Hayat Kara Ph.D
Mohammad v university , Rabat Agdal , Morocco

Andalusian chronicles : The role of women in al-Andalus

The study of women in al-Andalus had been hardly treated in Morocco since the beginning of the present century until the mid 1980s and it was only at the beginning of the 1990s that publications first began to appear on this subject . this opened a new field of research .
This research aims to summarise and analyse the role of women in al-Andalus.
Such an interest could be interpreted as part of the current trends of bibliographical research and, more specifically , of the relatively modern interest in the study and re-evaluation of the role played by women which, for different reasons , have been excluded from the records of the official history.
Research on the specific field of Muslam women in al-Andalus has now produced a considerable number of studies , but few of these integrate more informations about the intellectual role of women in al-Andalus.

1- **the delimitation of female roles** :
the delimitation of women's roles in al-Andalus is characteristic of their confinement to the private sphere , not only in Islamic societies , including the andalusian one , but also in the ancient, medieval , society . such confinement is conditioned in a generalway by the level of economic development,
with its cultural and ideological concequences , this development is rooted in the concerned social-structure . these conditions more or less restrict the number of roles limited by specific conditions such as gender . (as in the andalusian case , this leads to a social structure which can be defined as patriarchal and agnatic whereby a women depends upon her male relative.

a- social role :

the question of how medieval women themselves established cross-sectarian relations has rarely been explored . documenting women's history is almost always problematic because of limited source materials but this essay suggests that much can be learned by looking at areas shared certain facts of their lives . either by reason of social relations tied to religion and ethnicity (slavery between Christian women and Muslims) or by reason of events that connected them due to their shared gender (child birth , caring for the dead ..).

By activety looking for " spaces " where women would be found , we can begin to hear the dialogues that passed amoung women across religious lines .

In his famous book "the Ring of the Dove in the Art of Love", (Tawq al-Hamamah), which was translated into several languages, Ibn Hazm states that women in Andalusia used to work in different jobs, including medicine, auction, teaching, and handicraft, such as spinning and textile. He mentions that they taught him in his childhood.

He remarked in this genealogical treatise that in Cordoba , a spicifis place as Bab al-'Attarin was a meeting point for women which exhibit their produces of weave and embroidery.

He also asserts that women could play a role in leadership.
Muslim women were active patrons and sponsors of public works. Women have historically supported many public fountains, gardens, hospitals, and inns through their own assets and property. They also have endowed mosques, such as the mosque at al-Rusafa in Cordoba,which had built from Shua' a Qasim ibn Asbigh's slave.

Legal documents still remain largely unexploited , would permit a clearer view of the reality of Andalusi women's social , and their Society roles .

b- the education –intellectual perspective :

Bibliographical compilations , and also literary anthologies refer to women who have carried out intellectual and / or artistic activities , we may distinguish between who designated as scholars ( ) , as cultivators of knowledge( ) , but their principal activity is poetry , while some of theme were literary persons ( ) , others secretaries , and copyists , lexicographers , and grammarians , who known or read the Qur'an , who devoted themselves to tradition ( ) , arithmetic ( ) , and scholastic theology ( ) , or the law of descent ( ) , juridical knowledge , and even practiced medicine. We will talk on some of the andalusian potess such as :

the Umayyad princess Walladah (11th century), the daughter of the briefly reining caliph of Cordoba al-Mustakfi .
Walladah possessed an irrepressible spirit, symbolized by her public love affair with the virtuoso poet, Ibn Zaydun.
she broke of her relationship with Ibn Zaydoun , and her verses , even more openly than her behaviour , proclaimed :

Worthy am I , by God of the highest , and
Proudly I walk , with head aloft.
My cheek I give to my lover and, to those
Who wish them ,
Iyield my kisses.

أنـــا والله أصلـح للمــعالــي وأمشي مشيـتي وأتيه تيــها
وأُمْكِنُ عــا شـقي من صحن خدِّي وأُعطـي قبلتي مَن يشتهيها
. (نفح الطيب 4 / 205)

And in the same (5th/ 11th) century as Walladah , another princess , Umm al-Kiram , the daughter of al-Mu'tasim , petty king of Almeria , sang of her love for a Fata known al-sammar , who willl have been a servant in the palace :

Such is my love for him , if he left me
My heart would run after him .

حـسبي بمن أهـواه لـو أنَّه فارَقَـني تـابــَعَهُ قـلبـي
.(نفح الطيب 4 / 170)

In the 6th / 12th century the libertine poet Nazhun al-Qulay'hiyah , moving easily and as a peer in a circle of other poets of the kind , such as Ibn Quzman , and al-Makhzoumi , declared :

I paid a poem with another : tell me ,

by my Soul , who is the better poet ?
if woman be my nature , man is my poetry.

جـازَيـتُ شـعراً بشعـــر فَقُــل لَعَمري مَـن أشـــعَـرْ
إنْ كـنْـتُ فـي الخـلق أُنـثى فإنَّ شِعْــري مُــذَكَّـــــرْ
(نفح الطيب 1 / 192 - 193).

Such expressions of love are by no means unique , let us take other examples from 6th / 12th century .

Qasmuna bin Isma'il al-Yahudi , she has been seen as an Arabic poetess and , as such , included along with her Muslim counterparts in different studies and compilations about women poets in al-Andalus.

We only have two poems extant written by this Jewish poetess :

I see a garden with ripe fruit , yet the gardener , it seems ,
Will not stretch out his hands to it.
How pitiful , youth fleets by and is lost , and something I will not name remains lonely .

Then Hafsa al-Rakuniya , the most noteworthy Andalusian women poet , who came from a rich noble family of Granada :

I praise that mouth , and upon my word ,
I know what I say ,
Ido it justice , I would not lie before God :
It is sweeter than wine to the taste.

ثَنَـائي على تـلك الثَّنَـايا لأنَّـني أقول عـلى علم وأَنـطقُ على خُبْـر
وأُنصفها لا أكذبُ اللهَ إنَّـــــني رَشَفـتُ بها ريـقاً أرقَّ من الخَمْــر
(نفح الطيب 4 / 173).

In this context we can bring Hoernerbach's remarks, he stated :

" the position of women in Spain was free than in other Muslam countries, women took part in all the intellectual and cultural events of their time , and the number of those winning fame for their scientific works , or by their contending with men for the palm of poetry , was not small ".

c- the political role :

The women of al-Andalus like their counterparts in many pre-modern Muslim societies -- were active participants in political and

cultural affairs. They helped shape the cosmopolitan civilization associated with the Muslims.
The Umayyads ruled Al-Andalus for the first three centuries of Muslim rule in Iberia (roughly 711-1031 CE). The Umayyad household provided a strong, centralized vision for developing a distinct Andalusi culture. Women of the royal household. along with other courtly women, played prominent roles within this culture. Some of Al-Andalus' most influential women included:

- Al-Zahra, concubine of the caliph Abd al-Rahman III, for whom his new palace complex was most likely named
- Subh, the wife of caliph Al-Hakam II and architect of secretary Al-Mansur's rise as chief minister and army commander

- Itimad al-Rumaykiyya, poetess and wife of taifa king al-Mutamid of Seville

  Women in ruling Amazigh (Berber) households, likewise, commanded respect. They also participated in leadership roles.

  The ***taifa*** king and **Zirid** ruler of Granada, Abdullah Ibn Buluggin, wrote about the role of women in his memoirs, ***The Tibyan***. He notes that in the leading Amazigh (Berber) families, mothers and other women of the household participated in a shura council that made collective political and military decisions the ruler would enact.

  The Amazigh (Berber) commander Yusuf Ibn Tashufin -- whose Almoravid forces brought Ibn Buluggin's rule to an abrupt end in 1090 CE relied heavily on his wife, Zaynab al-Nafzaouiya, for strategic advice. He trusted her to oversee and protect his realm from political rivals.

D – the spiritual influence and female role :

Women have played an important role on the sufi path and continue to do so today , The celebrated mystic, Ibn Arabi of Murcia (died 1240), recounts in his biographical dictionary of Andalusi Sufis, Ruh al-Quds fi Muhasabat al-Nafs, how certain women had a profound influence upon him. Ibn Arabi met Shams of Marchena in her 80s. He describes how she had the ability to communicate with others over great distances. She relates how a visitor en route to see her confirmed hearing her voice on the way.
The other women who have so influence on Ibn ‘Arabi , was Fatima bint ibn Muthanna , Ibn ‘Arabi speaks of her in Ruh alQuds along side several other sufi saints of twelfth century in al-Andalus.

E – Slaves and power :

Andalusi biographics mention the servants and slaves who supplemented the domestic surrounding of important persons and more data about slaves is available from legal sources.

Slaves fall into two categories , being devoted either to serving (Jawari al-khadam) , or to pleasure (Jawari al-mut’a).

Slave women often led a better life than did free women . some of theme achieved influence and political power . Andalusi kings often married slaves , with the result that history has at least preserved their names as Mut’a(pleasure), Fajr(dawn) , Taroub(joyful) , Murjan (coral) , Subh(brighten) , I’timad al-Ramikiya (reliance) .

The number of servants and slaves was a symbolic indication of power and wealth , there were in fact 6.314 women in Madinat al-Zahra .

Slaves constituted some 10 to 20 % of the population of al-Andalus .

Slaves , therefore , were not just a significant demographic element but a source of continued ethnic and cultural mixing especially talented slaves were imported from Baghdad.

In the first centries of Islamic rule , most slaves came from eastern Europe , it was at this time that the word “ slave” was slipt off from “ Slav “. Finally , there were Christian captives from northem Iberia .

There was no prohibition of education of slaves .As educated slaves were more valuable .

For example :

A women astronomer and writer (katiba) of great al-Hakam II and servant in the royal palace is alsoknown , she was sent by the caliph to Sulayman al-Rusafi al-Qassam whom he entrusted to teach her astronomy (atta'dil) the use the astrolabe and other knowledge .

In some three years , she had become an expert and she returned to the palace , provoking the administration of the caliph who employed her to work in her speciality , despite all the praise devoted to her gift for astronomy , the name of this women is not even known.

On the other hand , Fathuna al-Murciyah , she was historian , written a book on the slaves of al-Andalus (Qiyan al-Andalus) , whish opposed the work of al-Isbahani (al-Aghani).

As refined and highly cultivated , they took part in literary gatherings and served teir masters , who usually demonstrated an outstanding predilection for them, there are numerous references to the Umayyad as well as Tai'fa kings completed in acquiring the most and the best slave singers .

For example , Uns al-Qulub which was a singer at the time of Abd al-Arrahman II (4^{th} / 10^{th} century) , and in this same century , another singer as Mut'a , she was a slave of the great Umayyad's artist Ziryab , (greatest musician of his day , from Baghdad , and he added a fifth string to the lacal version of the lute to create the Andalusian guitar , when he played it , the audience would cry ' ALLAH ' , which their modern counterparts have turned into " Olé").

he had educated her and instructed all his songs .

Once she sung to Abdarrahman II , when she had discerned his admiration , she sung him :

يا من يغطِّي هـــواه من ذا يُغَطِّي النَّهَـــارا
قد كنتُ أملـكُ قلــبي حتَّى علِقتَ فَطَـــارا

(نفح الطيب من غصن الأندلس الرطيب 3/131) .

Educational approach :

This approach aims to investigate attitudes of educators as well as a teaching style , and learning style .

We list a biographies of women taken from the Andalusi biographical texts , and number of women who feathure in this sources :

Ibn al-Faradi (2) , Ibn Bshkual (16) , al- Humaydi (3) , al-Dabbi (13) , Ibn alAbbar (73) , al-Murrakushi (46) , Ibn al-Zubayr (5) , Ibn Dihya (6) , Ibnsaid (alrayat 3) , alMughrib (7) , Ibn al-Khatib (2).

We note that the biographies of women generally appear at the end of this biographical texts , with the exception of Ibn al-Faradi who includes the biographies of only two women in their corresponding alphabetical order , and Ibn Dihya who choose to classify theme in the beginning of the book, while Ibn Said relayed on decades and region.

This convention of situating women's biographies appeared parallel with the development of the biographical genre in al-Andalus .

In total , these sources describe nearly one hundred eighty women , a number which , in itself , reveals great differences between women and their male companions .Mmoreover if we look a little deeper at the qualitative aspects of the descriptions , the difference becomes yet more accentuated.

Analysing this group , one can establish the following classification :

- Studies exclusively with father.
- With father, brother and husband .
- With father and grand father.
- With father and grandfather and paternal uncles.
- With husband .
- With master (in general in the case of slaves).

We remarque that they attended lessons inside the family circle .

They receiving an education similar to that given to men of her age and social situation.

For example , Rayhana in Almeria , attended the classes of noted Quranic reader , Abu Amr al-Dani (d 444/ 1053) but she did so hidden behind a curtain , the teacher signaled the pauses that she had to make in the reading by means of hitting the curtain with a stick .

The scientific centers or spaces were in general the Mosque.

The mosque played a very great part in the spread of education in Islam

the mosque, Wardenburg explains, was the centre of the Islamic community, a place for prayer, meditation, religious instruction, political discussion, and a school. And anywhere Islam took hold, mosques were established, and basic instruction began. Once established, such mosques could develop into well known places of learning, often with hundreds, sometimes with thousands of students, and frequently contained important libraries

Education and methodology :

This element will be based on the Biographical texts which are an exclusive written sources could provide us informations concerning the methodology of women's education .

We can remark that it based on :

- stamped the Quran .
- memorization of the books .
- the hearing : method of knowledge.
- Original opposition .