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Chapter 55

Granada

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One night in the spring of 1375 in Fes, Morocco, medieval Granada’s most eminent writer, Ibn al-Khatib, was strangled in prison. This inglorious end came after he had lived for a number of years in Morocco as a fugitive from his rivals in the Naṣrid kingdom of Granada, including the jurist al-Nubāhī (al-Bunnāhī) and the poet Ibn Zamrak, his former student. When political upheaval among the Marinids of Morocco left him without protection, these rivals were summoned to Fes by his local enemies and Ibn al-Khatib was put on trial for heresy. He resisted confession despite being tortured, but doubts remained about his guilt. After he was sent back to prison, apparently to await further deliberations, some hired men broke into his cell and murdered him.¹

Although the charges seem to have been trumped up, this was not the first time that Ibn al-Khatib had been at odds with local authorities. One of his unconventional teachings, which opposed the common view of most jurists, was of particular historical import: his outspoken stance on the plague in his brief treatise *The Convincing of the Questioner Regarding the Appalling Illness* (*Muqni‘at al-sā‘il ‘an al-maraḍ al-hā‘il)*, written in 1349. This work was one of various such treatises written in Granada, including a work by his contemporary, the Granadan doctor and poet Ibn Khāṭīma al-Anṣāri, from Almeria (d. 1369). Against the traditional view among some Islamic jurists that diseases like the plague were not transmitted by contagions, but instead were acts of God—in fact, death by the plague was considered by some to be a form of martyrdom—Ibn al-Khatib argued that to deny that the plague is contagious ‘is to be malicious, it is blasphemy against God, and holds cheap the lives of Muslims’.²

The question of contagion was not a trivial one in the kingdom of Granada, which was small and thickly populated in the urban areas and had probably reached its largest

¹ On his trial, see Calero Secall, ‘El proceso’.
population in the early fourteenth century.\(^3\) Between the arrival of the first Muslims in 711 and Christian subjugation of the cities of Córdoba (1236), Jaén (1246), and Seville (1248), Islam was a dominant political and cultural presence throughout the Iberian peninsula. However, the conquest by the middle of the thirteenth century of all but the south-east region of Iberia forced many of the Muslims living in the north to take refuge in the new Naṣrīd kingdom of Granada, so named after its first sultan, Muḥammad I Ibn Naṣr. After rebelling against Ibn Hūd, a local leader who had helped to bring about the end of Almohad rule in al-Andalus, Muḥammad I proclaimed himself ruler of Arjona (a small town near Jaén) in 1232 and came to rule the surrounding cities (including Granada) by 1237. He rose to power at the very moment when the Christians were advancing on the cities of the south; through political aplomb he managed to broker Christian recognition of a Granadan kingdom as a vassal state of Castile.\(^4\) The enclave set up by Muḥammad I Ibn Naṣr, which corresponds roughly to the modern-day provinces of Granada, Málaga, and Almería—slightly larger than Massachusetts and slightly smaller than Belgium—would survive against the odds for another two and a half centuries until the Catholic Kings Ferdinand and Isabella took possession of it on 1 January 1492.

\(^3\) Although no reliable demographic figures exist, see the estimates in Harvey, Islamic Spain, 5–9; and Viguera Molins et al., El Reino, 8.4.32–7, based on Ladero Quesada, Granada, 38–42.

\(^4\) Harvey, Islamic Spain, 23–5.
In addition to being affected by its partial political isolation, Granada’s character was influenced by its geographical position between mountains and the Mediterranean coast. The Naṣrid kingdom’s birth through a process of retreat from onslaught into the mountains of the Baetic Range—which includes the snowy elevations of the Sierra Morena—set in place a number of formative paradigms that would define its character. As the last remaining Muslim territory in the Iberian peninsula, it survived ‘literally with its back to the wall’, living on the defensive against the Christian kingdoms to the north and enjoying a complicated and strained peace with the rival Marinids to the south. Despite this political tension, it enjoyed an open and mutually enriching cultural connection with the Islamic world, above all with the Maghrib. Developing in this precarious physical and political position at this solemn historical moment, Granadan culture was marked by a bipolar mix of an inward-looking, traditionalist nostalgia intent on preserving the cultural forms of centuries past and by an ambitious and outward-looking symbiosis vis-à-vis the Islamic world to the south and east. These mixed perspectives, manifest in art and architecture as well as in literature, become most pronounced in the second half of the fourteenth century, the period of Naṣrid Granada’s greatest cultural splendour.

Given Granada’s cultural conservatism, the literary forms cultivated under the Naṣrids were entirely those common throughout the Arabic-speaking world. No new forms were invented, although traditional forms were sometimes combined or altered and were exquisitely refined. In prose, the most ornate form was rhymed (sometimes termed saj), in which sentences are subdivided into short, cadenced segments balanced by frequent rhyme and marked by a wide and often rarefied vocabulary—for example: ‘In those days, there was a craze for nonpareil turns of phrase and deft, bombastical displays of periphrastical word plays that could amaze and earn one praise by setting readers’ hearts ablaze.’ This form had been traditionally used for ‘assemblies’ (maqāmāt), collections of bawdy or off-colour anecdotes sometimes involving a fast-talking hustler who changes disguise and hoodwinks a gullible narrator with rhetorical prowess. Some typical examples survive from Granada, but the form was also adapted for new purposes such as travelogues. Rhyming prose was cultivated along with other, non-rhyming forms pertaining to historiography and didactic adab literature (the literature of refinement and culture), including belletristic essays and monographic or technical treatises.

In poetry, writers cultivated the monorhyme, polythematic ode (qaṣīda) to treat traditional themes such as panegyric (madiḥ), satire (ḥijâ), elegy (rithâ), nature description (wasf), and love (ghazal), among others. Fourteenth-century writers also carried on the only poetic form invented in al-Andalus, that of the strophic songs known as muwashshāḥas. These are polyrhymed songs normally composed across five stanzas that are threaded with a refrain with a separate, recurring rhyme (e.g. AABBB

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5 Monroe, Hispano-Arabic Poetry, 61.
AACCC... etc.). In their final two-line refrain (*kharja* or in Castilian, *jarcha*, ‘exit’) they also sometimes include vernacular Arabic or Ibero-Romance words and phrases. Whereas the *qaṣida* is, as in Greek and Latin poetry, built on quantitative metrical feet, the *muwashshaḥa* does not easily correspond to traditional quantitative metre and for some more closely resembles the syllabic-stress metres of European vernacular literatures. Despite their popular origins, Nasrid writers sometimes extended their strophic structure to a much longer form resembling the *qaṣida*. As James Monroe argues, such classicizing tendencies can be seen as ‘a manifestation of the archaism deliberately sought by Granadan artists to oppose the inexorable advance of Christendom’.7

Despite this embattled stance, a clear symbol of Granada’s cultural ambition was the foundation by Sultan Yūsuf I (reigned 1333–54) in the spring of 1349 of a *madrasa* (‘school’), next to the mosque of Granada. As the first major ‘university’ in Granada—another, smaller *madrasa* had already been erected in Málaga a few years earlier—its construction responded in part to the building of numerous North African *madrasas* by the Marinid sultan Abū al-Ḥasan. In the second half of the fourteenth century, Granada’s *madrasa* became a vibrant centre of culture and learning and remained a hub of intellectual and literary activity throughout the period. Through its doors passed virtually every Granadan writer of prominence, as well as many from other shores of the Mediterranean. The great Moroccan traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 1368 or 1369) passed briefly through Granada in the early years of the *madrasa*, meeting the native Granadan Ibn Juzayy, then scribe for Yūsuf I.8 A few years later in Fes, Ibn Juzayy became the redactor of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s famous travel memoirs, the *Rihla*, completed in 1357, in which many famous Granadans are mentioned.9 As early as 1353–4, the eminent Sufi preacher Ibn Marzūq (the grandfather, d. 1379) came from Tlemcen to preach at the *madrasa*. He was a teacher of jurist Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibi (d. 1388), who was one of various Granadan jurists from the Mālikī school, a traditional legal school within Islamic religious law, prominent in Africa and al-Andalus and dominant in Granada.10 These jurists included al-Sharīf al-Gharnāṭī (d. 1359), also a poet of some renown, Ibn Lubb (d. 1381), the grand jurist (*qāḍī*) of Granada—and Ibn al-Khaṭīb’s enemy—al-Nubāḥi (or al-Bunnahī, d. after 1389), whose *The Highest Watchtower (al-Marqaba al-ʿulūyā)* is a central source of information about Nasrid jurisprudence, and Abū Bakr Ibn ʿĀṣim (d. 1426).11 Ibn ʿĀṣim wrote a metred verse treatise entitled *Gift of Judges Concerning the Subtleties of Contracts and Ordinances (Tuhfāt al-hukkām fi nukat al-ʿuqūd wa-l-ḥākām)*, also called the ʿĀṣimīyya, a widely influential treatise on Mālikī juridical procedure that received many commentaries by later jurists throughout the Muslim world and that remains in use today.

7 Monroe, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, 64.
8 BAA, 2.601–18; and *EI*2, ‘Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’.
9 Martínez Enamorado, ‘Granadinos’.
10 On these figures, see BAA, 4.124–38 and *EI*2, ‘Ibn Marzūq’; and *EI*2, ‘al-Shāṭibi’, respectively. On Granadan jurisprudence, see Arcas Campoy, ‘Teoría’.
11 On these authors, see *EI*2, ‘al-Sharīf al-Gharnāṭī’; BAA, 4.24–8; *EI*2, ‘al-Nubāḥi’; and BAA, 2.373–6, and *EI*2, ‘Ibn ʿĀṣim’, respectively.
The poet and vizier Ibn al-Jayyāb (d. 1349) died only a few months before the madrasa was inaugurated but dedicated a short poem to it, allegedly intended to be an inscription over its door. Although another text was chosen, the short poem is worth remembering as homage to the madrasa and its founder:

Oh student of science, its open door is open.
Enter and witness its radiance; the morning sun has appeared.
Thank your benefactor on entering and leaving (min ħallin wa-murtahalin).
For, God has brought near what was far off in your aiming.
The capital of Islam has founded a madrasa
in which the path of good guidance and of science has become clear.
The works and doings of our Sovereign Yūsuf
decorated its pages, tipped its scale (qad ārrazat suḥufan ẓīdānūhā rajaḥā).

Among the most famous of Naṣrid writers overall, and representing a major presence at the early madrasa, was Ibn al-Khaṭīb, known by the title Lisān al-Dīn, 'tongue of the religion'. Born to a noble family near Granada, he had various important teachers, including Ibn Marzūq, Ibn al-Jayyāb, and Muḥammad al-Maqqārī, ancestor of the seventeenth-century writer Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maqqārī from Tlemcen (d. 1632). The later al-Maqqārī dedicated the second half of his enormous history of Muslim Spain, The Breath of Perfume from the Tender Branch of al-Andalus and Reminiscence of its Vizier Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb (Naẓf al-tīb fi ḍhūṣn al-Andalus al-raṭīb wa-dhikr waziriha Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb), to a discussion of his predecessor’s life and work; much of what is known about Ibn al-Khaṭīb comes from its second part. As al-Maqqārī and other sources tell us, when Ibn al-Jayyāb died, Ibn al-Khaṭīb took his place as vizier of both civil and military affairs, bearing the title dhū l-wizaratayn, 'he of the double vizierate', posts he continued to hold under Yūsuf I's son, Muḥammad V (reigned 1354–9 and 1362–91), after the former was murdered. As statesman and poet, public intellectual and one of the greatest artistic talents of his day, Ibn al-Khaṭīb represents the epitome of the Naṣrid literary effort.

Ibn al-Khaṭīb was a writer of wide range in his own right and an indefatigable collector and anthologizer; his texts are responsible for preserving a large share of what is known about Granadan literary culture in the fourteenth century. In addition to composing his own poetry and anthologizing that of many others, he composed some sixty prose works on subjects as diverse as history, mystical/philosophical themes, law, politics, and medicine. Most important for the history of literature is his Comprehensive Book on the History of Granada (al-Iḥāṭa fi akhbār Gharbāta), an encyclopaedic mix of history and biography, plus an anthology of Granada's greatest

13 BAA, 3,643–98; EI, 'Ibn al-Khaṭīb'; and the references in Boloix Gallardo, 'Praising the "Tongue of Religion"'.
14 Al-Maqqārī, Naẓf, 5,203, 390, and 434.
15 Parts of the first half have been translated by Gayangos, in Al-Maqqārī, History.
writers.\textsuperscript{18} It preserves material concerning many figures of the preceding generation such as the traditionalist (\textit{hadith} scholar) Ibn al-Zubayr (d. 1308) and the poet and traveller al-Sāhili al-Ṭuwayjin (d. 1346)\textsuperscript{19} as well as brief selections from writers of his own day such as the scattered verses of the jurist Abū al-Barakāt al-Balafiqi (d. c.1372), the Şafi scholar Ibn Şafwān (d. 1362), and the judge Ibrāhīm al-Numayrī (d. 1364), among many others.\textsuperscript{20}

One brief but very interesting notice is that of Umm al-Ḥasan al-Tanjāliyya, whom Ibn al-Khāṭib claims was a woman learned in theology, philology, law, and especially medicine. As the daughter of the judge Abū Ja'far Ahmad al-Ṭanjāli (d. c.1349-50) from Loja (about 50 km east of Granada), she was a figure of some celebrity in fourteenth-century Granada because of her eloquence and education. Only a few lines of her writing have come down to us, and these are the only verses by a female poet to survive from our period. Of the two snippets preserved by Ibn al-Khāṭib, one addresses the subject of calligraphy and good handwriting. It hints at the poet’s dedication to learning and her attention to essential knowledge rather than to superficialities of form:

Knowledge has no use for penmanship (\textit{al-khāṭtu})

which is [merely] ornament on paper (\textit{tazīnun bi-qirṭāṣi}).

I demand study and seek nothing as a substitute.

The youth stands out (\textit{yasmūʿ alā l-nāṣi}) according to the measure of his knowledge.\textsuperscript{21}

The \textit{Comprehensive Book} preserves scores of such references and excerpts, some of which would be otherwise lost, and constitutes the primary source for our knowledge of literature in fourteenth-century Granada. Ibn al-Khāṭib also later penned \textit{A Troop in Ambush (al-Katiba al-kāmina)}, a biographical dictionary in rhymed prose treating many of the most important writers of his century. In some cases, he retracted an encomium delivered in his earlier \textit{Comprehensive Book} and replaced it, in \textit{A Troop in Ambush}, with contumely. Comparing the two works and their titles shows some of Ibn al-Khāṭib’s friendships degenerating in his later life, offering a portent of the bitter relations that would lead to his end.

Two other writers who provide additional information, equally valuable, about the Naṣrid kingdom in the fourteenth century are the North African ‘sociologist’ Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), who was friend and rival to Ibn al-Khāṭib, and Abū al-Walid Iṣmā’īl Ibn

\textsuperscript{18} The work, still untranslated, has been edited by M. 'Inān in four volumes, but it is best to consult one of the many surviving manuscripts such as Escorial 1673 (copied in BNM 4891-2) as well. On the editions and their problems, see \textit{BAA}, 3.672-3. Velázquez Basanta explored the sources in the \textit{Comprehensive Book} in his 1979 thesis, \textit{Poetas Arabigoandaluces}, from which he has drawn material for a score of relevant articles, too many to list here.


\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Iḥāta}, 1.430–1; Velázquez Basanta, ‘Umm’, 38; \textit{BAA}, 7.438–51.
al-Almamar (d. 1404–5 or 1407–8), an exiled NASRID prince best known as a Marinid historian. The latter's Book of the Assorted Pearls of Poetry of Those Whom Time Strung Together With Me (Kitab nathir al-jum\'an fi shi\'r man nazama-ni wa-iy\'ahu al-zam\'an), as well as his later Assorted Precious Pearls Strung by the Masters of the Age (Nathir far\'id al-jum\'an fi nazm fu\'il al-zam\'an), both provide selections and biographies similar to those of Ibn al-Kha\'titib, if less voluminous and varied. Similarly, Ibn Khaldun's writing provides a rich and nuanced picture of the culture and history of this period. After Muhammad V's successful return to rule in Granada, Ibn Khaldun served in 1363 as his minister and as his ambassador to the Castilian king Pedro I 'the Cruel'. Although Ibn al-Kha\'titib's envy against Ibn Khaldun helped to drive him from Granada, the final two volumes of the latter's seven-volume Book of Advice (Kitab al-ibar), to which the famous Prolegomenon (Muqaddima) serves as Volume One, provide much valuable information about Maghribi and Andalusi history and culture. Together, the works of Ibn al-Almamar and Ibn Khaldun supplement what has been preserved by Ibn al-Kha\'titib and Al-Maqqari about the literature of Western Islam in the second half of the fourteenth century. Without these sources, our knowledge of NASRID literature would be much more limited.

It would be incorrect to see Ibn al-Kha\'titib's value, however, only in his preservation and anthologizing of the work of others. It is true that he was an enthusiastic connoisseur of poetry and strophic songs, as is evident from the anthologies he compiled, Enchantment and Poetry (Sikhr wa-l-shi\'r) and, most important of all, the invaluable Army of Strophic Poetry (Jaysh al-tawshih). This is one of two principal anthologies of Andalusi muwashsha\'as to survive, preserving 111 songs not extant elsewhere, sixteen of which include kharjas (final refrains) in Romance. But in addition to being Granada's greatest literary historian and critic, he was himself one of its two most important poets, writing both classical qa\'id\'as and more popular muwashsha\'as.

One elegant description of the city of Granada compares it to a child's body:

It is a city surrounded by gardens as if
it were a handsome face and the gardens its first downy hair ('idharuhu)
and as if its rivers were the wrist of a young girl
and the strong bridges its bracelets.23

In a famous poem dedicated to Muhammad V upon his return to the throne in 1362, Ibn al-Kha\'titib likens the sovereign's naval ships to proud adolescents. To this image, he then adds two other striking metaphors, comparing the ships first to birds and then to pregnant women:

From each bird, it is as if there were a wing,
which is its sail, under which chicks took shade (tu\'allalu).
Hollow, it carries her and whomever she carries within.
Who knows what the female carries [when pregnant]?24

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23 Ibn al-Kha\'titib, Diwan, 1.425 (no. 345); and Ib\'ata, 1.115.
24 Diwan, 2.500 (no. 418 l, 93–4). On this poem, see Continente, 'La Casida'.
Within the hundreds of poems in his diwān, Ibn al-Khaṭīb displays some of the finest verses and most refined use of language from Naṣrīd Granada, and his poetic skill rivals the best Arabic poetry of earlier centuries.

One poet and author of various muwashshahās who was close to Ibn al-Khaṭīb was Ibn Khāṭima al-Ansārī. Like his more eminent friend, Ibn Khāṭima wrote various works besides his treatise on the plague already mentioned, including works on grammar, philology, and a rhymed description of the spy, a topos of Arabic works on love. Within his poetic diwān, a fascinating muwashshāha describes the poet's ardent love for a Christian:

I fell in love
His zunnār belt has made
But O, if he speaks to me
And when I tell him my troubles,
My heart is in snares.
'I swore by your Gospels
Not to listen to the censors
But how you tarry (tumātīl)

This song provokes reflection on the symbolic meaning of Muslim relations with non-Muslims in this period. The taboo against interconfessional (and homoerotic) relations logically found apposite expression in the muwashshāha form, which, as Tova Rosen has argued, was 'the most complete literary embodiment of the multiethnic and multilingual fabric of Andalusian society'. In the isolated and largely homogeneous realm of Naṣrīd Granada, in which there were relatively few Jews and even fewer Christians, the poet's question, 'Is there a translator around?' ('fa-ḥal mutarjimu'), might be taken as a factitious trope, but it piquantly underscores, nevertheless, the symbolic reality of this complex cultural legacy.

The continuity of Granada's literature with earlier Arabic and Andalusi traditions was evident not only in its poetry, but can be seen on a smaller scale in its cultivation of prose too, an additional sphere in which Ibn al-Khaṭīb proved exceptional among his Granadan peers. Among his various historiographical works, his Flash of Moonlight about the Naṣrīd State (al-Lamḥa al-badriyya fi al-dawla al-Naṣriyya) is dedicated to Granadan history and the second part (of three) of his Deeds of Great Men: On Those Who Came to Rule before Maturity (A′mal al-a′lam fi man buyū′a qabla l-iḥtilām) covers earlier Muslim history in Iberia. Two of his various maqāmāt in rhymed prose showing his adaptation of the genre to new uses are The Strutting of the Spectre, about Travel in Summer and Winter (Khaṭrāt

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26 A distinguishing belt worn by non-Muslims living under Muslim rule.
29 Arié, L’Espagne, 314–38. On the most important of the very few Jewish writers from the Naṣrīd kingdom, Sa’adya Ibn Danān, who lived from the mid fifteenth to the early sixteenth century, see BAA, 3.47–54.
al-ṣayf fī riḥlāt al-shita‘ wa-l-ṣayf), a travelogue describing his journey through the territories of the Naṣrid kingdom, and his Boasting Match between Malaga and Salé (Mufākharat Mālaqa wa-Salā), a comparison of the two cities that evokes the tacit rivalry between Granada and North Africa.\textsuperscript{30} Other works combine prose and poetry, such as his Shaking [the Dust] off the Rucksack: On the Diversion of the Traveller (Nufādāt al-jirāb fī 'ulālat al-ightirāb), which mixes travelogue with a description of the mawlid (birthday celebration for the prophet Muhammad) given by Muhammad V in the Alhambra in 1362, and includes many poems by Ibn al-Khaṭīb and others. He also penned numerous works relating to diplomacy and chancery writing.\textsuperscript{31}

These numerous prose texts can be fitted within the wider context of prose composition in Naṣrid Granada in the later fourteenth century, when a number of significant texts of \textit{adab}, or didactic and belles-lettres literature, as well as \textit{maqāmāt}, were composed by Ibn al-Khaṭīb’s contemporaries. The provincial writer Ibn al-Murābī‘ al-Azdi (d. 1350), just before our period, left a more traditional example of the genre in which the author is a picaresque protagonist who, in order to satisfy his demanding wife, suffers misadventures in his search for a sheep for the ‘Īd al-aḍḥā, ‘festival for the sacrifice’.\textsuperscript{32} Another writer about whom little is known, one Ibn Bāq from Almería (d. 1362), has left a curious work about legal obligation concerning payment for services, the Book of the Garden’s Blossom Giving a Summary about the Assessment of Duties (Kitāb zahrat al-rawd fī talkhīṣ taqdir al-fard), in which he touches on a wide range of issues, including weddings, funerals, food preparation, breastfeeding, use of public baths, and sexual conduct, among other topics.\textsuperscript{33}

In the realm of didactic \textit{adab} literature, one important collection of assorted anecdotes, written as a sort of mirror for princes, is the \textit{Book of Scattered Flowers About Tidbits of Stories Passed Down} (\textit{Kitāb al-zahārāt al-manthūra fī nukat al-akhbār al-ma’thūra}) by Abū al-Qāsim Ibn Simāk al-‘Āmili, from a family of important secretaries of Naṣrid rulers.\textsuperscript{34} Of the same generation was Abū al-Hasan Ibn Hudhayl (d. after 1409) who composed a two-volume work for Muhammad V entitled \textit{Gift of Souls and Emblem of the Inhabitants of al-Andalus} (\textit{Tuhfat al-anfūs wa-shī‘ar sukkān al-Andalus}). The first book of the \textit{Gift of Souls} is a treatise on \textit{jihād} and holy war in Islam which encourages Muslims to struggle in defence of Islam and to revive the arts of horsemanship, and of cavalry fighting.\textsuperscript{35} The second volume, later offered as a separate treatise to Muhammad VII (reigned 1392–1408) under the new title \textit{Ornament of Knights and Emblem of Paladins} (\textit{Hilyat al-fursūn wa-shī‘ar al-shuj‘ān}), is a treatise on hippology filled with rich descriptions (including many technical terms) and some poetry relating to horses and chivalry.\textsuperscript{36} Around the same time, the important jurist

\textsuperscript{36} See the editions and French translations of both by Mercier and the Castilian version of the \textit{Ornament} by Viguera Molins.
Abū Bakr Ibn ‘Āsim, in addition to his major work on Mālikī law already mentioned, compiled a collection of popular anecdotes known as the Hadā’iq al-azhar (Garden of Blossoms). Dedicated to Yūsuf II (reigned 1391–2), its fifth chapter includes a list of over eight hundred popular proverbs and refrains that give a rich snapshot of the Granadan dialect of the time. Each of these works, in its own distinctive way, sheds valuable light on the social and cultural fabric of daily life in Naṣrid Granada.

Despite his bloody end in 1354, Sultan Yūsuf I’s patronage of culture was, coupled with the relatively peaceful reign of Muḥammad V, a primary force in bringing about the period of greatest cultural flourishing in Naṣrid Granada’s history. This burst of creativity, manifest in poetry as well as in prose, was embodied nowhere more clearly than by the Alhambra fortress, which saw its most dramatic phases of construction between 1350 and 1400. The Alhambra’s splendour, however, is not limited to its enchanting fountains and floral or arabesque designs on its walls, ceilings, and tiles. Over thirty poems are inscribed into the plaster in which those designs are carved, making the Alhambra, in Emilio García Gómez’s words, ‘a veritable poetic anthology’. In its current state, poems survive by Ibn al-Jayyāb, Ibn al-Khaṭīb, and, above all, by the latter’s student-turned-rival Ibn Zamrak (d. 1393). Along with his teacher, Ibn Zamrak was one of Granada’s most important writers, although he produced only a fraction of writing by comparison. Like his teacher Ibn al-Khaṭīb, he served as vizier to Muḥammad V and actually replaced the former after seeing him exiled to North Africa. Again like his teacher—in whose death he had a sullied hand—he too met with a bloody death, being murdered by assassins sometime around 1393.

Outside of the Alhambra, examples from Ibn Zamrak’s qaṣidas, muwashshahās, and other shorter poems survive within his poetic diwān, and they exemplify the most extreme tendency of Naṣrid poetry toward technical perfection of classical forms in the expression of traditional themes and images. Among his surviving poems are a number of extremely florid, emotionally charged descriptions of love and nostalgia, as well as numerous panegyrics for Muḥammad V. Most iconic, however, are his poems treating the city of Granada—and sometimes Málaga as well—in lush and descriptive praise. One of his most famous verses presents the Alhambra, situated on a hill known as al-Sabika, as the jewel in the crown of the city:

Sabika hill wears a crown on its brow (tājun fawqā mafriqihā)
in which the bright stars only wish that they could be studded (tuḥallihā).
Her Alhambra—may God protect it—
stands out as a ruby atop that crown (yāqūtatun fawqā dhāti l-ttāji tu’lihā).40

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37 Marugán (ed. and tr.), El refranero, gives a transliteration and translation.
38 Poemas, 24. A full presentation and study of the Alhambra’s inscriptions and poems is available in Puerta Vilchez, Leer la Alhambra.
40 Ibn Zamrak, Diwān, 501.
Numerous similar verses are immortalized on the walls of the Alhambra itself. In the famous Court of the Lions, commissioned by Muḥammad V during his second reign, Ibn Zamrak’s words decorate the basin of the central fountain:

Sculpted pearl, with diaphanous light (shaffa nūruhā),
adorned by the pooling of pearly dew drops (al-jumān al-nnawāhiyā).
Melted silver flows through the jewels
and becomes, in its beauty, whiter and more pure.
The flowing is so alike to the hardness (tashāhaha jārin bi-l-ʿuyāni bi-jāmidin)
that I do not know which of the two was flowing.41

The Alhambra is decorated at every turn with words, mostly of the repeated and ubiquitous phrase ‘there is no conqueror but God’ (wa-lā ghālib illā ‘Allāh), but also those of Ibn Zamrak’s poems praising its spectacular form and praising the rulers who had it built and expanded. Although Robert Irwin has criticized his metaphors as ‘utterly conventional’ and his religious poems as ‘platitudinous’,42 Ibn Zamrak’s encomium for the Alhambra, which never fails to dazzle, still carries emotional weight when appreciated within the rich context by which it was framed.

The Alhambra, with its fountains, halls, gardens, alcoves, and towers, epitomizes the most important cultural production in Granada in the second half of the fourteenth century in Iberia. Perhaps fittingly, therefore, the Alhambra also exemplifies the double tendency of Naṣrid art, discussed above, to be both inward-looking and outward-minded, both classically refined and creatively conservative. At once a military fortress and a wandering chain of private patios, the Alhambra is both on the defensive and turned in on itself, both bastion and place of private reflection. While boasting of itself to the world, both Christian and Muslim, as the epitome of refinement and embellishment, it also hides itself from the outside behind rough, unadorned outer walls. The Alhambra’s deeply affecting forms can belie the poverty of its building materials.43 Since much of its decoration and inscription is in stucco plaster, it builds its grandeur from ornate design rather than from wealth of stones and precious metals. Compared to the opulence of the Caliphal monuments of Córdoba, the Alhambra’s breathtaking but materially superficial decoration can make Granada seem at times like ‘little more than a miniature jewel-box version of what had once been al-Andalus’.44

This paradoxical brilliance is reflected in the poetry of Ibn Zamrak, which often moves inward from a traditional reflection on the forms in nature toward the forms of art and poetry itself. A panegyric qaṣīda for Muḥammad V that begins by describing ‘a horizon adorned with flowers of stars’ (bi-l-zzuhri l-kawākibi ḥāliyā) soon moves through praise of Muhammad and eventually begins to reflect on the nature of ‘jewels from the sea of rhetoric | that are valued because they are not sold except at a high

42 Irwin, Alhambra, 87.
44 Menocal, The Ornament, 199.
This self-referential tendency is even more marked in the Alhambra itself. As D. Fairchild Ruggles has noted, the Alhambra is unique in the amount of its inscriptions in which it refers to itself as an architectural monument. Of the thirty-one poems identified, all but six mention the architecture where they are inscribed and a third do so in a first-person poetic voice. As Ibn Zamrak says that through his poetry, 'I have baffled (a'jaztu) all those who are to come as well as those who have departed', so the Alhambra's Lindaraja Fountain proclaims:

He granted me the highest degree of beauty  
and my shape inspires the people of culture (ahl al-adabi).  
No one has seen a greater courtyard than mine  
in the East or in the West.  
Never has any king offered anything like me  
before among the non-Arabs ('ajamin) or Arabs.

The Alhambra represents a visual correlative to the increasing poetic focus on meta-literary expression, reflecting more on the constructed shape of the palace and the cultivated garden than on the raw beauty of nature itself.

Such highly charged self-consciousness defines the poetry of the grandson of Muhammad V, Sultan Yusuf III (reigned 1408–17). Beyond his odes and amorous muwashshahas declaring his passion for both men and women (including a Christian lover), his poetry is particularly interesting for its evocation of political and military conflicts with the Christian north and Marinid south, which were also chronicled by his court poet Ibn Furkün (d. after 1417). Cultural efflorescence under Yusuf III, however, was short-lived. After Yusuf, no substantial additions were made to the Alhambra and only a few later poets—most notably 'Abd al-Karim al-Qaysi (al-Başî), probably born during Yusuf’s reign—approached the poetic calibre of the three preceding generations.

This waning was political as well as literary. Yusuf III’s loss of Antequera to Aragón in 1410 and of Ceuta to the Portuguese in 1415 slowly begin to shut Granada in on itself, and its troubles were compounded by his death in 1417, which left his 8-year-old son, Muhammad VIII, on the throne. These events augured the beginning of the painful political decline of the Naṣrids upon the rise of the ambitious Banū Sarrāj (‘clan of Sarrāj’, better known by their Castilian name, Los Abencerrajos). Although the age of the Abencerrajes was later immortalized as chivalrous and refined in the nostalgic ballads and ‘moorish novels’ of the Castilians, it was not the historical Banū Sarrāj of the fifteenth century who deserved this noble portrait. Rather, it was the time of the late fourteenth century—the age of Ibn al-Khaṭīb, Ibn Zamrak, and their...
contemporaries—that merits being remembered as Nasrid Granada’s cultural and literary zenith. Ironically, under the Abencerrajes of the fifteenth century, Granada’s risen star would fall to its nadir, a decline from which it would recover only in the romantic and distorted nostalgia of legend.

ABBREVIATIONS

BAA Jorge Lirola Delgado and José Miguel Puerta Vilchez (eds), Biblioteca de Al-Andalus, 7 vols and 2 vols appendix and index (Almería, 2004–13).
El² Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd edn (Leiden, 1954–).

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