

# Bodies, and the Arabic literature of Al-Andalus

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This handout was created for students at the University of Leeds. It contains a series of Arabic poems drawn from Ibn Sa'īd al-Magribī's thirteenth-century CE anthology *Rāyāt al-mubarrizīn wa-ghāyāt al-mumayyazīn*:

The Arabic text and, where it doesn't take up too much space, Spanish translation from *El libro de las banderas de los campeones, de Ibn Sa'īd al-Magribī*, ed. and trans. by Emilio García Gómez, 2nd edn, Series mayor, 39 (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1978) [first publ. Madrid: Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, 1942]. In some cases I've got round to transcribing the Arabic. Other times, I just give a scan of the Arabic, because my Arabic typing is extremely slow: apologies that I haven't got further with this yet! In all cases, there's a reference if you do want to look the Spanish up.

A prose translation from *Rāyāt al-mubarrizīn wa-ghāyāt al-mumayyazīn/The Banners of the Champions: An Anthology of Medieval Arabic Poetry from Andalusia and Beyond*, trans. by James A. Bellamy and Patricia Owen Steiner (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1989). This volume contains selected prose translations, not in the original order, but including more of the homoerotic material. Quite literal.

A verse translation from *Moorish Poetry: A Translation of 'The Pennants', an Anthology Compiled in 1243 by the Andalusian Ibn Sa'id*, trans. by A. J. Arberry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953). Selected verse translations, in more or less the original order, omitting some of the more homoerotic material. The translations are sometimes quite witty, but not very literal. Available for loan via archive.org as well as the library.

If you'd like to start exploring secondary literature pertaining to bodies in these poems, have a look at the Wikipedia entries for the *Rāyāt al-mubarrizīn*, Medieval Arabic female poets, *Qiyān*, and Medieval Arab attitudes to Black people.

## *In the mosque*

Ibn Mālik, Murcia (fl. 12th century)

El magnate y k̄tib Muḥammad ibn Mālik, secretario de Muḥammad b. Sa‘d, rey de Murcia.  
El autor del *Zād al-musāfir* inserta estos versos suyos [sarī‘]:

Yo vi en la mezquita aljama a un esbelto mancebo, bello como la luna cuando sale.  
Los que le veían inclinarse al orar decían: ‘Todos mis deseos están en que se prostorne.’

الرئيس الكاتب محمّد بن مالك كاتب محمّد بن سعد ملك مرسية

أنشد له صاحب " زاد المسافر " [سريع]:

وَأَهْيَفَ كَالْقَمَرِ الطَّالِعِ \* أَبْصَرْتُهُ فِي الْمَسْجِدِ الْجَامِعِ

يَقُولُ مَنْ أَبْصَرَهُ رَاكِعًا \* كُلَّ الْمُنَى فِي سَجْدَةِ الرَّاكِعِ

I saw in the Friday mosque a slender youth, like the rising moon,  
Whoever sees him bow in prayer says, ‘All my desires are in his prostration as he bows’

~ ~ ~

Slender he was, and fair  
As the uprising moon;  
I saw him stand to prayer  
In the mosque at noon.

And as he bent low  
Worshipping, I cried:  
‘All desire shall so  
Be richly satisfied!’

(Bellamy and Steiner 1989, 192 [no. 181]; Arberry 1953, 125; Gómez 1942, 77 (text), 239 (translation) [no 217])

## Artichoke

‘Abdallāh ibn al-Ṭallā’, Mahdia (fl. 11th century)

<p>‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ṭallā, uno de los poetas de la <i>Dajira</i>. Al-Juṣanī en el <i>Kitāb zamān al-rabī</i>’, inserta estos versos suyos acerca de la alcachofa [<i>basīt</i>]:</p> <p>Hija del agua y de la tierra, su abundancia se ofrece a quien la espera encerrada en un castillo de avaricia. Parece, por su blancura y dor lo inaccesible de su refugio, una virgen griega escondida entre un velo de lanzas.</p>	<p>عبد الله بن الطَّلَاء من شعراء " ذخيرة " أنشد له الخشني في " كتاب زمان الربيع " في حرشوفة [بسيط]:</p> <p>وبنت ماءٍ وترب جودها أنذا * لمن يرجيه في حصن من البخل كانها في بياضٍ وامتناع ذرى * بكّر من الروم في خدرٍ من الأسل</p>
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Daughter of water and earth, her goodness is there for all who hope to reach her in her stronghold of prudishness.  
In her whiteness and well-defended heights, she seems a Greek virgin hidden away in a bedroom of spears.

~ ~ ~

Lovely little daughter  
Born of earth and water:  
Still her excellence is  
Barred by the defences  
Avarice erects  
Hopeful hearts to vex.

With her flesh so white,  
Guarded in the height  
Of her tower surging,  
Like a Turkish virgin  
Bashfully she peers  
Through her veil of spears.

(Bellamy and Steiner 1989, 25 [no 23]; Arberry 1953, 182; Gómez 1942, 110 (text), 293 (translation) [no 305])

## ***In praise of Idrīs, King of Málaga (Ballamy and Steiner's title); The dawn (Arberry's title)***

Ibn Muqānā, Lisbon (fl. c. 1054)

I see the fresh brilliance of morning; so give me some wine to drink before the muezzin intones his 'Allah is great!'  
Pouring in water has scattered pearls over the wine; they swim around and then turn into camels' nose-rings,  
With generous and noble youths who exchange wreaths of the myrtle of merrymaking,  
And who sip wine from the cheek of a gazelle on which roses and jasmine are blooming,  
Whose nurses carefully combed the jet of his hair on the ivory of his forehead.  
He bends like a stem of a sand dune, and night appears over a clear morning.  
For those who have a morning drink, the wind of the air has been dampened by the rose-water of the dawn.  
The dew falls from the narcissus like tears that drop from the eyelids:  
And, like a bright branch of jasmine, the Pleiades have descended from their horizon.  
The wing of darkness flies away from the morning, as a crow takes flight, exposing her hidden eggs.  
And the sun, as it comes out, dazzles everyone.  
And is like the face of Idrīs, son of Yāhyā, son of 'Alī, son of Ḥammūd, the Commander of the Faithful.

~ ~ ~

Dawn is rising bright and clear,  
Yonder see its shine appear:  
Pour me wine, and quickly, ere  
Sounds the solemn call to prayer.

Other wine they quaff as well  
From the cheeks of a gazelle  
Blushing sweetly, and therein  
Blooming rose and jessamin.

The soft pinion of the air,  
As we pass the winecup there  
Hand to hand, bedews the lawn  
With the rose-water of dawn.

As the wine is mixing now  
Pearly bubbles wreath its brow,  
Sprinkled jewels, glittering  
As they float, a liquid ring.

Miracles his beauties seem  
All unclouded as they gleam,  
Locks of jet, sublime to see  
On that brow of ivory.

See the white narcissus sips  
The sweet fragrance as it drips  
Flowing gently from the skies,  
Teardrops spilled by lovers' eyes.

Let me drink with lads of breed,  
Noble all of birth and deed,  
Interchanging as they sit  
Merry tales of spicy wit.

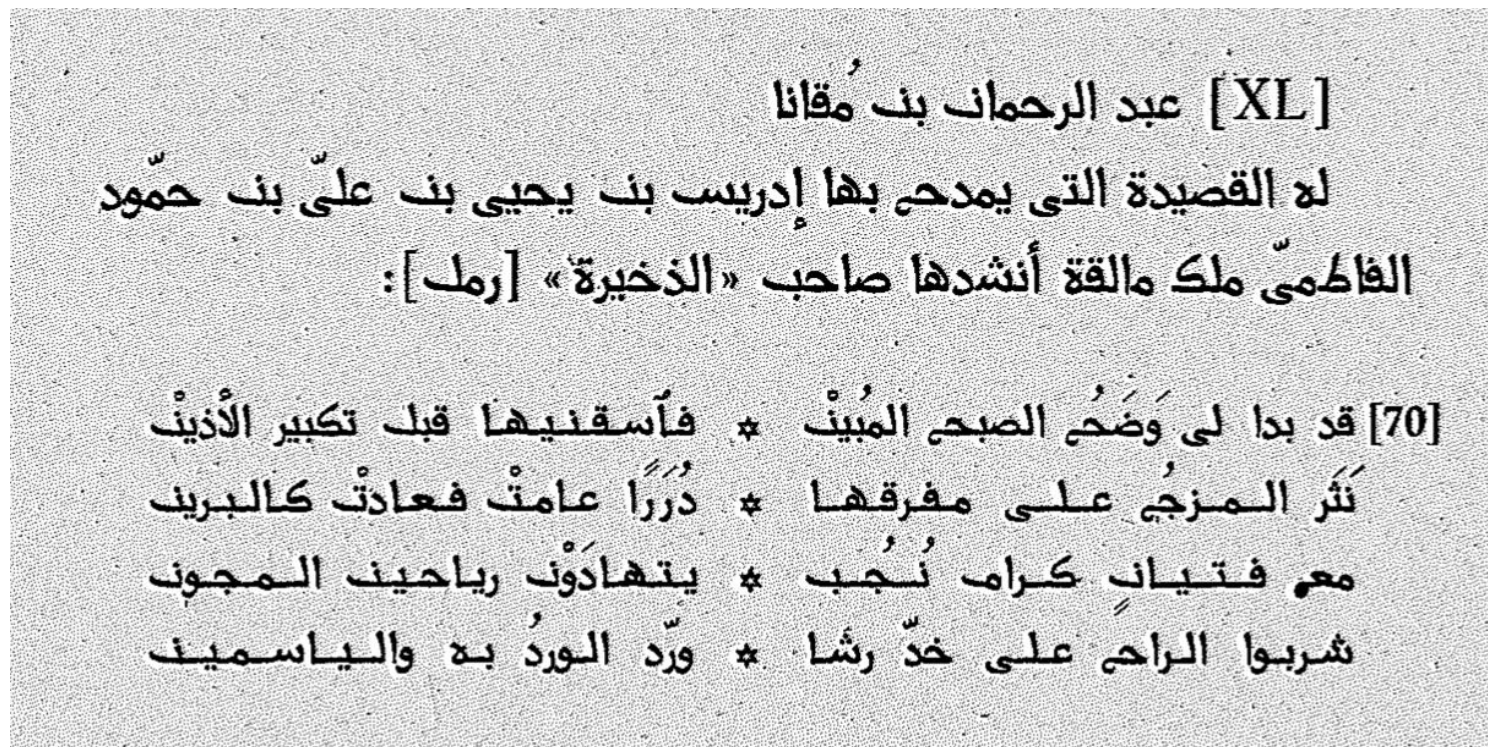
Lissom bough (oh what amaze!)  
On a rounded hillock sways,  
Night of loveliness divine  
Overshadows morning's shine.

Now the Pleiades submerge  
On the far horizon's verge,  
Shaking out their silver shower  
Like a jasmin-twigh in flower.

Night's deep shadows are withdrawn  
From the pallid cheek of dawn  
As some crow, that skyward springs,  
Shows the eggs beneath her wings.

mounts up the sky  
Dazzling the beholder's eye,  
There ascends thy aureole,  
Prince of every faithful soul!

As the sun



وَجَلَّتْ آيَاتُهُ<sup>1</sup> عَامِدَةً \* سَبَّحَ الشَّعْرُ عَلَى عَاجِ الْجَبِينِ  
فَأَنْثَنِي غَصًّا عَلَى دَعْصِ نَقْيٍ \* وَبَدَا لِيكَ عَلَى صُبْحِ مَبِينِ  
وَجَنَاحِ الْجَوْ قَدْ بَلَّلَهُ \* مَا وَرَدَ الصَّبْحُ لِلْمَصْطَبِينِ  
وَالْنَدَى يَقْطُرُ مِنْ نَرْجَسَةٍ \* كَدَمَوْعِ أَسْبَلْتَهُنَّ الْجَفُونِ  
وَالثَّرِيَّا قَدْ هَوَتْ مِنْ أَفْقَاهَا \* كَقَضِيبِ زَاهِرٍ مِنْ يَاسْمِينِ<sup>2</sup>  
وَأَنْبَرِي جَنَحِ الدَّجَى عَنْ صَبْحَةٍ \* كَغُرَابٍ طَارَ عَنْ بَيْضِ كَنِينِ  
وَكَاثُ الشَّمْسِ لَمَّا أَشْرَقَتْ \* فَأَنْثَنَتْ عَنْهَا عَيُونُ النَّاطِرِينَ  
وَجَهْ إِدْرِيسَ بْنِ يَحْيَى بْنِ عَلِيٍّ بْنِ حَمَّودِ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

(Bellamy and Steiner 1989, 96–97 [no 90]; Arberry 1953, 47–48; Gómez 1942, 33–34 [no 70])

## *Exchange between Abū Ja‘far and Ḥafṣah*

Abū Ja‘far ibn ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Sa‘īd, Alcalá le Real (d. 1163); Ḥafṣah, Granada (d. 1190)

May God preserve that evening, free of censors, which secretly concealed us in Ḥawr Mu‘ammal.  
A fragrance, bringing the scent of cloves, drifted in from Najd.  
The turtle-dove was singing in the tree and branches of sweet myrtle bent low over the stream.  
The garden was happy with all that it could see: embracing, and enfolding, and kissing lips.

She answered, saying:

By my life! The garden wasn’t happy with our union, but, rather, showed us malice and envy,  
And the river didn’t clap for joy at our closeness, nor did the turtle-dove sing, except of its own passion.  
Don’t think so well of everything, as you’re very apt to do; it isn’t always true.  
If the horizon showed us its star, I’m sure it was only to spy on us.

~ ~ ~

Abu Jaafar the poet was in love with Hafsa, and sent her the following poem:

God ever guard the memory  
Of that fair night, from censure free,  
Which hid two lovers, you and me,  
Deep in Mu‘ammal’s poplar-grove;  
And, as the happy hours we spent,  
There gently wafted a sweet scent  
From flowering Nejd, all redolent  
With the rare fragrance of the clove.

High in the trees a turtle-dove  
Sang rapturously of our love,  
And boughs of basil swayed above  
A gently murmuring rivulet;

The meadow quivered with delight  
Beholding such a joyous sight,  
The interclasp of bodies white,  
And breasts that touched, and lips that met.

Hafsa replied in this manner:

Do not suppose it pleased the dell  
That we should there together dwell  
In happy union; truth to tell,  
It showed us naught but petty spite.  
The river did not clap, I fear,  
For pleasure that we were so near,  
The dove raised not his song of cheer  
Save for his personal delight.

Think not such noble thoughts as you  
Are worthy of; for if you do  
You'll very quickly find, and rue,  
High thinking is not always wise.  
I scarce suppose that yonder sky  
Displayed its wealth of stars on high  
For any reason, but to spy  
On our romance with jealous eyes.

(Bellamy and Steiner 1989, 175–76 [nos 164–65];  
Arberry 1953, 94–95; Gómez 1942, 61 [nos 160–61])

ونقلت من تقييد لأحد أدباء غرناطة أنّ أبا جعفر بن عبد الملك  
بن سعيد وهو عمّ والدي كاتب شديد الكلف بها وأنه كتب  
إليها [طويل]:

[160] رعى الله ليلاً لم يرحم بمذمم<sup>2</sup> \* عشيةً واراناً بحور<sup>3</sup> مؤمل  
وقد خفقت من نحو نجد أريجة \* إذا نفحت هبت برياً القرنف  
وغرد قمرى على الدوح وأننى \* قضيب من الرياح من فوق جدول  
ترى الروض مسروراً بما قد بدا له \* عناق وضّ وأرتشاف مقبل

فأجابته مناقضة على عادتها ' وما دهته إلا بإحدى آياتها ' [طويل]:

[161] لعمرك ما سرّ الرياض بوصلنا \* ولكنا أبدت<sup>4</sup> لنا الغلّ والحسد  
وما صفّ النهر أرتياحاً بقربنا \* ولا صدح القمرى إلا بما وجد  
فلا تحسب الظنّ الذى أنت أهله \* فما هو فى كلّ المواكب بالبرشد  
فما خلّت هذا الأفق أبدى نجومه \* لأمر سوى كيما تكون لنا رصد



## *The blooming daisy*

Ibn Billīṭa, Toledo (d. 1048)

Ama la floreciente margarita, en la que el oro está embutido en plata.  Sus blancos pétalos no son sino esclavos que se han hecho zoroastras y se pusieron ante el fuego. Parece la boca de quien amo cuando con la mía puse en alla un dīnār.	أحبُّ بدور الأقاح ذوارا * عسجده فى لجيذه حارا  كأنما زهره صفالبة * أضحوا ممجوسا فاستقبلوا البارا  كأنه فم من هوبث * وضعتُ فيه بفي دينارا
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How lovely is the blooming daisy; its gold is swallowed up by silver.

Its blossoms are like Slavs who have become Zoroastrians and are facing the fire.

It is like the mouth of my beloved when, with my own mouth, I put a dinar in it.

~ ~ ~

Shining marguerite,  
Flower fair and sweet,  
Golden glow a-glimmer  
On your silver shimmer.

Frankish slave, pale-faced,  
Magian faith embraced,  
Mystic fire discerning,  
To its altar turning.

Mouth of my adored,  
And, for love's reward,  
Gleaming gold I shower  
In her mouth, my flower.

(Bellany and Steiner 1989, 19 [no 17]; Arberry 1953, 77; Gómez 1942, 198 [no 130])

## *The swimmer*

Ibn Khafāja, Alcira (1058–1138)

Un negro nabada en una alberca cuya agua no ocultaba los guijarros del fondo.  
La alberca tenía la figura de una pupila azul, donde el negro era la niña.

وأسود يسبح في لجة \* لا تكتّم الحصباء غدرانها  
كأنّها في شكلها مقلة \* زرقاء والأسود انسائها

A black man was swimming in a pool whose water could not conceal the pebbles on the bottom;

In form it was like a blue eye and the black man was its pupil.

~ ~ ~

Once (O wonderful)  
In a shining pool  
I saw a negro swim;  
The waters did not dim  
The gleaming pebbles spread  
On its stony bed.

Now as I observed,  
The little pool was curved  
Like an eye, and blue  
As an eye too;  
What was the negro? Why,  
The pupil of that eye!

(Bellany and Steiner 1989, 56 [no 54]; Arberry 1953, 147; Gómez 1942, 253 [no 253])

## *The river*

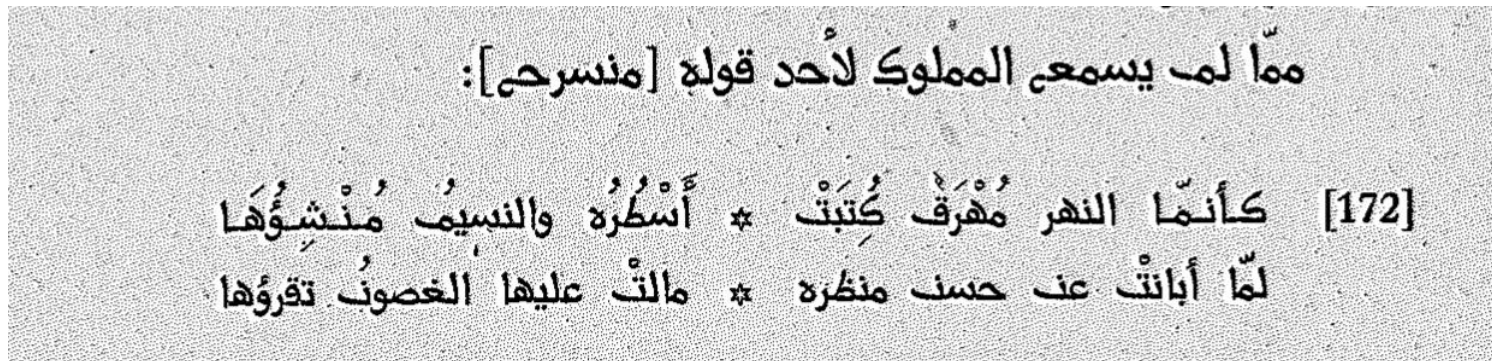
‘Alī ibn Mūsā ibn Sa‘īd, Alcalá la Real (1213–86)

The river is like a piece of parchment on which the breeze is tracing its lines.  
And when they see how beautiful the writing is, the branches bend down to read it.

~ ~ ~

The river is a page  
Of parchment white;  
The breeze, that author sage,  
There loves to write.

And when the magic screed  
Is finished fair,  
The bough leans down, to read  
His message there.



(Bellamy and Steiner 1989, 35 [no 33]; Arberry 1953, 103; Gómez 1942, 66 [no 172])

## *The end of Ramaḍān*

Abū l-Qāsim al-Qālī, Bona (fl. twelfth century)

O month of fasting, in God's eyes there is no other month like you,  
Though you forbid us the pleasures of drunkenness,  
And the touching of cup to cup, and the kissing of mouth to mouth.  
By Him who has honored your times by mentioning them,  
And by the odd- and even-numbered prayers that are prayed during you,  
I am happy to see you ending, though you are a part of my life.

~ ~ ~

Holy Ramadan,  
Season sanctified,  
More dear to Allah than  
Every other tide!

Yet to mortal man  
(What is hardly right)  
Thou dost unkindly ban  
Drunkenness' delight.

Glass that clinks on glass  
(O divinest bliss)  
Mouth pressed to mouth: alas  
That denied and this.

So I swear, by those  
Who devotedly  
Each moment as it goes  
Do honour unto thee

As by all their prayers  
Offered up to God,  
Both single and in pairs,  
The even and the odd

Glad am I in heart  
Now to see thee die,  
Although with thee a part  
Of my life goes by.

(Bellamy and Steiner 1989, 147 [no 138]; Arberry 1953, 178–79; Gómez 1942, 290 [no 302])

[CXXXIX] الرئيس الكاتب أبو القاسم عبد الرحمان القالبي

من قالمة وهي من قطر بونة<sup>2</sup>

أنشد له صاحب «الظرف» [هزج]:

[302] أشهر الصوم ما مثلاً \* ك عند الله من شهر  
على أنك قد حرمة \* ت فينا لذة السكر  
وقرعه الكأس بالكأس \* ورشف الثغر بالثغر  
وإني والذي شر \* ف أوقاتك بالذكر  
وما أمسى يصلي في \* ك من شفيع ومن وتر  
لمسرور بأن تفنى \* على أنك من عمري

## *Elegy on a dead wife*

Ibn al-Ḥammārah (fl. mid-twelfth century)

O Zaynab, now that you have departed, he who remains will some day ride the same mount that carried you away.  
While you are lifeless and withered, how can I, with any ardor, pursue another woman?  
When you descended to the dust, I said: 'The stars have surely strayed in their course.'  
O flower that faded so soon, did the clouds begrudge you their rain or was it because the breeze stood still?'

~ ~ ~

Zainab, if you have departed,  
Yet the self-same back you rode  
Shall transport this broken-hearted  
Lodger from his lone abode.

With what ardour should I cherish  
Other women for my lust,  
While your bloom and beauty perish,  
And your charms are turned to dust?

When you fell to the embraces  
Of the dusky earth, I cried:  
'Lo, the stars have lost their places,  
And the sun of love has died.'

O most fair and fragile flower  
Withering so soon to death,  
Did the heavens grudge a shower?  
Could the breeze not spare a breath?

وَأَنْشَدْنِي لَهُ فِي زَيْنَابٍ ١ زَوْجَتِهِ وَكَانَ يَهْوَاهَا [وَأَفَر]:

[268] أَزَيْنُبُ إِن ظَعَنْتِ فَإِنَّ ظَهْرًا \* أَقْلَكَ سَوْفَ يَرْكَبُهُ الْمَقِيمُ  
بِأَيَّةِ حِدَّةٍ أَسْعَى لِأَنْثَى \* سِوَاكَ وَأَنْتِ هَامِدَةٌ هَشِيمُ  
وَلَمَّا أَنْ حَلَلْتَ التُّرْبَ قَلْنَا \* لَقَدْ ضَلَّتْ مَوَاقِعُهَا النُّجُومُ  
أَلَا يَا زَهْرَةً ذَبَلْتَ سَرِيعًا \* أَضَّ الْمَرْبُ أَمْ رَكَدَ النَّسِيمُ

(Bellamy and Steiner 1989, 95 [no 89]; Arberry 1953, 156–57; Gómez 1942, 265 [no 268])

## *The fall of Toledo to Christians from the north*

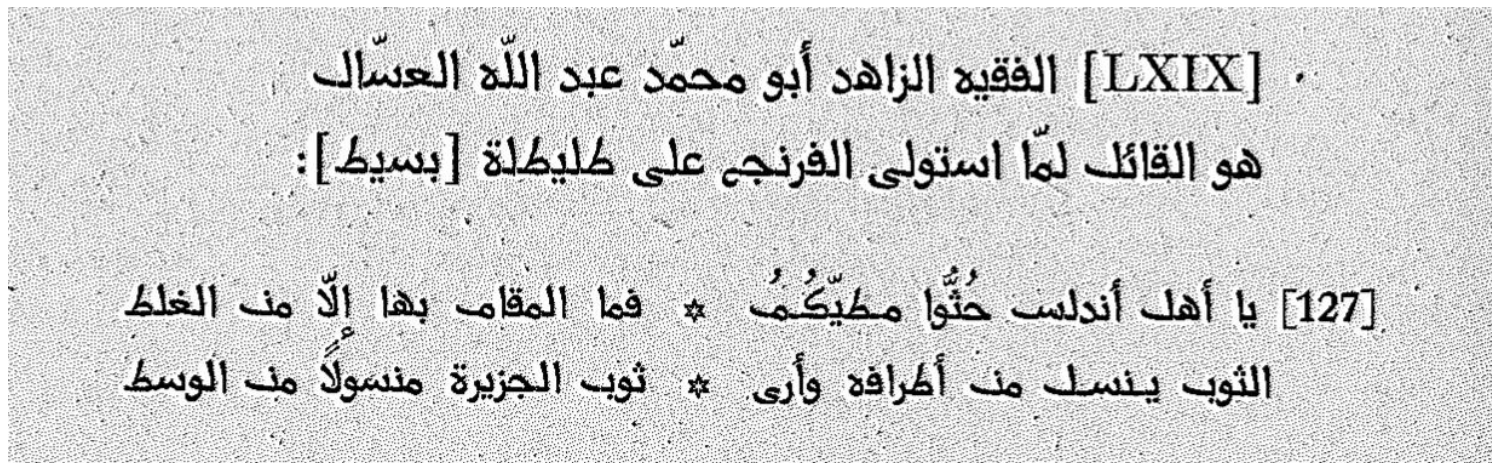
al-‘Assāl, Toledo (d. 1094)

O people of Andalusia, spur on your horses, for staying here is a drastic mistake.  
Garments begin to unravel at the seams, but now I see that the peninsula is unravelling at the center.

~ ~ ~

Men of Andalus, to horse!  
Mount your steeds and swiftly ride;  
It were an erroneous course  
Longer here to abide.

Garments ordinarily  
By their fringes are divested;  
Our imperial robe I see  
From the middle wrested.



(Bellamy and Steiner 1989, 138 [no 129]; Arberry 1953, 76; Gómez 1942, 50 [no 127])



## *Battle in the sky*

‘Alī ibn Mūsā ibn Sa‘īd, Alcalá la Real (1213–86)

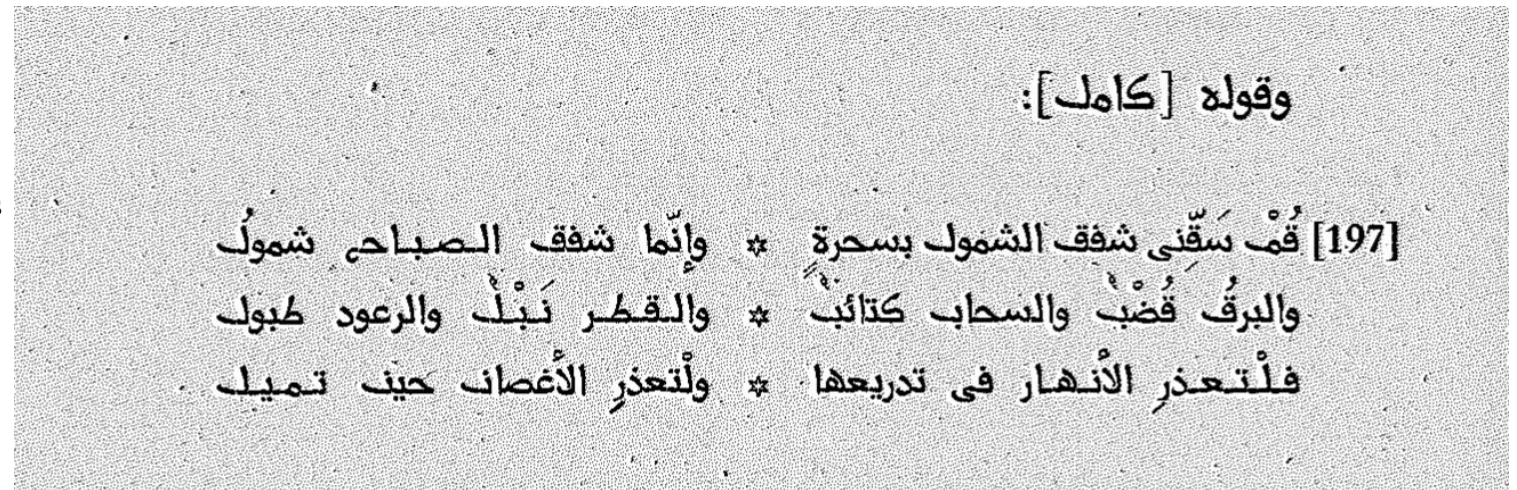
Arise, in the early morning, and pour the dawn wine for me, for the dawn of morning is like wine.  
And the lightning flashes are swords, the clouds are squadrons, the rain, arrows, and the sounds of thunder are battle drums.  
May the rivers be pardoned for putting on their armor, and the branches be forgiven for bowing in submission.

~ ~ ~

Rise, and pour me rosy wine,  
Dawn aglow at morning shine;  
Wine of daybreak, cool to sip,  
Crimsons the horizon's lip.

See, the lightnings shake their spears  
And the clouds are cavaliers;  
Swift their showering arrows come  
As the thunder rolls its drum.

And the rivers, rightly pale,  
Clothe themselves in coats of mail;  
Pardonably do the trees  
Sway and shiver in the breeze.



(Bellamy and Steiner 1989, 34 [no 32]; Arberry 1953, 113; Gómez 1942, 70 [no 197])



## ***Breasts on a Slender Body* (Bellamy and Steiner's title); *Fruit tree* (Arberry's)**

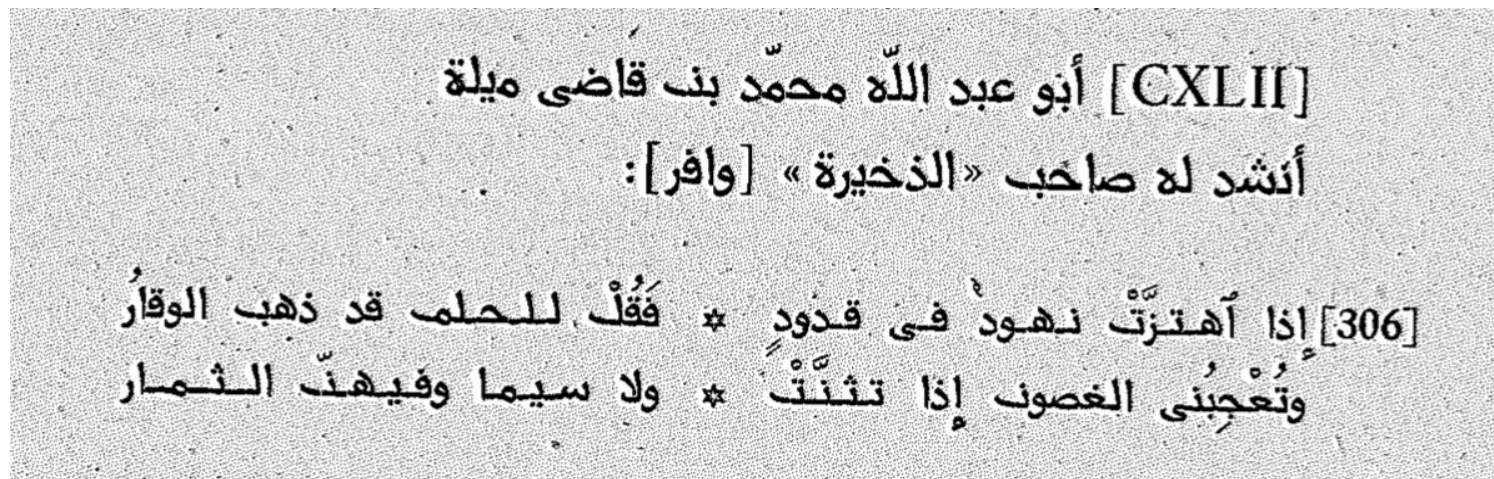
Ibn Qaḍī Mīlah, Sicily (fl. eleventh century)

When rounded breasts shake on a slender body, I say to self-restraint: 'This is the end to all sobriety.'  
I like branches when they bend, especially if they are bearing fruit.

~ ~ ~

When bosoms quivering  
On slender bodies swing,  
Patience, your day is o'er:  
Forbearance can no more.

I love these boughs to see  
That sway so gracefully;  
Especially when they suit  
My taste, when hung with fruit.



(Bellamy and Steiner 1989, 69 [no 67]; Arberry 1953, 183; Gómez 1942, 111 [no 306])