

MEDIEVAL SICILY, AL-ANDALUS, AND THE MAGHRIB WRITING IN TIMES OF TURMOIL

NICOLA CARPENTIERI
and CAROL SYMES





Medieval Sicily, al-Andalus, and the Maghrib





THE MEDIEVAL GLOBE

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Nicola Carpentieri and Carol Symes

Note on the Transliteration of Arabic

In this volume, Arabic has been transliterated with appropriate diacritical markings, except in the case of certain common proper nouns (*e.g. Abbasid*). At the same time, only terms that would be unfamiliar to most non-specialists have been italicized (*e.g. fitna*).

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INTRODUCTION

NICOLA CARPENTIERI AND CAROL SYMES

BEGINNING IN THE seventh century, Muslim expansion into the western Mediterranean initiated a new phase in the long-lasting layering of heterogeneous peoples, confessions, and languages within that ecumene. Arabs and Berbers, Christians and Jews, Sunnī and Shīʻa Muslims, Greek and Latin speakers, among other peoples, all contributed to shaping shared and contested identities. Hybrid genealogies of knowledge can be traced back to the cultural interactions between these various groups. As for the political arrangements that emerged from their coexistence, they were as inclusive as they were fragile. The centralizing powers that gave western Islam its great urban centres—Palermo, Córdoba, Qayrawān—were often threatened by the centrifugal pull of factionalism, and the dialogues between cultural agents were never devoid of polemical tangents and confrontations. The political and cultural history unfolding between the sea's southern and northern shores oscillates between convergence and clash.¹

This dialectical relationship lies at the heart of the generative processes that literary, cultural, and art historians have only recently begun to address. With respect to textual, narrative, and linguistic connections, the pathbreaking work of Maria Rosa Menocal and Karla Mallette has been especially instrumental in forging new epistemological tools for the articulation of a "medieval Mediterranean lexicon" capable of embracing the uneven, but not fragmented, literary landscapes shared by Sicily, Iberia, and North Africa during the medieval period.² Scholars working in previously non-conversant fields—Byzantinists, Arabists, Romanists—have created new interfaces that have broken the seals of nationalist packagings; in the words of Sharon Kinoshita, we have begun "displacing the nation" in our examination of Mediterranean literary artifacts.³

This special issue follows in that trajectory, exploring "minor" narrative forms, proffering new approaches to well-known texts, and suggesting alternative readings of overarching genres moulded by turmoil in the western Mediterranean.

I Maghrib: in Arabic, the regions west of Egypt; as opposed to Mashriq: the "East."

² Menocal, *Arabic Role, Ornament of the World; Literature of Al-Andalus*; Mallette, *Kingdom of Sicily,* "Poetries"; *A Sea of Languages.* Pioneering studies include those listed in the bibliography, but it is beyond the scope of this introduction to provide an exhaustive review of recent literature in the field.

³ Kinoshita, "Medieval Mediterranean Literature," 602.

It is the product of a conference conceived in 2016 as part of a research project entitled "The Birth of Romance Literature: Iberia and Sicily at the Twilight of Arabo-Muslim Cultural Hegemony," based at the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona. This collective endeavour brought into new focus the Arabic poetry composed in times of political transition and shifting sovereignties. Surveying a corpus of eleventh-and twelfth-century Arabic verse, one detects some recurring patterns in Maghribī poems, as their authors grieved for and grappled with Islam's loss of cohesion. Arabic poets of the West mourned their homelands in many lines of *tafajju* (lamentation); as city after city fell to foreign invaders, they voiced their angst in the face of the Muslim community's incapacity to defend itself. Elegies to the fallen cities (*rithā* al-mudun) of al-Andalus and Sicily multiplied, encoding a lexicon of loss. Indeed, the cultural ties that bound Sicily and Spain, as well as their similar histories, contributed to this lexicon's rapid transformation into a new koiné.

Perhaps the most famous of the Andalusian elegies to a fallen city is Ibn Shuhayd's "Elegy to Córdoba," in which the poet (992–1035) celebrates the heyday of the Umayyad caliphate and ponders the calamitous civil war that caused its downfall.

An abode for whose people God has decreed a fall: they have become Berberized, mingled with the Moroccans, and adopted the creed of the Egyptians.⁵

In this epitaph-like line, Ibn Shuhayd mourns at once the demise of a city and its people. Like their once splendid capital, the Andalusians themselves have been fragmented. Scattered across the Mediterranean, they have foregone their former identity and adopted the customs of other peoples: Berbers, North Africans, Egyptians. Alexander Elinson has already called attention to these three groups and their specific meanings within the overall message of the elegy. The verb *tabarbara*, "to become berberized," is loaded with a traditional Andalusian contempt and "carries with it a sense of backwardness, ignorance and, quite literally, barbarity." Meanwhile, *tagharraba*, "to become Maghribī," and *tamaṣṣara*, "to become Egyptian," convey other racial and sectarian biases. The first is intended to distance al-Andalus from the Maghrib, perceived by the literary establishment as an intellectual and cultural backwater. The second alludes to the *shīʿa/sunnī*

⁴ See Elinson, "Loss Written in Stone."

⁵ Elinson, "Loss Written in Stone." Elinson's translation has been adapted to offer a more literal reading.

⁶ Elinson, "Loss Written in Stone."

rift that split the Muslim *Umma* in this age. With the Fatimids firmly established in Egypt, the place had now become indissolubly bound to their Ismā'īlī doctrine, which Andalusian refugees would, according to Ibn Shuhayd's narrative, end up embracing. The poet thus acts as the defender of the caliphate and of the Arabic language, representing al-Andalus itself as much more than a western outpost of Islam. For him, it is a locus of sophistication and refinement, now destined for oblivion—were it not for the literary rescue carried out by his elegy.

By decrying the brutalization of diasporic Andalusians, Ibn Shuhayd also conveys a second, implicit message that would not be lost on the Andalusian recipients of the poem: an allusion to the confrontations between Arabs and Berbers and older versus newer settlers (that is, Andalusians versus "Moroccans"), which had ultimately caused the downfall of Córdoba during the so-called "Berber fitna." This term figures prominently in Arabic accounts of the end of Umayyad rule in Iberia. Often translated as "civil war" or "dissension," it captures the violent divisions within the Muslim *Umma* caused by the craving for material possessions, the lust for and love of the world. *Fitna* is at once a trial by God (the word originally refers to the process of purifying gold from the dross) and a sign of the community's loss of divine guidance. Thus, the intended audience would detect an underlying accusation: the disintegration of the Andalusian social fabric began at home during the civil war that condemned their city and destroyed their world.

Ibn Shuhayd's critiques echo in the verse of a Sicilian poet of the next generation, Ibn Ḥamdīs (ca. 1056–ca. 1133). Born during the Norman invasion of Sicily, Ibn Ḥamdīs was a witness to the calamitous political events that shook Muslim polities in his homeland, as well as in al-Andalus and the Maghrib throughout the eleventh and into the twelfth century. Muslim Sicily had ceased to exist as a unified political entity by the time of the poet's birth, fragmenting in circumstances analogous to those that caused the downfall of the Umayyads around the same time; as in al-Andalus, centralized rule in Muslim Sicily succumbed to fratricidal *fitna*. The dynasty of the Kalbids, the emirs who had ruled the island from their capital in Palermo for a century, had been riven by internecine squabbles over succession at the turning of the eleventh century. With the Kalbid princes at each others' throats, their vassals across Sicily proclaimed themselves independent, splitting the island into four large principalities whose continuous and debilitating infighting ultimately consigned Sicily to conquest by Norman invaders.

After leaving war-ridden and famine-plagued Sicily, Ibn Ḥamdīs landed in North Africa and subsequently joined the retinue of al-Muʿtamid ibn ʿAbbād, king

⁷ See Denaro, "And God Dispersed Their Unity," in this issue.

⁸ See Nef, "La fitna sicilienne."

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of Seville (r. 1069–1091). But in 1091, the Almoravid invasion of al-Andalus put an end to the rule of al-Muʻtamid. After witnessing the deposition of his patron at the hands of fellow Muslims, Ibn Ḥamdīs left on a calamitous sea voyage which would end in shipwreck and the death of his beloved slave-girl, Jawhara. An exile once more, Ibn Ḥamdīs resumed a roving life, passing through the courts of precarious Muslim statelets in Majorca, Tunis, and Algeria. He was destined never to return to Sicily, his ancestral home, which was now fixed in the orbit of European Christendom. As William Granara has pointed out, Ibn Ḥamdīs' poetry can be read as a compelling historical testament to Islam's political decline in the western Mediterranean. His own odyssey maps out a world where Islamic sovereignty is compromised by internal discord and staggers under the blows of new political protagonists. His verse, meanwhile, encodes these new protagonists within the ancestral lore of the $qas\bar{q}da$ (Arabic ode), contributing to what we may call a Maghribī poetics of loss, as pioneered by his Andalusian forebear Ibn Shuhayd. 10

Even as he mourned the loss of Sicily to the Normans, Ibn Ḥamdīs did not refrain from accusing the Muslims of Sicily of engineering their own downfall.

ولكنّ أرضي كيف لي بفكاكها فبعد سكون للعروق العلوج الغواصب لئن ظفرت تلك الكلاب بأكلها فبعد سكون للعروق الضوارب أحينَ تفانى أهلها طوع فتنة فيضرّم فيها نارَه كلُّ حاطب وأضحت بها أهواؤهم وكأنما مذاهبهم فيها اختلاف المذاهب ولم يرحم الأرحام منهم أقارب تروّي سيوفاً من نجيع أقارب 11

How can I free my land from her chains, in the hands of usurping barbarians? If those dogs could seize their food, it was only after her veins had stopped pulsing.

Didn't her people destroy one another at the beck and call of civil strife, each lumberman stoking the flames of its fire?

The light of that fire revealed all their base desires: they bickered as if all moved by different beliefs.¹²

Relatives had no mercy on each other, and quenched their swords' thirst with the blood of their kin. 13

⁹ Granara, "Ibn Ḥamdīs's al-Dīmās Qaṣīda."

¹⁰ Carpentieri, "Towards a Poetics of Aging."

II Arabic text in Ibn Ḥamdīs, Dīwān, 31; trans. Carpentieri.

¹² *Madhāhib*: schools of thought within Islamic jurisprudence.

¹³ See also Carpentieri, "At War with the Age"; Granara, "Ibn Ḥamdīs and the Poetry of Nostalgia."

Here, Ibn Ḥamdīs delivers a clear message to his audience, understood as the Maghribī Muslim community: the Normans would have been no match for the Sicilians had they managed to stand united instead of giving in to bickering and divisions. It was the Muslims, "her people," and not the Normans, who broke Sicily's heart and drained her life's blood. This was an audacious message to deliver at this point in time, when Norman power in the Mediterranean was a growing threat for the Muslim principalities in North Africa. Ibn Ḥamdīs accordingly uses Sicily as a cautionary tale for North Africa's Muslims princes, for whom he worked in his mature years. In particular, he denounces the "lumbermen" who had fomented and exploited sectarian divisions for their own benefit.

More broadly, the poet's invocation of *fitna* and *madhāhib* (sects or beliefs) has the effect of framing the Sicilian downfall within "a narrative of defeat"—a point that one of our authors, Roberta Denaro, will explore in detail—whereby the loss of divine guidance is followed inevitably by military and political loss. Much like Ibn Shuhayd, Ibn Ḥamdīs stands as the censor of his own community, whom he both pities and accuses. He, too, conjures the spectre of sectarian antagonism as the great puppeteer behind the scenes of the Sicilian *fitna*. In the above verses, thus, he interweaves *fitna* with the Norman conquest, showing how religious transgressions give rise to a protracted civil war in which the Muslims of Sicily murder their own country, whose carcass falls into the grip of the rapacious Normans. Together, Ibn Shuhayd and Ibn Ḥamdīs also exemplify how this period of Islam's political decline led to extraordinary new engagements and exchanges within the Maghribī community, between competitors and interlocutors.

This special issue explores how the internal struggles and political turmoil that convulsed these societies are reflected in a variety of writings; and how those writings, in turn, participated in these events and gave them specific narrative contours. Its seven contributions examine texts that reveal how rivalries and alliances—confessional, political, and ethnic—were a dialectic force driving new modes of literary exchange. Collectively, our authors address several broad questions: how did Sicilian, Iberian, and North African writers fashion the shared experience of civil strife? How did factionalism shape the themes and debates that animated Maghribī literature in this era? How can we decode the workings of polemic and synthesis that generated this "literature of turmoil"? And how did turmoil and trauma affect the material formats and genres of writing?

By tackling these questions, our authors explore the web of cultural and political ties that entangled Muslim Sicily and al-Andalus, North Africa, and Christian Europe from the ninth to the sixteenth century. Some of the texts they examine have already received significant attention; in such cases, our authors proffer new approaches that situate them in a global context, showing how modes of writing

travelled across geographical and cultural frontiers, and how writing "the Other" was inextricable from examinations of the self. Other contributions examine forms of writing that have been, thus far, at the periphery of academic interest and so cast new light on the literature of turmoil's dialogical modes. In keeping with *The Medieval Globe*'s mission, every article is designed to be accessible and interesting to the non-specialist, while simultaneously engaging scholars already deeply familiar with the topics we address.

Maghribī Societies: Between Convergence and Clash

Contemporary travellers, poets, and scholars were fascinated by the similarities between Muslim Sicily and Muslim Iberia, comparing their environments, architectural styles, demographics, historical developments, and political institutions. ¹⁴ Beyond their cultural affinities and remarkably similar histories, both were frontier states: the westernmost strongholds of Islam vis-à-vis Christendom. Ibn Jubayr, the twelfth-century Andalusian traveller, articulated this fascination in his description of Sicily, which he came to know after he was shipwrecked off the coast of Messina in 1185.

The prosperity of the island surpasses description. It is enough to say that it is a daughter of al-Andalus in the extent of its cultivation, in the luxuriance of its harvests, and in its well-being, having an abundance of varied produce, and fruits of every kind and species.¹⁵

Both regions also had close but complex relations with their North African neighbours. These relations were the result of geographical proximity, but also reflected the shared heritage of the Arabs and Berbers who, after the Muslim conquests of the Maghrib, settled these lands. But in spite of these common characteristics, the political interests of the two <code>jazīras¹6</code> (<code>jazīra</code> is Arabic for both "island" and "peninsula") came to diverge greatly from those of North Africa, as the two lands experienced their rise to autonomy. Finally, in their political twilight, both al-Andalus and Muslim Sicily had to negotiate new alliances with the North African kingdoms in order to guarantee their survival.

It is therefore not surprising that the more tumultuous pages in the shared mythology of Muslim Iberia find counterparts in those of Muslim Sicily. The Muslim invasion of Iberia (711 \times CE), at the legendary invitation of the Visigothic count

¹⁴ See Mandalà, "Figlia d'al-Andalus!"; Kapitaikin, "Daughter of al-Andalus."

¹⁵ Ibn Jubayr, Travels of Ibn Jubayr, trans. Broadhurst, 339.

¹⁶ Mandalà, "Figlia d'al-Andalus!"

Julian, is paralleled by the Aghlabid invasion of Sicily (827 cE), at the legendary invitation of the renegade Byzantine general Euphemius. Both invasions were followed by protracted periods of negotiation between older and newer settlers pouring in from the North African coasts. The Muslim conquest of Iberia, in particular, was compromised by the fact that the Berber soldiers, who had done most of the fighting, felt defrauded when Arab elites favoured their own kinsmen in the distribution of lands and booty. The Berbers' simmering resentment exploded into open revolt in the first half of the eighth century, threatening to undermine the establishment of any cohesive polity. Further conflicts between North African Berbers and Andalusian Muslims would be a crucial factor in the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate of Córdoba, three centuries later. Muslim Sicily was also plagued by analogous ethnic and social rivalries throughout its history.

In both jazīras, relations between Muslim rulers and their Christian and Jewish subjects were also marked by conflict. While the dhimma¹⁷ granted these confessional groups protection and freedom of worship, confrontations and polemics were by no means eradicated. In this issue's first article, Andrew Sorber delves into one such early polemic by offering a new reading of the *Indiculus luminosus* (Enlightened Little List) by Paulus Alvarus (ca. 800–861). Alvarus, a Christian layman and possible convert from Judaism, wrote this brief treatise in the 850s as both an invective against Islam and a defence of the so-called Córdoba martyrs: a group of forty-eight individuals who, between 850 and 857, sought "martyrdom" by publicly attacking Islam and its Prophet. Rather than taking the Indiculus at face value, or even as an early formulation of Christian holy war ideology, Sorber explores how Alvarus sought to challenge Muḥammad's prophetic claims in order to convince his audience—the Christian elites of Córdoba, who had long accommodated themselves to Muslim rule—that the tenets of Islam were alien and antithetical to their own culture and interests. Sorber also underscores how Alvarus' appropriation of the prophetic legacy was part of an increasingly common strategy among Latin polemicists, in response to the success of Arab conquest and the Islamization of the Iberian Peninsula.

Remaining in Iberia, Natalie Levin transports us to the "golden age" of political stability and cultural flourishing that was achieved in al-Andalus under the Umayyad caliphate (929–1030). In 953, a monk called John of Vandières travelled from the abbey of Gorze to the capital at Cordóba as a diplomatic envoy for

¹⁷ Encyclopaedia of Islam, dhimma: "the term used to designate the sort of indefinitely renewed contract through which the Muslim community accords hospitality and protection to members of other revealed religions, on condition of their acknowledging the domination of Islam. The beneficiaries of the dhimma are called dhimmis, and are collectively referred to as ahl al-dhimma or simply dhimma."

the future Emperor Otto I, then king of East Francia. His extended visit there, the political goals and implications of his embassy, and his eventual meeting with Caliph 'Abd al-Raḥmān III, were later memorialized in a section of John's Latin *vita* which, as Levin demonstrates, was closely informed by literary tropes drawn from Arabic *adab*¹⁸ literature. The anecdotes popularized by this genre travelled widely throughout the Mediterranean, but Levin's article sketches the fascinating transmission of one such tale as far as Lotharingia, and shows how the appropriation of its motifs was instrumental in strengthening Ottonian imperial messaging both within and beyond his turbulent realm.

The next two articles consider writings that responded to turmoil in the Maghrib during the tenth century: the result of wider Mediterranean processes as well as fractures internal to Maghribī Islam. At the turning of this century, both North Africa and Sicily were overtaken by the Fatimids, a Shiite dynasty that won a sweeping military victory over the Sunnī Aghlabid emirs of North Africa. From the capital of their new caliphate in Ifrīgiya, 19 the Fatimids defied both the weakened authority of the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad and the rising star of the Umayyad emirs of al-Andalus. However, the conquerors also had to seek compromises between the proselytizing mission of their Isma'ilī Shiite doctrine and the dictates of realpolitik. Through propaganda and public disputations (munāzarāt), they sought to negotiate their religious authority with the Mālikī Sunnī²⁰ establishment of North Africa. They also had to address the Muslims of Sicily, who had broken out into open rebellion against them and declared a highly symbolic allegiance to the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad. Sicily would reach a period of political stability only after protracted clashes with Fatimid authorities. Muslims in al-Andalus also reacted with open defiance to the caliphal claims of the Fatimids, positioning themselves as Maghribī champions of Sunnī Islam: an aspiration symbolized by 'Abd al-Rahmān III's own assumption of the caliphal title in 929.

Against this backdrop, Aslisho Qurboniev's article focuses on the *munāṇarāt* between Sunnī Mālikī and Fatimid scholars in North Africa, revealing how they reflect the contention and uncertainty experienced by all participants. He draws on accounts by the traditionalist Saʿīd ibn al-Ḥaddād (d. 915) and the Fatimid propagandist Ibn al-Ḥaytham (d. after 953), each of whom produced

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¹⁸ Meaning both "literature" and "manners," *adab* encompasses anecdotal writings that celebrate urbanity, wit, hygiene, erudition, and linguistic competence.

¹⁹ This term had rather fluid connotations and its boundaries were not fixed; but it corresponds roughly to modern-day Tunisia and eastern Algeria.

²⁰ Mālikīsm is one of the four schools of Sunnī Islamic thought.

texts that exemplify the hagiographical treatment of disputants on both sides. Within Mālikī ranks, to write a narrative of disputation was an act of saintly defiance against the Fatimids, who had undermined Mālikī hegemony in North Africa. As for the Fatimids, their propagandists ($d\bar{a}$ 'is) used $mun\bar{a}zar\bar{a}t$ to elevate their intellectual position and so leverage authority within the traditional establishment of the Mālikī ' $ulam\bar{a}$ ': the specialist scholars of Islamic sacred law. Qurboniev argues that, by venturing into the public arena, both groups sought to gain personal prestige and thereby enhance the position of their own social group through a sort of intellectual cold war that pitched Fatimids and their doctrine against the Sunnī establishment in North Africa and, by extension, against the authority of both the Umayyads in Iberia and the Abbasids in the East.

If turmoil was a motor of ideological writing, as exemplified by the *munāzarāt*, it could also shape the forms and materialities of writing. The frequent military campaigns that accompanied political and social unrest in the western Mediterranean demanded that written communication be swift, confidential, portable, and effective. Orders had to be dispatched, reports conveyed to headquarters, and negotiations carried forward—sometimes through official correspondence, but also through brief textual messages (ruga'). Alex Metcalfe guides us through the largely unexplored landscape of these written communications in both Fatimid North Africa and Sicily during the Norman invasion of the mid-eleventh century. He reveals that the *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhar*, a biographical account of the eunuch and courtier who was chamberlain to the Fatimid caliphs until his death in 973, provides abundant records of these short messages, which are also referenced in a number of Arabic chronicles. Such messages are also attested in the Latin writings of Geoffrey Malaterra,²¹ a monk who immortalized the deeds of the Norman warlords Robert Guiscard (ca. 1015–1085), his brother Roger (ca. 1040–1101), and his son Roger Borsa (ca. 1060–1111). Later witnesses include illustrations in the presentation manuscript of the *Liber ad honorem Augustus*, written by Peter of Eboli for Henry VI, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily, in 1196. Analyzing the precious testimonies to this vital but fungible form of correspondence, Metcalfe grapples with the problem of their seeming ubiquity but scant preservation, as well as the problems posed by their very brevity and ambiguity, and the interplay between orality and writing. He also calls attention to the vital roles played by the messengers who conveyed these diminutive chartulae.

²¹ This Geoffrey has recently been identified as a Norman Benedictine monk of Winchester's New Minster, who became the abbot of Burton-upon-Trent (Staffordshire) in 1085. When he was ousted for theft and mismanagement in 1094, he made his way to this newer Norman colony: see Symes, "Doing Things beside Domesday," 1073.

Writing the Twilight: History, Travel, and Romance

The end of Muslim rule in Sicily heralded the twilight of Islam's political sovereignty in al-Andalus. Umayyad Córdoba fell during the civil war (ca. 1009–1031) that pitted new Berber settlers against Andalusians: the so-called Berber *fitna*. Around the same time, Sicily's epicentre, Palermo, fell victim to sectarian strife: the Sicilian *fitna*. ²² In both lands, local warlords exploited the turmoil by establishing independent kingdoms, the *taifas* (from the Arabic $t\bar{a}$ 'ifa, faction), tearing apart the political and social fabric of Islam. As the Andalusian *taifas* were swallowed up by the North African dynasty of the Almoravids, the Sicilian *taifas* would be swept away by the Norman avalanche.

How did Muslim historians make sense of these calamities? Roberta Denaro's contribution offers an answer. Analyzing narrative patterns in historical accounts describing the end of Muslim rule, she suggests that they function as a countergenre to that of the $fut\bar{u}h\bar{a}t$: a type of historiographical writing that celebrated the victories and conquests of Islam, particularly during its first phase of expansion. Denaro also positions these narratives of defeat within other, overarching Arabic historiographical trends, particularly the concept of fitna. Much like the verses of Ibn Shuhayd and Ibn Ḥamdīs, quoted above, this teleological topos figures defeat as the necessary outcome of moral deviance: when dissension fractures Muslim unity, God withdraws his favour. By surveying multiple Arabic chronicles devoted to the repulsion of Muslim campaigns in Europe, especially al-Ghāfiqī (d. ca. 1165) on Poitiers and al-Sulamī (d. 1106) and al-Nuwayrī (d. 1333) on Sicily, Denaro argues for a reading of these sources as "the antipodes of the $fut\bar{u}h\bar{a}t$."

While Arabic historians and poets grappled with Islam's loss of sovereignty in the Mediterranean, Muslims travellers crossing the Middle Sea were confronted with a social landscape that was becoming ever more transcultural. Islam may have been losing to Christianity on the military and political fronts, but Christian victors were often yielding to the culture of the Arabic-speaking world they now inhabited, and they were eager to adopt its artistic, technological, and scientific advancements. Christians across Europe reaped the fruits of Arabic learning, while those living in Sicily and Iberia were deeply attracted to the sophistication of Islamic court culture and worked to emulate its rituals and aesthetics in their cosmopolitan cities. Walking through the streets of Norman Palermo, Ibn Jubayr was enraptured and awestruck by Christian churches built on Islamic models. In her article, Vanna Calasso compares his account of one such contemporary church, St. Mary's of the Admiral in Palermo, better known as the Martorana, with that of a monument from the distant past: the ancient Egyptian temple of Akhmīm. Ibn

²² Nef, "La fitna sicilienne."

Jubayr's description of the former reveals his admiration for the achievements of Norman Sicily: the wealth of their churches, their "arabized" courts and "Islamicate" garb, and the tangible manifestations of deeper cultural syncretism. But by contextualizing his travelogue (rihla) within the discursive strategies exposed by Denaro, Calasso suggests that the author was also grappling with a personal and intimate fitna: the allurement and seduction of the exotic. Through his meditation on the afterlife of the Egyptian temple and the new vernacular Church of St. Mary, Calasso articulates a compelling parallel between narratives of public and private loss, survival and renovation.

A later tale of survival, renovation, and reinvention also seals our issue. Keith Budner's article follows the metamorphoses of a pan-Mediterranean love story whose protagonists had as many names as the languages of their tale: Floire and Blancheflor, Florios and Platziaflora, Florio and Biancifiore, and so on. The romance between a Christian damsel and a Moorish prince was rewritten at a series of historical junctures in the relationship between Christianity and Islam in Iberia. Examining two Spanish versions created between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, Budner reads the Flores romance as a palimpsest of these relationships as they took shape in a time of Christian hegemony, investigating how these two redactions reflect the increasing subjugation of the Muslim community and Christian rulers' imperial ambitions within and beyond Iberia. By delving into the "mythopoeia of the Morisco²³ experience," Budner draws a compelling parallel between the redacted Flores romance and the narrative constructed by the Lead Books of Sacromonte: a collection of twenty-two volumes discovered in Granada at the end of the sixteenth century, which Morisco scholars claimed to be pre-Islamic Arabic texts written by Roman Christians (they are almost certainly a contemporary forgery). A further analogy is provided by an Italian avatar of the Flores romance: Boccacio's Filocolo, which Budner addresses in the last section of his article. Through these comparative readings, Budner casts the forging of fictional pedigrees and the constantly re-imagined past as a process in dialogue with marked social and political changes in an Iberia that was no longer Muslim.

Together, these seven articles illuminate the writings that responded to critical moments and trends in the centuries of turmoil that shaped and reshaped the Mediterranean. They examine interfaith religious polemics and initiatives that bridged literary and cultural traditions, ephemeral messages exchanged in times of warfare and episodes of diplomacy, travel writing and romance, dialogue and disputation. Avoiding facile dichotomies that pit a monolithic Islam against medieval

²³ The term is used to describe Iberian Muslims pressured into Christian conversion by the Spanish Crown during the sixteenth century, as well as to their descendants.

Christendom, our special issue testifies to shared discourses and aesthetics, as well as to rifts and rivalries. Rather than opposing binaries, these writings reveal a far more complex panorama of "internal otherness" that plays at least as important a role as religious conflict.²⁴ Indeed, turmoil itself emerges as more than a merely destructive force: it is also a dialectic force that propelled cultural production and even cultural synthesis. As medieval writers crafted their narratives of turmoil, they also documented the constant crossing of linguistic, social, artistic, and political boundaries largely erected by post-medieval nationalist, racist, and confessional narratives. Reading their writings with fresh eyes, our authors expose those modern fictions for what they are, and open a window onto a more diverse and elastic medieval world.



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Abstract The seven articles in this thematic issue address written responses to different periods of turmoil that impacted Muslim and Christian societies in the western Mediterranean from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries. By highlighting the complexities of the literary artifacts produced in Sicily, al-Andalus, and North Africa, it offers new perspectives on the interactions between Islam and Christendom at a time of traumatic transition from one political and religious hegemony to another, as reflected in a variety of genres: apologetic and hagiographical works, interreligious polemics, military and diplomatic dispatches, historiography, travel narratives, and romance. These analyses reveal a cultural panorama in which "internal otherness" and religious rivalry are both generative forces within a Mediterranean of fungible linguistic and social boundaries, where traditional genres are inflected and re-invented and new vernacular forms arise from multicultural and multi-confessional encounters.

Keywords: Mediterreanean, Maghrib, Sicily, al-Andalus, Spain, Arabic literature, Latin polemic, vernacular romance, transculturation, Islam, medieval Christendom, Ifrīqiya, North Africa, Umayyads, Fatimids

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