrived in Granada in the years when Abū Bakr Ibn Sa'īd was the governor of this town and he took lodgings in the neighbourhood of Ibn Sa'īd's house. Ibn Sa'īd said: 'This is the thunderbolt which God sends against anybody He wants.'" So in order to avoid a dangerous confrontation with al-Makhzūmī, he invited al-Makhzūmī to his palace by means of a laudatory poem in which he praised the poet as a second al-Ma'arri. The blind poet responded favourably to his invitation, and when he arrived, composed a laudatory poem, in which he described the pleasures of court life at Ibn Sa'īd's court. The poetess Nazhūn then tried to provoke the blind poet with an unpleasant remark. The story goes as follows: "Nazhūn bint al-Qalā'ī was present and said: 'Master, we see you here as familiar with beautiful music, thuribles full of aloes, singing and fragrant wine. You wonder why you have been invited here, and you compare it with the bliss of Paradise; you say that it was hitherto only perceptible by hearing and eyes could not see it. But someone who descended from the stronghold of Almodóvar and grew up amidst goats and sheep, where has he learned about assemblies with pleasant music?' When she had finished speaking, the blind poet hawked vigorously, and Nazhūn reacted with 'Stop it.'³⁸ Then al-Makhzūmī asked: 'Who is this whore?' She answered: 'An old woman, who could have been your mother.' The blind poet said: 'You lie, this is not the voice of an old woman, but that of a hot whore, whose unpleasant smell can be sniffed from the distance of a mile.' At that moment Abū Bakr Ibn Sa'īd interceded and said: 'Master, this is Nazhūn bint al-Qalā'ī, the learned poetess.' Al-Makhzūmī answered: 'I have heard about her speaking, may God not make her hear the good, and show her nothing than a rod.'³⁹ She answered him: 'O infamous old man, you contradict yourself! With what [else than a rod] can a woman better be bestowed?' Al-

³³ Metre *wāfir*, rhyme *riq*; second poem: metre *sarī'*; rhyme *lī*; third poem: metre *sarī'*; rhyme *lī*.

³⁴ Metre *ṭawīl*; rhyme *ri*.

³⁵ Cf. Teresa Garulo, *op. cit.*, 110-118; *Mughrib* II: 121 and I: 227-228; *Banderas*, 60 and 211-212; *Ihāṭa*, I: 425-27; II: 504-505; III: 344-45; *Naṣṭ* IV: 295-298; I: 190-93; *Kaḥḥāla* V: 167-70; *Shaka'a*, *op. cit.*, 156-166.

³⁶ A.R. Nykl, *op. cit.*, 303 and 266-301.

³⁷ Cf. Lisān al-Dīn ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Ihāṭa*, I: 424-27.

³⁸ This passage has various readings; 'Inānī's edition reads '*da'ḥu*' ['stop it']. Other readings are *buhḥa* and *dhabḥa*.

³⁹ This passage has a lacuna in 'Inānī's edition: 'Inānī does not fill in the Arabic equivalent for 'penis'. The Arabic apparently goes as follows: '*Qāla: "Sami'nu bi-hā, lā asma'a -l-Lāhu khayran wa-lā arā-hā illā ayan."*

Makhzūmī reflected a while and said:⁴⁰

'Nazhūn's face has a slight touch of beauty, but under her clothes is disgrace, if that would be unveiled.

Those who go to Nazhūn, pass by every other woman; who sets out for the sea, considers irrigation-canals unimportant.'

The poetess reflected a while and then answered:⁴¹

'Say to this impudent man some words that will be repeated until the Day of Resurrection.

In Almodóvar where you grew up, dung smells more pleasantly than this place!

There uncivilised Bedouins walk with pride amidst their family;

For this reason you are fond of everything that is round.

You have been born one-eyed and you like everything ignominious;

I have repaid a poem with a poem; by my life, tell me now who is the best poet.

Although I am a woman by nature, my poetry is masculine.'

Al-Makhzūmī said to her: 'Listen:⁴²

O, ask Nazhūn what is the matter with her, that she drags her tail so proudly;

If she would see a penis, she would roll up its garment, such as she is accustomed with me.'

Again Abū Bakr Ibn Sa'īd intervened, and he adjured them not to utter any further invective verses about one another. But al-Makhzūmī retorted: 'I am the best invective poet of al-Andalus and would I deprive myself of the pleasure of composing satires about her for nothing?' The governor said: 'I will buy from you the right to wound her honour. Please ask.' The blind man said: 'I sell it for the slave whom you have sent to me and who conducted me from

⁴⁰ Metre *ṣawīl*, rhyme *yā*. Cf. Nykl, *op. cit.*, 303. The two verses are borrowed from two Oriental Arabic poets, namely: Dhū'l-Rumma (d. 735) [*Diwān* ed. Macartney no. 99: line 2, p. 675] or the early Islamic poetess al-Khansā' (Cf. al-Marzūqī, *Sharḥ Diwān al-Hamāsa (li-Abi Tamīm)*, ed. Ahmad Amin et al. (Cairo 1968 [2]) III: 1542, no. 668: line 2]; and al-Mutanabbī (d. 965) [*Diwān*, ed. Dieterici (Berlin 1861) 675, no. 241: line 20].

⁴¹ Metre *mujaṭṭith*; rhyme *ar*.

⁴² Metre *mutaqārib*; rhyme *āla-hā*. The word used is not 'penis', but 'glans, head of a penis' [*ṣaysha*].

my house; he has a soft hand and a gentle manner of walking.' Abū Bakr understood his intention and replied: 'If he were not yet a child, I would give him to you.' But the poet answered: 'I will have patience until he is grown up. If he had been older, you would not have preferred him above me.' The governor burst out laughing and said: 'If you do not compose satires in verses, you make them in prose!' The blind man replied: 'Governor, one can not change what God has created.' Then al-Makhzūmī took leave, after Abū Bakr had made peace between him and Nazhūn."

We see from this anecdote the courage of this poetess, who violently attacked the blind poet, a man who was feared and had been called the 'Bashshār ibn Burd of the East'.⁴³ Although a woman, she replied vividly without shame. Her role is outside that which we would expect from a woman at that time.

Another example of Nazhūn's behaviour can be found in the *aṭ-Ṭālī' al-sa'īd* by Ibn Sa'īd, from which the *Ihāṭa* derives a passage.⁴⁴ It is about Ibn Quzmān during his visit to Granada and when he met there with several other poets in one of the gardens of the Banū Sa'īd in the little village La Zubia [Zāwiya] near Granada. When Nazhūn saw him dressed in yellow, in the manner of the *faqīhs*, she exclaimed: "How nicely dressed you are, golden calf of the Israelites! Only you do not make happy the people who look at you!" Ibn Quzmān replied: 'Perhaps I do not delight the people who see me, but in any case I delight the people who hear me; it is your task to please the people that see you, whore!' Then inebriety came over Ibn Quzmān. The long and the short of it was that people including Ibn Quzmān began to push one another away [in the direction of the pond]. Finally they threw Ibn Quzmān in the pond. He came out in sopping wet clothes, and had swallowed a large quantity of water. He then said: 'Listen o vizir!' and he recited:⁴⁵

Listen Abu Bakr, I have no force to push away prominent nor insignificant people.

And the woman who possesses that wide vagina, which overflows with fluid, resembles the tails of my garment.

You plunged me in water, o lord, pay for this by plunging me in your money.

⁴³ *Mughrib* I: 228.

⁴⁴ *Ihāṭa* II, 504-5.

⁴⁵ Metre *sarī'*; rhyme *ālī*.

The vizier ordered Ibn Quzmān to be stripped of his clothes and gave him fresh garments and presents which suited him."⁴⁶

In addition to these two stories in which Nazhūn could match and even surpass two famous invective poets, there are several other invective poems from her hand, directed against a stupid lover whom she rejected and another lover whom she apparently wanted to make jealous:⁴⁷

Who defends me against a stupid lover, insolent in his gestures and longings?

He longs for a meeting with someone who would not bestow on him a box on the ear, if he would come and desire that.

With a head which even lacks a brand [such as an animal's or slave's head] and a face that even lacks a veil [such as a woman's face].

The last poem by Nazhūn we quote here is a love poem, perhaps intended to make another lover jealous:⁴⁸

How excellent are the nights! How sweet are they! How sweet among them is Sunday night!

Suppose you were present with us, and the eye of the watcher would not pay attention to it, and would not look at anybody.

Then you would see the sun of the forenoon in the arms of a moon, indeed, a gazelle in the arms of a lion.

Another well-known poetess with a relatively free way of life is Ḥaḥṣa bint al-Ḥājj ar-Rakūniyya,⁴⁹ who also lived in the twelfth century. She was unconstrained in her love for the poet Abū Ja'far Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Sa'īd. According to Di Giacomo this love began in ca. 549/1154, and lasted until the death of Abū Ja'far in 560/1165.⁵⁰ The affair was ultimately the reason for Abū Ja'far's execution by his rival, the Almohade governor of Granada, Abū Sa'īd 'Uthmān, the son of the ruler 'Abd al-Mu'min. The

⁴⁶ *Iḥāṭa* I, 504-5.

⁴⁷ Metre *mutaqārib*; rhyme *ī*.

⁴⁸ Metre *basīṭ*; rhyme *ā*.

⁴⁹ Teresa Garulo, *op. cit.*, 71-85; *Mughrib*, II: 138-139; 164-166; *Banderas* 61 and 212-214; *Iḥāṭa*, I: 491-494; Louis Di Giacomo, 'Une poétesse andalouse du temps des Almohades Ḥaḥṣa bint al-Ḥājj ar-Rakūniyya', in *Hesperis* 34 (1947), 9-101; *Nafḥ* IV: 171-179; *Kaḥḥāla* I: 267-271; *Shakā'a*, *op. cit.*, 219-229.

⁵⁰ Di Giacomo, *op. cit.*, 53.

relationship between the governor and Abū Ja'far, his secretary, soon deteriorated. Abū Ja'far made invective poems about Abū Sa'īd 'Uthmān, and mocked the dark colour of his skin. Abū Ja'far asked Ḥaḥṣa reproaching her, when she partly accepted Abū Sa'īd's advances: "What do you see in this negro? I can buy on the market for twenty dinar so many better ones than him."⁵¹

Ḥaḥṣa took the initiative in the love affair, which clearly appears from the following poem to Abū Ja'far:⁵²

Shall I visit you or shall you visit me? For my heart always bows to what you long for;

My mouth is a source of clear sweet water, and the hair of my head is a leafy shade.

I hoped you were thirsty and struck by the sun, when the noon hour would bring me to you;

Give me answer quickly: it is not nice, o Jamīl, that you keep Buthayna waiting!

In his answer Abū Ja'far showed his appreciation of her initiative, although it is not usual for a garden to visit a breeze; normally it should be the other way round. He answered:⁵³

I will honour you, because of the fact that you visit me. I would have liked to go, if I had had the opportunity.

It is usually not the garden which visits someone, but it is the gentle breeze which visits the garden.

Another poem by Ḥaḥṣa shows her initiative as well. She appears at his door and hopes to be let in:⁵⁴

To you has come a visitor with the neck of a gazelle; he made the rise of the crescent visible under the black night of his hair.

He has eyes formed by Babylon's magic and saliva superior to the daughter of the vine-tendrils [wine];

The deep redness of his cheeks makes the roses blush; his white and brilliant mouth make pearls feel shame.

⁵¹ *Mughrib* II, 164.

⁵² Metre *wāfir*; rhyme *ilā*. In line four the poet Jamīl and his beloved Buthayna are mentioned, cf. Fuat Sezgin, *GAS* II (Leiden 1975) 406-407.

⁵³ Metre *sarīc*; rhyme *il*.

⁵⁴ Metre *khafif*; rhyme *āl*.

What do you think, do you allow him to come in, after having asked admittance? Or is there something which gives cause for a separation.

The following poem has the same expression about the woman compared to a garden. It is an invective poem about a black slave girl, in whom Abū Ja'far once showed too great an interest:⁵⁵

O you, who were the most elegant of all people before
Fortune dropped you;
You are in love with a negress who is equal to a night which
conceals the miracles of beauty;
In whose darkness cannot be seen splendour of face nor
blushing redness.
By God! Tell me, because you know best the ones who
praise beautiful women;
By God, who falls in love with a garden in which there are
no roses or orange blossoms?

Ḥafṣa composed only one real invective poem (or only one has survived) which was addressed to al-Kutandī, when he fell into a pit full of dung, after refusing to attend Ḥafṣa's tryst with Abū Ja'far as a witness or as a kind of voyeur. Ḥafṣa and Abū Ja'far laughed and wrote a poem to al-Kutandī, each improvising a line, and Abū Ja'far began as follows:⁵⁶

Say to the poet from whom we are released because of his
falling in the dung;
Return back again to the backs, o son of the dung, like the
dung itself would like to do.
Suppose you want to visit us some day, you will see;
O most rejected of human beings, o most unworthy of them,
without any doubt;
This may be the fortune that awaits you, even if you visit
during sleep;
O human face which likes dung and hates amber;
May God not bring about a rendezvous with you before they
have buried you!

Among the Andalusian women we have discussed, two are mentioned because of the tragic end of the 'Abbādid dynasty; the

last three poetesses are famous because of the extravagant role they played in literary circles: they were not passive women, and they did not bow to conventional restraints on their lives and they sometimes even adopted the role of men, when they took the initiative in love, or when they composed invective poems about their colleagues. However, not all the poetesses al-Maqqari mentions are devoid of shyness and passive femininity. The young Jewish girl whom we find in the chapter about Jewish poets, Qasmūna⁵⁷ has a less emancipated way of life. The shy young girl who is impatient and longs for marriage or the experience of love and hates being cloistered at home is the counterpart of the free unconstrained poetesses, who did not avoid obscenities and invective in their poetry. She asks her father to be put in contact with a lover or husband by the following simple and charming lines:⁵⁸

I see a garden whose time has come to be plucked of its
fruits, but I do not see any reaper, who stretches his hand
out to it.

O what a distress! Youth passes and is almost lost, and
leaves the one whom I do not mention alone.

O gazelle, which always grazes in a garden. I am comparable
to you in loneliness and despair.

We are both alone, without companion, but let us wait
patiently for the decision of Almighty Providence.

After hearing the poems her father finally decided to give her in marriage to someone.⁵⁹

I hope to have shown in this paper the contrast that may exist between the various Andalusian women mentioned. If we look for what is sometimes called a female voice, we can find representatives of this in the poetesses Buthayna and Qasmūna. On the other hand, poetesses such as Nazhūn and Wallāda when they composed their invective poems seem to put aside their womanly role, and take on more masculine traits.

If we compare Andalusia with the East, we are struck by the overwhelming mass of material we possess about women from the

⁵⁵ Metre *basīṭ*; rhyme *ar*.

⁵⁶ Metre *rajaz*; rhyme *rā*; for the anecdote cf. *Nafḥ* IV: 175.

⁵⁷ Teresa Garuolo, *op. cit.*, 121-123; *Nafḥ* III: 530; *Kaḥḥāla* V: 207-208; *Shakā'a*, *op. cit.*, 234-235.

⁵⁸ Metre *ṭawīl*; rhyme *dā*; the second poem: metre *kāmil*; rhyme *ar*.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Nafḥ* III: 530 '*fa-samī'a-hā abū-hā fa-naẓara fī tazwiji-hā*.'

East. Indeed, how many singing girls - who at the same time were composers of poetry - played an active cultural role at the 'Abbāsid courts! It may at first seem impressive when we observe that al-Maqqarī lists some twenty-five poetesses in his book, but only in a few cases do we know something about them.⁶⁰ Upon reflection, therefore, the quantity and quality of information is not really so impressive as it might seem. At the same time, however, it is important to know that there were literate women in Andalus, in a period when literate women in the Christian part of Europe were almost wholly non-existent.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Cf. *Nafḥ* IV: 166-298 [*dhikr jumla min nisā' al-Andalus*] with 24 poetesses; *Nafḥ* III: 522-30 mentions six Jewish poets, among them one poetess [*dhikr shu'arā' al-yahud*]. Teresa Garulo mentions 33 poetesses.

⁶¹ Women authors and poetesses in Western Europe occur especially in later periods, such as Christine de Pisan (1364-ca. 1430), Caterina da Siena (1347-1380), Teresa de Ávila (1515-1582), Gaspara Stampa (1523-1554) and Vittoria Colonna (1490-1547).