Mapping the Frontier between Islam and Christendom in a Diplomatic Age: al-Ghassânî in Spain

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This essay analyzes the travel account authored by Moroccan ambassador Muhammad al-Ghassânî, who visited Spain in 1690–91. The account shows the evolution of the early modern frontier between Christian Europe and Islamic North Africa, from a militarized boundary to the development of diplomatic relations. Both an agent and witness of that history, al-Ghassânî describes a heterogeneous space: he surveys the border, explores the foreign land of modern Spain, and reimagines the memory of al-Andalus. His important account, based on sharp observation and serious research, helps nuance the prevailing view that Arab culture had ignored Europe before the nineteenth century.

INTRODUCTION

IN RECENT DECADES, many studies have been devoted to the representations of Muslims and Islamic cultures in European literatures over the centuries, including travel writing. Corresponding scholarship on the corpus of texts written by Arabs, Turks, or Persians about Europe is much less abundant, and has long concerned mainly the nineteenth century; indeed, following one influential assessment, prior to that time, "Arab interest in the West was almost non-existent."[1] This view holds that only when the technological, economic, and military advances of Europe had made it a formidable and expanding threat did travel writing about Europe develop in Muslim cultures. The renewed interest in important texts composed before the nineteenth century has helped amend this fairly unnuanced opinion. Many of the most remarkable early documents were written by Moroccan authors, including ambassador to Spain Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhâb al-Wazîr al-Ghassânî (d. 1707), whose work has been rightly considered to be "of quite extraordinary interest."[2] Providing historians of both Spain and Morocco with valuable information, it has attracted a certain amount of attention. Almost all these studies are found in surveys of Arab texts about Spain or Europe, frequently including the accounts

[1]Abu-Lughod, 67.
[2]Lewis, 118.

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of one or both of his eighteenth-century successors, Moroccan ambassadors al-Ghazzâl (d. 1777) and Ibn 'Uthmân (d. 1799). They often tend to highlight the commonalities between the work of others and al-Ghassânî's text, rather than attend to its singularities.[3]

These analyses usually belong in the field of imagological studies, essentially intending to reconstruct the representation by the Muslim of the European Other and to assess its limits, thus following a binary logic that supposes and reinforces a radical and stable distinction between the two. This perspective ignores crucial aspects of al-Ghassânî's text and its context: both text and context are inscribed in a contact zone, a liminal space of circulation and contestation, exchange and confrontation, that had prevailed for many centuries between North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, "that archetypal Mediterranean frontier."[4] Al-Ghassânî's travel account was not only produced against this background, it was partly engendered by this situation itself and by the ways in which the different actors, including the author of the text, analyzed this reality and negotiated their engagement with it. Numerous contemporary documents have been published about al-Ghassânî's embassy, which have been almost entirely ignored by scholars, although they shed a fascinating light on the circumstances and meaning of his embassy in the early modern context of the relations between Spain and Morocco, Europe and North Africa, Christendom and Islam. They help understand how his text uses, transmits, and reactivates cultural and literary forms generated on the conflictual border between civilizations.

This article will explore the circumstances of al-Ghassânî's embassy and analyze how his travel account represents Spain, negotiates Morocco's relations with its powerful neighbor, and contributes to changing those relations. The mission allowed the ambassador to survey the rigid boundary that separated the two territories, and to observe its contrast with the interior of Spain, mostly its capital city. Al-Ghassânî was carrying with him the cultural memory of al-Andalus, and that memory was confronted with the realities of modern Spain. He was also able to witness the strategies deployed by descendants of the Moriscos who had escaped expulsion in order to find a place in Spanish society while keeping alive the memory of their lineage. While resituating the relation to the past in the context of new political realities, this important text chronicles a momentous change in the history of the Western Mediterranean and depicts the efforts of the Moroccan state to lead its relation to Spain toward a new age of diplomacy between Islam and Christendom.

[3]Pérès, 5–40; Paradela Alonso, 2005, 31–75; Paradela Alonso, 2011; Elboudrari, 1991; Matar; Newman; Beck.

[4]Hess, 5.

AL-GHASSÂNÎ AND HIS EMBASSY

Early in his account, the author describes an empty house near Puerto Santa Maria, the entrance of which was walled. There, al-Ma'mûn (d. 1613), son of the Sa'dî sultan Ahmad al-Mansûr (r. 1578–1603), one of the great figures in Moroccan early modern history, had stayed in 1609–10, when negotiating with Felipe III. Al-Ma'mûn was at war against his brother Zaydân (d. 1627), and wanted to obtain the Spanish king's help. The envoy could thus contemplate in this Spanish house an important site of Moroccan history and, indeed, look back on the very reason why he was, many decades later, sent to meet Felipe III's grandson, Carlos II, the last Habsburg king of Spain. In exchange for his assistance, al-Ma'mûn ceded to Felipe the Atlantic port of al-'Ara'ish (called Larache by the Europeans) in Northern Morocco. The action outraged many, contributed to a tremendous deepening of the crisis that Morocco was going through, and accelerated its political fragmentation during the first half of the seventeenth century. Al-Ghassânî does not recount these momentous events, although his embassy was the result of the recapture of that city in 1689 by the army of the sultan Mûlay Ismâ'îl (r. 1672–1727), of the 'Alawî dynasty that succeeded the Sa'dî. All the inhabitants of Larache, including the garrison, were taken prisoners. Eager to have them freed, especially the officers, the Spanish Crown engaged in negotiations with the sultan. These culminated in the 1690–91 mission of al-Ghassânî, who wrote a travel account entitled *Rihlat al-Wazîr fî iftikâk al-asîr* (The travel of al-Wazîr for the redemption of the captive).

The ambassador was a trusted secretary of Mûlay Ismâ'îl and came from a family of learned men and servants of the Moroccan royal government, called the *makhzan*.[5] He was also a scribe, and was reputed for producing flawless manuscripts very quickly.[6] His copy of *Jamharat ansâb al-'Arab* by the illustrious Andalusian writer Ibn Hazm (994–1064) is held in the Royal Library in Rabat.[7] His other writings include a 1698 panegyric in verse and prose of the writer and poet Ahmad al-Râfi'î from Titwân (1631–after 1698)[8] and an official letter he wrote while in the service of the sultan.[9] The mission to Spain was not his only

[5]Despite the word *wazîr*, which means "minister," in his name, he did not hold that position in Mûlay Ismâ'îl's government. He was a *kâtib* — as all documents state, including the sultan's letter to Carlos III — a word that was translated by the king's interpreter as *secretario*. According to the Moroccan historian al-Qâdirî (1712–73), the family kept the name al-Wazîr from one ancestor who was minister to Ahmad al-Mansûr and had, incidentally, been sent to negotiate the redemption of Muslim captives in Portugal after the Moroccan victory of Wadî al-Makhâzîn in 1578: see al-Qâdirî, 3:173–74.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Al-Manûnî, 115.

[8]Dâwud, 1:415.

[9]*Hespéris-Tamuda*, 71–72.

participation in the foreign affairs of Mûlay Ismâ'îl. He was also involved in the reception of the French envoy François Pidou de Saint-Olon in 1693, and was described at that time by Jean-Baptiste Estelle, consul of France in Salé, who calls him "Amour Lousir," as an "honorable" and "very intelligent" man.[10] In 1701, al-Ghassânî accompanied 'Abd al-Mâlik, son of the sultan, who was conducting an embassy to Algiers.[11] He died in Fez in 1707 after a long career in government.

Undoubtedly, his greatest achievement was the embassy to Spain, and Moroccan chroniclers memorialized him and his travel account. This remarkably composed piece of literature, written in a simple and concise style, was based not only on the author's sharp observations of Spanish society and culture, but also on relatively thorough research of its history and contemporary politics. The text was taken as a major model and reference by another distinguished writer and diplomat, Ibn 'Uthmân al-Miknâsî, who even echoed his title when he wrote about his own embassy to Spain in 1779–80 and named it *al-Iksîr fî fikâk al-asîr* (The elixir for the redemption of the captive).

Al-Ghassânî's work also attracted the attention of later European historians, and several translations, editions, and summaries were to follow. H. E. J. Stanley, using a manuscript held in Lisbon that did not bear a title or the name of the author, published a substantial article outlining the contents of the manuscript in 1867. In 1884, Henri Sauvaire translated a manuscript held in Madrid's Biblioteca Nacional into French. Again, the author and title are not given, and the translator omitted the last nineteen pages, an account of the Arab conquest of al-Andalus. These were not left out in the 1940 edition by Alfredo Bustani, which offers the Arabic text and a Spanish translation, although the latter is incomplete, as Bustani passed over some passages judged disrespectful of Christianity. For the first time, the name of the author and the title of the work are mentioned. Bustani used three texts, the one from Madrid and two from libraries in Northern Morocco, located in Titwân and Banû Bûzîn, respectively. In 2003, Nabil Matar published an English translation, using mainly the Madrid text, while adding to it the brief introduction in which al-Ghassânî explains the reasons for his travel. Matar acknowledges that by relying again on the Biblioteca Nacional manuscript, he thus leaves out descriptions and poems about al-Andalus that appear in the Moroccan texts used by Bustani. He also, like Sauvaire, omits the last pages about the conquest of al-Andalus, summarizing them in one page. Finally, the most recent Arabic edition by Abderrahim Benhadda is based on four manuscripts, from Madrid, Rouen, Titwân, and

[10] *SIHM*, 4:117: "Honneste homme . . . et homme de beaucoup d'esprit."

[11] Al-Qâdirî, 3:132.

Rabat. This excellent edition does not pass over any passages and offers a more complete text than any translation.[12]

Al-Ghassânî's mission was of great importance for the sultan, who used his foreign policy as an instrument of prestige, both internally, against urban elites and tribal powers, and externally, as an affirmation of national sovereignty in relation to Europe and the Ottoman Empire.[13] The study of contemporary documents leads to the conclusion that the embassy was indeed the result of Mûlay Ismâ'îl's tenacious efforts despite Spain's initial reluctance. After the capitulation of Larache on 11 November 1689, the fate of a hundred officers became the object of fevered discussions. Mûlay Ismâ'îl had promised to liberate them unconditionally, but later refused to be held to that pledge, alleging that the population rebelled when his army entered the city, thereby annulling the agreement.[14] He demanded the liberation of either one of two other Spanish strongholds on the Moroccan coast, Ceuta or Melilla (both of them, incidentally, still to this day are Spanish possessions), or of a thousand Muslim slaves in Spain, Moroccan or otherwise, stating these demands in more than one letter to Carlos II.[15] The Spanish government sent the Trinitarian Manuel Viera de Lugo to negotiate the liberation of all the prisoners of Larache, not just the hundred officers. However, on 15 May 1690, Mûlay Ismâ'îl refused to discuss the fate of the rest of the captives until an agreement concerning the officers was reached,[16] a decision partly motivated by the fact that Carlos II had not sent a letter in response to his. When Vieira was again received by the sultan in August, he carried a letter from the king and requested the liberation of the hundred officers, six clerics, and the images and ornaments of the church of Larache.[17]

Mûlay Ismâ'îl received the Spanish envoy twice, and at the second audience he modified his demands: he was willing to ask for only five hundred Muslim captives, if the Spaniards would give him five thousand Arabic manuscripts (there was no more mention of surrendering Ceuta or Melilla). Since Vieira did not have the power to decide on this matter, Mûlay Ismâ'îl resolved to send an emissary to Madrid. For this delicate mission, he chose al-Ghassânî, the closest and most trusted of his secretaries, as he stated in a new letter to Carlos II, the

[12]This essay will refer to Matar's translation as al-Ghassânî, 2003, and to Benhadda's edition as al-Ghassânî, 2005, followed by page numbers. I have translated the quotations omitted in the English edition.

[13]Morsy, 48–49.

[14]Arribas Palau, 202.

[15]Ibid., 201–03.

[16]Ibid., 204.

[17]Ibid., 216.

contemporary Spanish translation of which is held in Madrid.[18] Al-Ghassânî's expertise as a professional scribe and a connoisseur of literature was also a factor in his selection, since these qualities would enable him to recognize and judge the qualities of the manuscripts that were now a potentially meaningful aspect of his mission.

Another member of the delegation was important enough to deserve a mention in the sultan's letter: "Absalen, hijo de Hamet Gasus,"[19] or 'Abd al-Salâm ibn Ahmad Gassûs. The sultan describes him as a friend and associate of the powerful governor of Titwân, 'Alî ibn 'Abd Allah.[20] This position in the Moroccan *makhzan* was akin to the function of a minister of foreign affairs, both commercial and diplomatic. During al-Ghassânî's sojourn in Madrid, Gassûs appears in the archives as "Absalen Jesus" and is referred to as the ambassador's interpreter. Indeed, Saint-Olon, who met him several times in 1693, testified that he was fluent in Spanish, as were other members of the Moroccan court, and that he inquired intently about France and internal European relations.[21] This account points to a curiosity about Europe on the part of some early modern Arab elites that is generally overlooked. Gassûs's linguistic proficiency was not exceptional, as Saint-Olon recognized; beyond Morocco, it has been shown that members of the Tunisian court in the eighteenth century often surprised visitors by their knowledge of Italian.[22] In this case, Gassûs's mastery of Spanish must have been very useful to al-Ghassânî in his communications with the Spanish. Even more importantly, he played, in all likelihood, a vital role in helping the ambassador gather the material he needed to write his account. The mission sent to Spain by Mûlay Ismâ'îl was thus headed by two distinguished scholars and members of the Moroccan elite. Overall, it counted between fifteen and twenty members, a number of whom were presumably servants. In his text, al-Ghassânî

[18]García Figueras and Rodriguez Joulia Saint Cyr, 449: "My secretary, the most trusted in my house . . . Mister Muhammad, son of 'Abd al-Wahhâb al-Wazîr." The original of the letter is published as an appendix to al-Ifrânî, 102–05.

[19]'Abd al-Salâm ibn Ahmad Gassûs's participation in the embassy to Spain is especially noteworthy as history will remember him and his tragic fate. This distinguished *faqîh* (scholar of Islamic law) tenaciously opposed Mûlay Ismâ'îl's decision to enslave the Harratîn, black free Muslims of Fez, in order to create a royal army independent from tribal powers; his adamant refusal to claim that this action was legal led to his persecution and, ultimately, his murder in 1709: see al-Qâdirî, 3:205–09; El Hamel, 167–69.

[20]Morsy, 48; Elboudrari, 1991, 378. The closeness of Gassûs to this prominent character is corroborated by a Spanish document: the governor had deputed him to welcome the Crown's envoy on Moroccan territory after he left Ceuta to head toward the capital Maknâs; see Arribas Palau, 233.

[21]*SIHM*, 4:2–5.

[22]Windler, 2002, 414–15.

uses both the first-person singular and first-person plural; the latter probably includes Gassûs when mentioning social occasions and diplomatic interactions.

The negotiations al-Ghassânî was charged with were unprecedented in the recent history of the relations between Spain and Morocco, which for decades had been extremely tense. The English ambassador in Madrid knew that Vieira's mission was an exceptional event: "An envoy is going from this Court to the King of Marocco, to treat about the redemption of the prisoners taken at Larache, which is the first any King of Spain has ever sent to a Mahometan Prince, since the expulsion of the Moors out of Spain,"[23] alluding to the expulsion of the Moriscos that was decreed in 1609. This momentous event was indeed a crucial juncture in the transformation of what used to be a frontier of circulation and exchange into a rigid boundary between two regions that were evolving toward greater differentiation. No official relations between the two political powers existed in the late seventeenth century. The belated secularization of Spanish diplomacy as compared to other European countries, especially France, meant that, before the second half of the eighteenth century, Spain's relations with Muslim countries were still dominated by the notion of Crusade, which implied that no peaceful relations could exist with Muslim powers.[24] The first peace treaty of Spain with an Islamic country would be signed in 1767 by Carlos III with Muhammad III, Mûlay Ismâ'îl's grandson. When al-Ghassânî was sent to Spain, both he and the Spanish government were thus in uncharted territory.

Indeed, the Crown was initially reluctant and alarmed, and made great efforts to closely control the mission at every step. The guard that would accompany the Moroccans to Madrid was instructed to make the trip as fast as possible, to not allow a change of itinerary under any pretext, and to only let the ambassador interact very little, if at all, with the captives.[25] Nevertheless, Muslim captives gathered to acclaim the Moroccans in Cadiz, Cordoba, and Madrid,[26] and problems did arise in the capital when a few slaves came in direct contact with the envoys, asking to be taken under their protection.[27] The members of the Spanish Council of State thoroughly debated which diplomatic protocols to use to receive this unusual embassy. In the end, they referred to two precedents, a Turkish embassy of 1649 and a more recent Moscovite embassy.[28] Al-Ghassânî

[23]Stanhope, 5.

[24]Windler, 1999.

[25]Arribas Palau, 225.

[26]For Cadiz, see al-Ghassânî, 2003, 122; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 55; for Cordoba, see al-Ghassânî, 2003, 129; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 65; for Madrid, see al-Ghassânî, 2003, 141; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 87.

[27]Arribas Palau, 260, 271, 274.

[28]Ibid., 248, 250, 252. See also Espadas Burgos.

himself was aware of these two models.[29] Moreover, Abel Messi, the Syrian Christian who was the king's interpreter and accompanied Vieira in his mission, was asked to write an account of how they were received in Morocco. In this text, Messi describes the great pomp with which the Spanish envoys were welcomed, including music and a soldiers' salute, as well as lodging in the Maknâs palace of the governor of Titwân.[30]

Remarkably, al-Ghassânî's text mostly glosses over the tense relationship between Moroccans and Spaniards. His description of his first audience with the king shows his restraint. On 21 December 1690, he and his companions were led by Carlos de Castillo, head of protocol, to the palace of Carlos II: "We found that all the city community had gathered, men and women, so that we did not reach the despot's mansion without great effort."[31] The intense curiosity of the population of Madrid about the Moroccan diplomats was corroborated by the British ambassador who saw "our Marocco ambassador . . . go to audience, where was an extraordinary concourse of people to see him, for the rarity of the thing, and the oddness of the dress, as little known here as with us."[32] That day, incidents occurred that were serious enough to generate an inquest and to be debated at the highest level of the Spanish state.[33] Some in the crowd subjected the Moroccans to insults, which were translated for al-Ghassânî by Gassûs. This abuse was directed to them in complete contradiction of the king's wishes. From the beginning, the issue of crowd control was of great concern to the Spanish government. The instructions given to the Duke of Sessa, governor of the coast of Andalucia, who was charged with conducting the Moroccans to Madrid, requested that he make sure that they were not submitted to any "vexation or annoyance."[34] Concerning the Madrid incidents, al-Ghassânî minimized them to the officials charged with investigating them, being, like the Crown, very mindful of the necessity of taking the negotiations to their end and of not letting the hostility of part of the population derail them. He stated that he was satisfied with the very gracious way in which the king had received the embassy, and on 25 December, he signed a petition requesting that the inquest be stopped.[35] In his travel account,

[29]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 142; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 87–88.

[30]Arribas Palau, 233–35.

[31]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 143; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 89.

[32]Stanhope, 7–8.

[33]Arribas Palau, 256–60.

[34]Ibid., 228.

[35]Ibid., 260. The petition states the following: "He said through his interpreter Absselem Jesús that that day, although it is true that while passing in front of the house of the queen mother our lady, they heard some rude words, the ambassador did not understand nor hear them; and that, considering the honors bestowed on him by His Majesty and the nobility . . . he asks from His Majesty that there would be no charges on this matter." The Arabic signature mentions al-Ghassânî and 'Abd al-Salâm Gassûs.

al-Ghassânî also kept silent on all this unpleasantness, insisted very emphatically on the great reception and welcome that was given to him by the king and the grandees, and often mentioned the cordiality shown to the Moroccans, especially in Southern Spain.

Indeed, the embassy was an undeniable success. Al-Ghassânî accomplished most of what he was tasked with by the sultan. He helped free around a thousand Muslims who were enslaved in Southern Spain and in the Balearic Islands,[36] many of whom were bought back by the king from their owners. Debarked at Ceuta and exchanged in September,[37] the freed captives were later received in Maknâs by the sultan, who gave each one of them a new set of clothes.[38] Among them, a few dozen Turks and Algerians were sent back to their country as a sign of good will on the part of Mûlay Ismâ'îl toward his neighbor.[39] The success of his mission brought international prestige to the sultan, and many advantages to the ambassador. Carlos II gave al-Ghassânî a rich present upon his departure, as was reported even in the official organ of the French royal government.[40] The French had been anxiously collecting news of al-Ghassânî's embassy, as they apparently feared that its secret goal was a treaty of alliance between Morocco and Spain, a rumor uncorroborated by contemporary documents but still echoed in the twentieth century.[41] The *Gazette de France* insisted on the magnificence of the reception given to the ambassador in Madrid; it was, indeed, according to Jean-Baptiste Estelle, fit for a king. Vieira affirmed in a letter that al-Ghassânî received valuable presents not only from Carlos II, but also from the grandees of Spain.[42] He even obtained the right for the freed slaves to keep any money made during their captivity. There is no doubt that the embassy was a success for the sultan, and a personal triumph for al-Ghassânî.

In the context of the diplomatic relations between European and Islamic powers, especially in the Western Mediterranean, this particular example shows the extent to which the two governments worked to find a pragmatic solution to a specific problem. Moreover, both powers contributed to the development of common diplomatic procedures, through learning and conscious imitation of

[36]For Southern Spain, see García Figueras and Rodriguez Joulia Saint Cyr, 314–16; for the Balearic Islands, see Vernet.

[37]García Figueras and Rodriguez Joulia Saint Cyr, 329.

[38]*SIHM*, 3:453–54.

[39]Ibid., 3:437.

[40]*Gazette de France*, 463.

[41]Pérès, 7.

[42]*SIHM*, 3:397. Vieira states that the king gave al-Ghassânî "one diamond and emerald jewel worth more than a thousand piasters . . . plus two guns worth more than a thousand piasters," as well as "a Turkish girl and a few very beautiful Moorish girls, two bears, four extraordinarily beautiful dogs and four hinds."

foreign practices. These processes helped to create new forms of interaction between the two states, mitigating the effects of the growing divergence after 1492 and, maybe even more importantly, after 1609. As could be expected, al-Ghassânî's text describes in great detail how the Moroccans were received and treated by the Spanish court. The author also paid close attention to European diplomatic culture, and provides detailed information about the exchange of representatives between countries, and the workings of the Spanish institution, including the position of conductor of ambassadors held by Carlos de Castillo: "This count is charged by the despot to meet delegations that arrive from Islamic and other countries. This is his only function: he has no other."[43] This specialization seems to have struck al-Ghassânî, as his own work in the external relations of Morocco was not his only function in the government.

Beyond observation of foreign practices, the mission itself helped modify to some extent the contemporary diplomatic culture. If peaceful relations between Morocco and Spain, between European and Muslim powers, did not yet find formal acceptance in political theories, practices were nonetheless changing. By making requests that necessitated a Moroccan embassy, Mûlay Ismâ'îl willfully helped this evolution toward formalizing new diplomatic processes through experience of the Other. A clear illustration of this is found in the Crown's reliance on Abel Messi's report as one model for the Moroccan embassy, along with memories of earlier missions. Taking place against a background of endemic conflict, this learning process was bound to be a deeply complex one. The paradoxes of the frontier situation and of the liminal cultural space it was producing are abundantly reflected in al-Ghassânî's account. The heterogeneity of his representations of the viatical space derives from a configuration of different memories, expectations, and realities. The border erected and maintained as a barrier between the powers, the foreign space of modern Spain, and the memorial and imagined landscape of al-Andalus are all present in the text, as are the histories they conjure; the sometimes uneasy combination produces a complex view of the situation of Islam in relation to Europe in the early modern period.

CHOROGRAPHY OF THE BORDER

Al-Ghassânî and his retinue, accompanied by Spanish soldiers and by Abel Messi, began their voyage by embarking from a fort near Ceuta and crossing the straits toward Cadiz. Madrid was, of course, their goal, where the Moroccan envoy was to meet with the king and high-ranking officials and where he spent about six months. The text does not simply follow the journey's itinerary. In fact, al-Ghassânî notes all his observations about the part of Spain between the

[43]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 141; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 86.

coast and Madrid when recounting the travel to the capital, either during the outward or the return trip. The greater part of the text consists of the description of Madrid, all the longer because al-Ghassânî tells the history of Spain in this section. He was received one last time by the king in his palace at Aranjuez on 18 May 1691, and then the Moroccans began their return trip, passing through Toledo, the last city described by al-Ghassânî. This narrative of the journey is framed by two evocations of the conquest of al-Andalus, one short prologue before the embarkation and a longer epilogue after the description of Toledo and its cathedral.

In sum, politically, Madrid was the goal of the travel but, textually, its end was Toledo — in the same way that there are two histories represented in the text, that of modern, post-Andalusian Spain, and that of al-Andalus. It has been speculated that the manuscripts "might be incomplete,"[44] in part because the details of the return trip are not spelled out; even the description of the mosque of Seville that al-Ghassânî stated he would provide is absent.[45] Furthermore, the exchange of the captives is not described in any manuscript. However, the return trip is far from absent from the text, as many events that happened at that time are told, sometimes in detail, including a number of incidents that took place in Seville, a city that was not on the itinerary from Cadiz to Madrid.[46] As it stands, the text offers an evident contrast between Madrid and the rest of Spain (including the border), made clearer by the choice to describe the latter in one section, rather than to distribute it according to the timeline of the journey.

Modern Spain and al-Andalus, the interior of the peninsula and the frontier, are present and entangled in al-Ghassânî's text in a complex way that is particularly apparent when it comes to the border, a boundary between the two shores that had been for many decades "frozen in a defensive posture."[47] How al-Ghassânî passed it, and described it, tells a lot about the nature of this space of confrontation and intense suspicion. This triumphant embassy did not begin very auspiciously. The envoy's account would let the reader believe that the difficulties he experienced in passing to Spain were only due to the uncooperative winds that forced a long waiting time on both shores, but they just compounded the initial reluctance of the Spaniards toward the mission. Indeed, they kept postponing the embarkation while the ambassador and his companions were waiting in Titwân. The Spanish displayed an attitude that Abel Messi in a letter to Francisco Bernardo Varona, the governor of Ceuta, compared unfavorably to the "gallantry and promptitude" of the Moroccans when they received the Crown's envoys, an attitude that annoyed al-Ghassânî

[44]Paradela Alonso, 2005, 33.

[45]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 185; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 150.

[46]See al-Ghassânî, 2003, 128, 154, 181; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 65, 75, 153.

[47]Hess, 44.

so much that he threatened to cancel the embassy before it had even begun.[48] This behavior on the part of the Spanish was motivated by the fear that the mission could endanger the defense of the border. The Council of State was adamant that the embarkation should not happen in Ceuta, so as to not risk informing the Moroccan sultan about the defenses of the embattled city.[49] As for disembarkation, they had to decide which Spanish port would be the safer choice.[50] The possibilities were Gibraltar, on the one hand, at the peril of allowing this representative of an enemy power that had just seized one Spanish possession to observe the weakness of that port and the royal marine, and, on the other hand, Cadiz, a very prosperous and active commercial port that could excite the covetousness of the Moroccans. The council chose the latter. In any event, contrary winds forced the ship to stop at Gibraltar, but per Carlos II's instructions, the representatives of the *makhzan* were not allowed to disembark, even though al-Ghassânî was seriously sick.[51]

The author, as with the incidents in Madrid, did not dwell on these difficult beginnings. He also kept silent about the crucial fact that his role as ambassador was put into question early on. The Spaniards were thinking of recusing him, as the rumor spread that he was a renegade, a gentleman who owned property in the region of Seville and who had converted from Christianity to Islam. Thus, they said, it would be "against our sacred religion to admit him in the land of Christians."[52] Conversion, as is well known, loomed large for many centuries in the relationship between the two countries, the two shores, the two religions, and was the paradoxical sign of both their long hostility and their intimate closeness. Not until the governor of Ceuta investigated and ascertained that neither al-Ghassânî nor any member of the delegation was a convert from Christianity was the embassy allowed to go forward. The body and the soul of the ambassador were very much a part of the contested territory on the frontier.

It is thus unsurprising that, in the prologue of the text, before the narrative of the journey begins, al-Ghassânî devotes many pages to a chorography of the border and of the region of the straits, describing in detail how the two shores look across each other, underlining how Tarifa sits opposite to Qsar al-Saghîr, and, most importantly, how Ceuta faces Gibraltar: thanks to these two strongholds, the Spaniards were able to lock the straits and to protect themselves from attacks coming from the North African coast. The post-Andalusian history of the relations between the two countries would mostly concern the battle over the closed garrison towns possessed by Spain on the

[48]Arribas Palau, 237.
[49]García Figueras and Rodriguez Joulia Saint Cyr, 315.
[50]Arribas Palau, 225.
[51]García Figueras and Rodriguez Joulia Saint Cyr, 320.
[52]Arribas Palau, 232.

Moroccan shore, which the ʻAlawî sultans made it their legitimizing mission to recapture. These places sometimes spent decades under siege by Moroccan forces, and were thus heavily fortified.

Al-Ghassânî was consequently startled by a phenomenon that he noted with great insistence: in interior Spain the cities were not walled anymore, contrary to the Spanish towns near the straits, on both sides of the sea. Santa Maria, despite being an important urban center, "does not have a wall separating the sea from the city nor the city from the rest of the land."[53] A little later, the author described Jerez in these terms: "Some of its walls have survived, but most have been destroyed: the Christians did not bother to build walls nor fortifications, except for cities near the sea, such as Cadiz, and the Mount of Conquest."[54] In more general terms, he doubted if many cities deserved the name anymore, as the Christians "do not care to build walls, and when a wall collapses or crumbles, they do not rebuild it. This is why the cities are now villages."[55] Al-Ghassânî had observed a critical aspect of the evolution of urban space in early modern Europe. Indeed, a recent study shows that "the urban landscape began to change profoundly over the seventeenth century as towns became more open to the outside world. The shift from closed to open cities was a Europe-wide phenomenon in the seventeenth century."[56] More and more, walls and fortifications were limited to the border towns to protect against invaders, and neglected or dismantled in the interior, signaling a weakening of municipal powers and a strengthening of the central royal rule.

This new political balance led to the production of a new space that profoundly transformed the city's role and identity. Studying the German case, Mintzker notes that this evolution elicited opposing sentiments: indeed, al-Ghassânî's remark that defortified towns were not cities anymore could have been made by some Europeans up to the early nineteenth century: "Contemporaries had strongly contradictory views about defortification because they viewed it as a metamorphosis of the urban environment as such: a fundamental transformation of what the city actually was."[57] This evolution was not occurring in Morocco, where towns would still be walled for a long time, and the dismantlement, or at least the lack of rebuilding of ramparts in interior Spain, could only have surprised the ambassador. Significantly, although he included almost all the developments about modern history in the section on Madrid, in this early part of the text devoted to the border he mentioned one contemporary event: while in Cadiz, he learned that the Ottoman troops had just retaken Belgrade (in October 1690).

[53]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 124; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 56.
[54]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 125; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 58. The "Mount of Conquest" is Gibraltar.
[55]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 138; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 82.
[56]Wolfe, 159.
[57]Mintzker, 12.

Rejoicing at the news, al-Ghassânî wrote that "after this victory, [the sultan] started repairing what had been destroyed of the city walls and defenses."[58] This news is related to the Eastern Mediterranean military frontier between Christendom and Islam, which necessitated the erection and maintenance of heavy fortifications, just like in the West.

MODERN SPAIN, MODERN SPACE

The closed house in which al-Ma'mûn al-Sa'dî was lodged in 1609–10 is thus a fitting symbol of the ongoing battle on the frontier between Christendom and Islam, on both ends of the Mediterranean. A description from the chapters on Madrid and the park of El Retiro stands in stark contrast to this image of immobility. There, al-Ghassânî saw people skating on the frozen river, "as quick as lightning," and was told that the people of Northern Europe were very skilled in this exercise, especially Flemish women, who "go for long distances in the mornings in order to earn their living, buying and selling, and in the evenings they return to their homes."[59] The image of the Flemish women symbolizes the modern capital city. These skaters vividly picture the connectedness, speed, and fluidity that characterize the Baroque capital, its long-range reach, and its openness to the circulation of goods and merchandise.

The further al-Ghassânî left the border behind, and the deeper he entered Spanish territory, the more clearly he could observe a Spain different from the one that Morocco was confronting on a daily basis in the Spanish strongholds and on its maritime borders. This Spain beyond the frontier was best embodied in its capital city. Among its most striking features was that it stood as a center of communications at the heart of a vast region, as was the case for other Baroque open cities. The image of the skaters symbolized this perfectly. Another incident illuminates this phenomenon. Early in the text, al-Ghassânî describes a time when the Moroccans were staying in Sanlucar during their return trip, and received letters from the court that were signed only three days earlier: "We were stunned, since the distance was more than three hundred [miles]."[60] This example concludes al-Ghassânî's first detailed account of the Spanish post system and the network of inns that doubled as way stations, where couriers could swiftly change horses and be fed and refreshed, thus allowing news to travel at great speed. Later, in the Madrid section of the text, he describes the system again, associating it with the gazettes that printed and spread the news coming from the rest of Europe, soon after the events had occurred.[61] The

[58]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 123; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 55.
[59]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 155; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 106.
[60]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 137; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 81.
[61]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 159–160; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 112–14.

Madrilenes thus became aware of contemporary history almost as it was happening.

And, indeed, al-Ghassânî gives a large place to modern Spanish history and, except for a couple of events, he tells it almost entirely in the chapters concerning Madrid. What is mentioned, sometimes in detail, shows that the author, probably with the help of Gassûs, had worked very seriously to inform himself about the history of modern Spain and Europe, and his account is unparalleled in Arab writing of the time. He mentions the discovery of America and the abundant riches and the vast power it had brought to the Crown. Ibero–North African relations take a large part of his account, and al-Ghassânî recalls the 1534 capture of Tunis by Charles V and his 1541 attack of Algiers that ended in disaster for the imperial fleet. He recounts in some detail the 1578 Wadî al-Makhâzîn victory that halted Sebastian of Portugal's invasion of Morocco and ended up giving "the Muslims . . . a great victory, the first to be seen in a long time."[62] The internal history of Spain occupies several pages, including the rebellion and then expulsion of the Moriscos and the independence of Portugal. For more recent times, al-Ghassânî was well informed of the succession of Felipe IV, and the struggle for power between Juan of Austria, brother of Carlos II, and the queen mother allied to her favorite, Valenzuela. The ongoing War of the League of Augsburg (1688–97), which opposed France and its ally, the Ottoman Empire, to a European coalition including Spain, takes many pages. Al-Ghassânî also describes, in a rather confused way, the differences between Catholics and Protestants, and analyzes the role of religion in England's Glorious Revolution (1688–89). He puts a strong emphasis on France, the greatest threat to Spanish power, and mentions the bombing of Barcelona and Alicante in July 1691 by the French fleet, which happened after he left Madrid. He was also aware that the Bourbon dynasty was likely to succeed the Habsburg. The economic role of French immigrants in Spain attracted his attention, and he explains their ascendancy by the low value assigned by Spaniards to commerce and industry, as compared to governmental or military positions, since these latter were the only ways to join the ranks of the nobility.[63] Through these long and informed developments, al-Ghassânî shows how Spain, and most of all Madrid, was connected to the rest of the world, through networks of communication and historical and political relations.

Wide streets and big squares were also important features of the modern European city in the late seventeenth century. Al-Ghassânî describes at length

[62]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 148; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 97.

[63]On the French and their role in early modern Spain's economy, see Kamen, 182–84; Hillgarth, 50–51.

the Plaza Mayor and its central role in Madrilene economic life.[64] The Plaza Mayor was also a vast theater for popular or religious festivities, such as bullfighting and processions, and al-Ghassânî and his companions were invited by the king to attend some of these — only a few of the many social occasions that the ambassador enjoyed during his time in Madrid. The king "wanted to entertain us and show us the places that were important to him, such as his parks; hunting grounds; orchards; feasts; mansions, with their interior residences and rooms; the armory, with his weapons and firearms; and other places. He repeatedly invited us to see all that I had just mentioned."[65] The king even did the Moroccans a rare favor by inviting them to hunt on royal properties. Al-Ghassânî was very impressed by the monastery of El Escorial, its majestic proportions, its statues, and its columns. In the palaces of the grandees, he met some of the most notorious people in Madrid, such as the English ambassador Sir William Godolphin, who converted to Catholicism in order to marry a Spanish woman,[66] or the beautiful daughter of the Duke of Medinaceli, who married her own uncle after he had obtained a papal dispensation.[67]

The envoy and his companions even struck up personal friendships with two successive priors of the monastery of El Escorial, the first being "an old man with reputation and honor who showed friendliness, charm and affability that I cannot [sufficiently] describe. . . . He left his position, proclaiming that he no longer wanted anything of the world, and conferred his responsibilities on one of his pupils, named Don Alonzo. This friar, who is now in charge of the Escorial, showed affability, friendliness, and good conversation. After we met him, and throughout our stay in Madrid, he continued to visit us every time he came to see the despot. We also used to receive his letters from the Escorial."[68] Al-Ghassânî's

[64]His depiction of this marketplace was unusual enough in its relative precision to be highly rated by Hillgarth, whose fascinating study of early modern travel narratives to Spain, almost all European, provides many precious insights on al-Ghassânî's account: "One of the clearer visions of Madrid at the end of the seventeenth century — unfortunately a brief one — comes from a Moroccan description, where we read of its markets, full of peasants from the countryside, and of stalls where food and drink were sold to passers-by. . . . One is a world away from the bored European diplomats and even further from the tedious inventions of Madame d'Aulnoy, for whom there were hardly any 'common people' at all in Madrid": Hillgarth, 94–95. Ibid., 67, notes that "the contrast between the friendly way this Muslim embassy was received and its cordial attitude to Spain and that of other (Christian) ambassadors is very striking."

[65]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 185; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 150.

[66]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 162–63; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 117. See Stanhope, 73.

[67]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 161; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 116.

[68]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 181; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 144. The old man is Diego de Valdemoro (1615–95), who was confirmed twenty-eighth prior of El Escorial on 2 June 1687; he was succeeded by Alonso de Talavera (d. 1714), who was confirmed on 5 May 1690: see Pastor, 1:111.

work contains none of the vilification of Spain that permeates many early modern European travel accounts. The ambassador clearly enjoyed the discovery of this unknown Spain. His text offers meticulous descriptions and inserts foreign words, a practice that is echoed in travel accounts from different cultures. Numerous transcribed Spanish terms appear in the text, sometimes translated, sometimes defined, most of them denoting alien phenomena, such as noble or religious titles. These transcriptions give the readers a more direct access to the foreign country and allow them to read, and hear, the language of the Other.

Unsurprisingly, the ambassador was very interested in religious life in Spain, describing it with a mixture of fascination and reprobation, the latter marked by the ritual curses against Christians, especially the pope, that peppered his text. He noted the important role of ecclesiastics in Spanish public and social life, and visited several convents, including some of women. Al-Ghassânî described in detail the celebrations of Holy Week and Easter,[69] and observed in the royal palace the ceremony during which the king washed the feet of thirteen poor men. The monarch invited the Moroccans to attend the processions marking the canonization of Juan de Dios (1495–1550), founder of the Brothers Hospitallers, and al-Ghassânî was evidently very impressed by the pageantry: "They dressed his effigy with magnificent clothes covered with pearls and diamonds and they decorated all the streets leading from his church to the plaza."[70]

Al-Ghassânî did not resist the temptation to indulge with learned men in religious controversies, extolling Islamic doctrine and refuting Christian dogma.[71] This was a performative ritual common in the early modern texts written on the frontier between Islam and Christendom, on both sides.[72] The disputation against the religious adversary, especially on his own territory, was an important cultural form that flourished in the liminal space of the Western Mediterranean frontier, allowing one to demonstrate the superiority of his own religion and to display mastery of dialectics. Al-Ghassânî proudly asserts that the Moroccans won battles of words against different adversaries, to the point that the head of a religious order forbade the friars from visiting them again.[73] However, this victory is paralleled in the text by a possible defeat, when al-Ghassânî tells a curious anecdote about the Brothers Hospitallers. He is unabashed in his admiration for their work, having visited several of their hospitals and described the great care they took of the sick, rich or poor. On the return trip, in Sanlucar, one of the Moroccans fell ill. Some brothers had come to

[69]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 173–77; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 132–38.
[70]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 157; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 110.
[71]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 177–78; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 139–40.
[72]For Christian examples, see d'Angers, 103–04; Del Puerto, 218–22, 663.
[73]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 178; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 140.

visit them: "When they saw a sick man, they asked that he be moved to their place in order for them to be able to look after and treat him. I prevented them from doing that, which surprised them. . . . They insisted on taking him but I refused to give in, so they continued to visit him until he recovered."[74] Al-Ghassânî does not explain his reasons for refusing to let the Moroccan be taken care of in the hospital, away from his companions. Given his avowed regard for the Brothers Hospitallers, one might surmise that his attitude could be dictated by the same anxiety that led the prior of the order in Madrid to forbid the friars from visiting the embassy. If the prior was intimidated by their dialectical ability, al-Ghassânî was equally affected by the active charity of the brothers, which could attract the less committed to their own religion. Conversion and its danger was the mark of the closeness of the two antagonistic cultures and was constantly on the minds of those who voluntarily or forcibly crossed the border between them. Potential conversion and religious controversy are so inherently part of the liminal space of the frontier that they crop up even in the parts of the text that al-Ghassânî devoted almost entirely to the foreign space of modern Spain.

"O LIBROS, O MOROS"

The section on Madrid, even in its historical passages, is limited to post-Reconquista Spain. Al-Ghassânî approaches the history of al-Andalus in other parts of the text and, more importantly, in very different ways. Most readers have just ignored these passages, as they were only interested in his representation of European otherness, and both the French and English translations simply excised most of these pages. They are in fact essential in understanding the ways in which Moroccans viewed contemporary Spain itself and integrated their cultural memory of a lost al-Andalus with an actual experience of the constant battle against their powerful neighbor. The comparison between al-Ghassânî's different representations of modern Spanish and Andalusian history is extremely instructive in this regard. The historical narratives at the heart of the description of Madrid do not mention al-Andalus in any significant way, confirming that the most essentially foreign space of Spain is located in Madrid, the open capital city, occupied by a Spain other than the one that Morocco had been familiar with for centuries, mostly through mutual hostility. In contrast, al-Ghassânî's description of the rest of Spain is informed by his memories of a time when the frontier between the two regions, Arab-Islamic and Christian-Latin, was still porous, more a space of circulation and entanglement than a rigid boundary. Al-Ghassânî negotiates the insertion of that specter into the reality of the modern border zone. Al-Andalus permeates the text in very meaningful ways. Indeed, the memory of it played a significant role in the embassy before it even began. Mûlay

[74]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 159; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 112.

Ismâ'îl himself, in order to excuse his unwillingness to be held to his earlier pledge to unconditionally liberate the hundred officers of Larache, referred to the fall of Granada in his letter to Carlos II, reminding him that the Spaniards had reneged on all the promises they made to the Muslims in the capitulation agreement.[75] Evidently, for late seventeenth-century Moroccans, the history of al-Andalus still informed their understanding of their relation to Spain.

The relevance of al-Andalus is further corroborated by the sultan when he proposed to exchange Arabic books for half of the captives. Al-Ghassânî was indeed chosen to represent Mûlay Ismâ'îl partly because of his expertise as a scribe. The proposal stemmed from the seizure in 1612 of the entire library of the Sa'dî sultan Mûlay Zaydân by a French privateer. The library was then seized by the Spanish fleet and ultimately incorporated in 1614 in the collections of the monastery of El Escorial; the sultan and his descendants vainly tried to obtain its restitution.[76] This remarkable incident was nevertheless emblematic of the conditions prevailing on the dangerous frontier between Islam and Christendom, and even of the constitution of Oriental libraries in early modern Europe.[77] No doubt the Moroccan *makhzan* had those books in mind. However, just as the fall of Granada was one prism through which recent events were viewed, the Moroccan perception of the lost Zaydân's library became enmeshed with the memory of the books left behind after the completion of the Christian conquest of the peninsula. Mûlay Ismâ'îl's letter demanded that half of the hundred prisoners be exchanged against five thousand books in these terms: "I request that you give me for fifty of the hundred Christians, five thousand Arabic books, a hundred for each one. I want them to be the books of the Muslims of my religion, of those that were in the libraries of the Muslims of Seville, Cordoba, Granada and other parts, that my servant and secretary will find satisfactory. . . . And if the books we are requesting cannot be found, give us the Muslims of the galleys and other places."[78] The introduction to al-Ghassânî's travel account echoes this equivalence between the redemption of captives and the liberation of Arabic books from Spain, as he was sent to "bring back the captives of Islam, and to search in the Andalusian libraries for books."[79] Zaydân already had proposed to either pay for his books (essentially

[75]García Figueras and Rodriguez Joulia Saint Cyr, 450.

[76]See Castries; Antolín y Pajares, 60–64; Justel Calabozo, 171–94; Ibn Azuz; Hershenzon.

[77]See Jones.

[78]García Figueras and Rodriguez Joulia Saint Cyr, 450–51: "y aora quisiera que me dierais por los cinquenta Christianos de los ciento, cinco mil libros Arabigos, ciento por cada uno. Y que estos fuessen de los Moros de mi ley, de los que estavan en las Librerías de los Moros de Sevilla, Córdova, Granada y otras partes, que sean de la satisfación de mi criado y Secretario. . . . Y sinó se hallaren los libros que pedimos, nos dareis los Moros de las Galeras, y otras partes."

[79]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 118; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 48.

ransom them) or to exchange them for Christian captives — relying on the two mechanisms in place for the liberation of captives of military and corsair activity on the frontier between the two shores.

European contemporaries knew that retrieving manuscripts was an important part of al-Ghassânî's mission. A Madrilene satirical song about the Moroccan embassy mentions that the envoy was asking for the "Alcoran" and "books."[80] Later, the French consul in Algiers attested that rumor had it that al-Ghassânî had actually brought manuscripts back to Morocco.[81] In fact, he was not able to retrieve any books. According to Estelle, who was informed by Vieira, the Inquisition was responsible for rejecting any possible restitution, since, "although the books are written in the Arabic language, they nevertheless talk of the divine mysteries of our Law as well as theirs."[82] The very closeness of the two traditions justified retaining the manuscripts.

Mûlay Ismâ'îl and his learned entourage were certainly thinking of Zaydân's library when asking for the return of Arabic books. Several reasons might explain why he did not ask for them outright. The sultan may have thought that if the Spaniards agreed to give the Moroccans five thousand Arabic books, which was approximately the volume of the Zaydân library, it would not matter whether these books would come from that library or from Andalusian collections. In fact, the symbolic value of manuscripts from Muslim Spain might be higher. Moreover, during the seven decades since the seizure of the royal collection, the Spaniards had constantly refused to return it, even against payment or political advantage, and there was no reason to believe that they would be any more willing to negotiate at this juncture. It might be highly significant that, while demanding the books, Mûlay Ismâ'îl gave the Crown a way out, by suggesting in his letter that an exchange of one thousand captives for the hundred officers was acceptable. Asking for the manuscripts, however, justified an embassy that the sultan promoted in order to enhance his international prestige and increase his knowledge of the ancestral enemy. He thus took an event emblematic of the constant hostilities of the border to change its very nature, by helping processes that would allow for new forms of interaction between the countries.

The sultan was probably not surprised when the Spaniards decided that they would not cede any books. Since he was asking for "either books, or Moors,"[83] they would rather give the latter than the former. Spanish authorities did not explain the true reasons for their refusal, and they even led al-Ghassânî to believe that the great fire of 1671 had destroyed all the books held in El Escorial. This was not the case, as almost two thousand Arabic manuscripts survived. The

[80]Vernet, 112.

[81]*SIHM*, 3:437.

[82]Ibid., 3:356. See also García Figueras and Rodriguez Joulia Saint Cyr, 322.

[83]Arribas Palau, 263: "o libros, o moros."

ambassador was shown the traces of the disaster: "We saw the place that had been burned in the libraries and we saw how the fire had damaged them and the church extensively."[84] While he had hoped to find and retrieve a wealth of royal manuscripts, he was shown instead the remains of this treasure's destruction. He might have seen in this a fitting symbol of the loss of al-Andalus.

THE ANDALUSIAN CHRONOTOPE

The memory of al-Andalus was involved in al-Ghassânî's mission from the beginning. Beyond his particular case and time, his evocations of Muslim Spain inaugurated a theme in the history of Arab culture. William Granara has explored the "Andalusian chronotope" in modern Arab literature, appropriating Bakhtin's definition of the *chronotope* as the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature."[85] He has noted that one of its earliest iterations is the multivolume magisterial monument of memory and nostalgia written by al-Maqqarî (ca. 1578–1632) in Syria, where he had moved after a long career as a religious scholar in Morocco.[86] Al-Ghassânî had the distinction of being the first post-Andalusian Arab author to visit and describe important sites of Muslim Spain. Contrary to al-Maqqarî, his imagination of al-Andalus was juxtaposed with the reality and power of Catholic Spain; the ways in which his text rhetorically negotiated this encounter deserve to be explored.

Al-Ghassânî's travel account is bookended by two evocations of the Arabo-Berber conquest of al-Andalus. The first, coming just after an introduction that briefly explains the reasons for the embassy, is a prologue to the narrative that begins with the embarkation near Ceuta. These few pages are devoted to a retelling of the conquest and recall the role played by the Wisigoth count Julian in the invasion. The text alludes only obscurely to his motivation: as legend has it, King Roderic raped Julian's daughter, and the count retaliated by enticing Mûsâ ibn Nusayr to conquer the country. The Arab general thus sent his Berber subordinate Târiq ibn Ziyâd, who conquered al-Andalus, and after whom Gibraltar (Jabal Târiq) is named. Al-Ghassânî only called Gibraltar "Jabal al-Fath," the Mount of Conquest. Although he intertwined its evocation with the chorographic representation of the two shores analyzed earlier and his understanding of the strategic importance of the coast between Morocco and Spain, he had constant recourse to memory and legend. Talking about a source on the African coast, he wrote that some claim "that it was the Fountain of Life from which the Khidr, peace be upon him, drank."[87] The character of al-Khidr

[84]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 184; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 148.

[85]Granara; Bakhtin, 84.

[86]On this text, see al-Azmeh, 260–62.

[87]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 120; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 51.

(or al-Khadîr) appears in sûra 18 of the Quran[88] and plays an important role in the history of Islamic mysticism, as well as in popular legend as patron saint of sailors. As a transhistoric figure,[89] he is a fitting trope for the presence of al-Andalus when al-Ghassânî evokes memory rather than history in his text. The crucial passage between the two shores is not only a geographical and political site, but also a locus of legend and nostalgia that calls for a symbolic interpretation.

In the epilogue, after the description of Toledo, al-Ghassânî returns to the conquest. After one last audience with Carlos II at his palace at Aranjuez, the Moroccans went to visit this important Andalusian city and were shown its cathedral, built in what used to be a mosque. Despite his interest in this famous site of Muslim Spain, al-Ghassânî does not seem able to evoke it for long apart from the reality of modern Spanish power. The archbishopric of Toledo had great clout, and its head at the time was Cardinal Portocarrero, one of the most powerful men in Spain, whom al-Ghassânî had met in Madrid. Most strikingly, he devotes most of the description to the Christian treasures that the cathedral contains. He saw, among other riches, "a big box full of precious items of jeweled gold, such as valuable fans, necklaces, chains, and rings," and cabinets "full of gold and silver lanterns, inlaid crosses, and robes that friars, senior clergymen, deacons and monks wear. All are decorated with very precious jewels."[90] This treasure reminded the author of another one, which became a central motif in the epilogue. To evoke this treasure, however, he had to hark back to legendary origins. When Târiq ibn Ziyâd reached Toledo, he found the table of King Solomon, made of precious metals and stones, that would be part of the rich bounty that the Arabo-Berbers found in al-Andalus and brought back to the caliph in Damascus. This legend was widespread in Islamic culture under different versions, finding its way into the *Thousand and One Nights.*[91] Al-Ghassânî cited two major sources, Ibn Habîb (d. 853) and al-Râzî (d. 955), although he seems to have also used Ibn ʿAbd al-Hakam (d. 870), whose version included the detail that Tarîq replaced one of the legs of the table to prove later that he was the one who discovered it. And, indeed, the account is also partly about the rivalry between Târiq and Mûsâ, between the Berbers and the Arabs, as to who should take the greatest credit for the conquest. More than his predecessors though, al-Ghassânî emphasized the story of Solomon's table,

[88]Accompanied by a boy, he serves Moses on a trip and looks for a place where two seas are united. In the tradition of Qur'anic commentary, some indeed speculated that the locus in question was the straits of Gibraltar. See Wensinck, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. "al-Khadir."

[89]Elboudrari, 1992, 37.

[90]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 189; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 155–56.

[91]See Hernández Juberías, 208–48.

and framed his epilogue with its discovery and description,[92] and then its origins and its final delivery to the caliph.[93]

Most significantly, al-Ghassânî left aside other elements of the legend found in many sources. He did not mention the prophecy of the conquest,[94] and focused rather on the bounty collected, the division of the land among the victors, and the many riches that were found there, going beyond Solomon's table, which is both a part of the conquest and its legendary symbol. Beyond nostalgia, al-Ghassânî was searching for a way to rhetorically negotiate the irrevocable loss of al-Andalus. Just as the text in its entirety juxtaposes the real space of Spain and the virtual, or spectral, space of al-Andalus, this epilogue puts in parallel the actual, present treasures that the Spanish held in the mosque of Toledo, with the past, mythical treasures found during the early conquest. Solomon's table, even in early accounts, was already a symbol for the real treasure, which was the land itself.

The specter of al-Andalus haunts other important passages that are suffused with cultural memories and are entangled with other texts. The description of the mosque of Cordoba can be read as a first example in Moroccan culture of an antiquarian approach to the remains of al-Andalus, which will be much more strongly represented in the eighteenth century by al-Ghazzâl and Ibn 'Uthmân, who will systematically describe monuments and collect inscriptions. Al-Ghassânî visited the mosque, admired its columns, arches, doors, and mihrab, counted the 117 orange trees in its courtyard, and found that the Christians, who made it a church, had not changed it much except for the addition of crosses. But the description is soon overwhelmed by the cultural memories that surround the site, and gives way to a brief history of the mosque, its first construction and its expansion through the ages.[95] More importantly, the story of the mosque as told by al-Ghassânî is a synecdoche of the history of the most prestigious and powerful dynasty of al-Andalus, the Umayyads, and conjures many illustrious characters. 'Abd al-Rahmân al-Dâkhil (r. 756–88), first Umayyad of al-Andalus, made Cordoba his capital, and bought a church in order to erect the mosque on its site. 'Abd al-Rahmân II (822–52) built mosques in Seville and other cities and, as a patron of sciences and letters, sent his confidant 'Abbas ibn Nâsih al-Thaqafî (d. ca. 852) to Baghdâd to collect and bring back books. He further demonstrated his qualities as a ruler and

[92]Al-Ghassânî, 2005, 156, 157, 158.

[93]Ibid., 168–69.

[94]According to a widespread legend, Roderic, the last Wisigoth ruler of Spain, hubristically opened a house in Toledo, closed for centuries by several locks, and found in it images of the Arabs who were going to invade his kingdom. See Basset; Hernández Juberías, 194–208.

[95]Al-Ghassânî, 2005, 66–69. Almost all of this description is omitted in al-Ghassânî, 2003.

protector of the arts when the poetess Hassâna al-Tamîmiya elicited his help in rectifying an injustice of which she was a victim, and then wrote odes to commemorate the occasion.[96]

This episode encapsulates important elements of the imagined al-Andalus, a powerful realm ruled by a righteous and cultured king. Finally, two more characters are mentioned: 'Abd al-Rahmân III (r. 912–61), whom al-Ghassânî calls the "star" of the Umayyads of al-Andalus, and the chamberlain al-Mansûr.[97] Both ordered great expansions to the mosque. To conclude, the author mentions the fortress that faced the mosque and that was the seat of the Umayyads "before the advent of *muluk al-tawa'if*,"[98] the petty kingdoms into which the unified power of al-Andalus fragmented, putting an end to this glorious period of harmony between political might and artistic prestige. These pages are very different from the historical passages about Spain. The history of the Umayyads is mediated through the description of the mosque of Cordoba, which summons the great shadows of powerful rulers. The presence of al-Andalus in the text is not historical, but rather spectral. The Spanish space is historical and political, descriptive and social. The Andalusian space is memorial and imaginative, spectral and literary.

These qualities extend to the land itself. When al-Ghassânî describes the river Genil, the physical account is soon submerged by its literary depth: "The banks of the river Genil [Shînîl] are entirely covered by gardens, orchards and beautiful landscapes that have enchanted the minds of many writers of al-Andalus; they composed numerous poems about it in all meter and all rime, and wrote so many *zajâl* and *muwashahhât* that it is impossible to count them."[99] The landscape is defined by the innumerable poems it has inspired, beginning with a nostalgic ode written in Egypt by Abû Hayyân (1256–1344). In his initial approach to the landscape, al-Ghassânî was already nostalgic, not only for al-Andalus, but also for Abu Hayyân's own nostalgia. He parallels the earlier poet's tender memories of the land of his youth with his own recollections of the texts in which he has discovered the history and culture of al-Andalus, thus adding nostalgia to nostalgia.

Literary memories also dominate the description of the Guadix river. Al-Ghassânî cites an ode by Hamda bint Ziyâd (twelfth century) about the river, as well as other verses by the poetess.[100] This landscape itself is made of poetry, and al-Ghassânî did not resist the temptation to insert himself in it: "When I saw the beauty of the city, I was reminded of verses by al-Jazîrî, and

[96]Al-Ghassânî, 2005, 67.

[97]Almanzor in Western sources, he was the actual ruler of al-Andalus from 978 to 1002.

[98]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 130; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 69.

[99]Al-Ghassânî, 2005, 62. Omitted in al-Ghassânî, 2003.

[100]Al-Ghassânî, 2003,127; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 62–63.

added two lines of my own."[101] By adding his lines to al-Jazîrî's (d. between 1004 and 1007), al-Ghassânî underlines that he is describing an al-Andalus of poetic contemplation that could be transformed and reimagined. This Spanish landscape was indeed a text, a palimpsest that the traveler reinscribed, appropriating it through literature and incorporating the memory of al-Andalus into Moroccan contemporary culture — and politics too: "May God [deliver this land], until the supreme religion is followed in it, and protect it from turmoil / By the hand of one who justly allocates rewards, who represents God, and who descends from the most eminent of creatures."[102] Al-Ghassânî's lines called for a reconquest by Mûlay Ismâ'îl, descendant of the prophet Muhammad, "most eminent of creatures." Their ritual quality, their elegiac and wistful tone, keep them away from any serious militancy. They nevertheless indicate a move toward reinscribing the memories of al-Andalus, beyond nostalgic imaginations, into the more recent realities of the frontier's conflictual exchanges. Just as the new space of modern Spain and Madrid, away from the shore, is altered by the religious controversy that flourished on the border, the evocations of al-Andalus point to ways of including it in the contemporary history of the liminal space. Inserting himself in the textual Andalusian landscape, al-Ghassânî assigns it more immediate meanings, and suggests that contemplation of this memory of its beauty and power cannot be apprehended anymore without reference to the political actuality of the border zone.

NOSTALGIC INTIMACIES

When evoking al-Andalus, al-Ghassânî ostensibly talks in the main about its most glorious times, the conquest and the Umayyad golden age. He deals only allusively and metaphorically with its disintegration and slow conquest by the Christians. These events are not ignored in the text, but are approached in a different, perhaps more surprising way. In Spain, the author encountered many descendants of the converted Muslims, the Moriscos — although he never uses this word and describes them always as Andalusians. He was very aware of the tragic fate of this minority. The historical account in the section on Madrid includes their persecution after the 1568–70 Alpujarras rebellion, and their expulsion from Spain in 1609–14. Al-Ghassânî, visiting Spain in the late seventeenth century, was able to see how the descendants of the Hispano-Muslims who had escaped expulsion had fared, and he witnessed the ways in

[101]Al-Ghassânî, 2005; 63. Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 128, attributes these two lines to Hamda, contrary to both al-Ghassânî, 1884, 38–39, and al-Ghassânî, 1940, 19–21, translations that rightly credit al-Ghassânî for the distich.

[102]Al-Ghassânî, 2005, 63. The second line is not featured in al-Ghassânî, 2003, 128. I have slightly modified the translation of the first line.

which they were inscribing their origins in the social environment of Catholic Spain. Including his observations in his text, he could connect two genealogies of Andalusian nostalgia into a new configuration.

Perhaps al-Ghassânî was naïve in detecting so many descendants of Muslims while traveling in Southern Spain.[103] He might have been when he assumed that the inhabitants of Lebrija used "discreet signs" to communicate to the Moroccans that they still belonged to Islam,[104] although inquisitorial records do attest to pockets of crypto-Islam well into the eighteenth century.[105] However, in the late seventeenth century, the Inquisition was not much interested in the Moriscos, focusing its energies on the suspected Judaizers, as al-Ghassânî himself attested when he described the vast powers the Inquisition yielded almost entirely in relation to the persecution of crypto-Jews.[106] During his sojourn in Spain, he observed that even great wealth did not save two descendants of conversos who were arrested and sent to prison, while their fortunes were confiscated. In marked contrast, al-Ghassânî noted that many of the Moriscos he encountered were local notables who did not hide their origins and even flouted them. A number of them came from Granadan aristocratic stock. They were able to retain an elevated social status, although they did not hold titles like the Old Christian nobility. The strategies of the Morisco notables have been the focus of interesting studies, which help corroborate al-Ghassânî's observations and underline their sharpness.[107] Historians have found his insights very striking, as they highlight a population about which sources are scarce.[108]

In one of the most interesting pages of his account, al-Ghassânî mentions a text that is very different from the poems and histories that he refers to when evoking al-Andalus. The town of Andujar, close to Cordoba, is populated by peasants and farmers:

> The majority are descendants of the Serraj [family], who converted to Christianity during the reign of Sultan Abu Hasan, the last ruler of Granada — or so Christians claim.
>
> They tell in their histories that some of the Granadans, children of Ibn Zakary of Granada, had reported to the king that one of the Serraj men had had an intimate conversation and relationship with his daughter-in-law. The king became angry with the Serraj family, who were with him in Granada, and killed their elders at a time when the Serraj men were the strongest defenders

[103]Hillgarth, 67.
[104]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 125; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 58.
[105]Lera Garcia.
[106]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 150–51; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 99–100.
[107]See Soria Mesa.
[108]See Domínguez Ortíz and Vincent, 262–63.

> of the Muslims, still retaining control of their region of Andujar after the infidels had conquered Cordoba and its surrounding regions. They were fighting to defend it, but once they heard what had happened to their kinsmen in Granada, they became so zealous, furious, and hateful that they went immediately to the [Christian] despot and converted at his hand. They then left him for Granada: they attacked it and then joined the despot in his wars on Granada and its surrounding regions.[109]

This passage tells in a somewhat mangled form the main plot of the first part of the *Historia de los bandos de los Zegríes y Abencerrajes* (History of the factions of the Zegries and the Abencerrajes), an important text of Spanish Golden Age literature, also known as *Guerras civiles de Granada* (Civil wars of Granada, 1595). Penned by Ginés Pérez de Hita (1544?–1619?), it built on romances and the anonymous *El Abencerraje* (1561), and told the story of the last years of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada. It presents a chivalric and admiring picture of the civilization of Muslim Spain, inviting readers to identify with "exemplary knights and their fair ladies."[110] Its depiction of luxurious pageantry, equestrian exploits, and romantic love met with tremendous success and helped the development of literary maurophilia in Spanish letters and beyond. A European myth of al-Andalus was born and would find its way into works by Madame de La Fayette, René de Chateaubriand, Washington Irving, and Louis Aragon.[111]

Many critics have pondered the paradox of the legend of the noble and exemplary Abencerrajes and its diffusion beginning in the sixteenth century, at a time when the Moriscos were the object of persecutions that would culminate in expulsion. Although this text is now considered by some to be the first historical novel in European literature, readers in Spain for a long time accepted it as history and not fiction, as British traveler Henry Swinburne observed in 1779.[112] This is certainly how it was presented to al-Ghassânî, who speaks of "their histories." This version of the fall of Granada must have surprised him. The story of the Banû Sarrâj is indeed recorded in many Arabic sources, some of which al-Ghassânî probably knew about, including al-Maqqarî. This powerful family fought against other factions during the last decades of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, and later converted and stayed in Spain. However, the legend of the Abencerrajes as recounted by Pérez de Hita credits them with more importance than they historically had.[113] The story that al-Ghassânî was told comes close to attributing the fall of the last kingdom of Muslim

[109]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 131; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 71–72.

[110]Carrasco-Urgoity, 98–99.

[111]See ibid., 137–44. On the early diffusion of the myth in France, see Hautcœur; Guellouz.

[112]Sieber, 291.

[113]'Abd al-'Aziz Sâlim; Arié.

Spain to the cruelty of the king and the treachery of the "Zegríes," a name mistakenly transcribed by al-Ghassânî as Ibn Zakary; in fact, Zegríes comes from "Thaghrî."[114]

The Moroccans encountered a number of people who claimed genealogies evoked by the *Guerras civiles de Granada*. In Southern Spain and in Madrid, they met self-proclaimed members of the Abencerraje lineage.[115] Others affirmed another heritage: in Utrera, a family of notables told al-Ghassânî and his companions that they were "of the blood of the last king of Granada that had been defeated,"[116] whom they referred to as "el rey chico" (this is indeed how Spanish sources call the last king of Granada, Abû 'Abd Allah, known in European texts as Boabdil). Al-Ghassânî transcribed the Spanish phrase and translated it, "the Little Sultan." He remarked that local notables, who hold "a governorship or a position in official administration,"[117] did not hide that they came from Muslim stock and openly sought the company of the Moroccans. One gentleman who proclaimed that he descended from Mûsâ, half-brother of Boabdil by a different mother, and son of King Hasan (r. 1483–86), appears in several pages of the book. Don Alonso was a cavalry captain "well known among the Christians and . . . considered one of their best and bravest horsemen."[118] In all likelihood, this is Alonso de Bazán, who, just a few years earlier, brazenly engraved on the stone crest at his door this proud proclamation: "This coat of arms belongs to D. Alonso Bazán Hazen, descendant of the Kings of Granada. Year 1686."[119] Indeed, the scions of Nasrid nobility were emboldened to affirm their origins, still using the work of Pérez de Hita and reading it as true history, not as romance. They clearly embraced his literary strategy of emphasizing "a shared chivalric culture that enables an imaginative and material connection to Granada,"[120] in order to gain acceptance in Catholic Spain's aristocratic society.

Al-Ghassânî seems perplexed that, to enhance their status, these Moriscos were using both their Muslim aristocratic origins and the early conversion of their ancestors. He evidently did not understand all the ramifications of these notables' social strategy, nor the role that the *Guerras civiles de Granada* played in it. It is still remarkable that al-Ghassânî, whose role in the early construction of the Andalusian chronotope in Arab culture is so important, had recorded the presence of a corresponding mythical representation of al-Andalus in Spain. His

[114]Seco de Lucena, 32.

[115]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 132; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 73.

[116]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 125; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 59.

[117]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 152; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 73.

[118]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 126; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 60.

[119]Sanchez Ramos, 617: "Este escudo de armas es de D. Alonso Bazán Hazen, descendiente de los Reyes de Granada. Año 1686."

[120]Fuchs, 114.

intervention would bring the Arab and the Spanish versions of the Andalusian legend closer together beyond his own text, when his tale of the rivalry between Zegríes and Abencerrajes was quoted by Ibn 'Uthmân in his chapter on Granada.[121] The Arab myth of al-Andalus and its European counterpart, born of the literature of maurophilia, found an early convergence through al-Ghassânî. Alonso told al-Ghassânî that "when his mother was pregnant with him she yearned for a couscous meal."[122] The cavalry captain enjoyed hearing the Moroccans talk about Islamic beliefs and practices and had probably taken the initiative of seeking out their company, as did others:

> One day I met a man in a coach in Madrid (whose name I forget now), accompanied by young and older women. They were handsome and beautiful. He stopped and greeted me lengthily, showing, with his women, joyous welcome. We reciprocated appropriately, and when he was about to leave, he introduced himself, saying: "We are Muslims by origin, descendants of the Serraj family." I inquired about him afterward and was told that he was one of the scribes of the court who oversee petitions, depositions, and similar things.
>
> There were also another group of Granadians living in Madrid who had authority and power and who came to visit us. They were friends with Don Alonso. . . . They often asked us about the religion of Islam and matters in that regard. When they heard our answers about our religion, about the purity of judgments on which Islam was based and many other things, they liked what they heard and listened carefully and thanked us — in the presence of Christians, and quite heedless of them. Throughout our stay in Madrid they visited us repeatedly, showing much love and affection.[123]

Al-Ghassânî found that his embassy in Spain was seen by the descendants of Muslims as a way to mediate and reflect on their connection to their past. They had already been using the literary power of Pérez de Hita to find a place in Spanish aristocratic society without denying their lineage. Al-Ghassânî in his text appears to be both a subject and an object of longing and nostalgia. These friendly Moriscos related to him and his companions because of their common origins; beyond that fact, the Moroccans could see how the Moriscos were also looking back on the same pre-1492 past, but from a very different perspective, on the other side of the border. Listening to them, connecting with them, uncovering surprising intimacies, al-Ghassânî incorporated their experience in contemporary Arab culture and allowed it to

[121]Ibn 'Uthmân al-Miknâsî, 177.

[122]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 126; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 60.

[123]Al-Ghassânî, 2003, 132; al-Ghassânî, 2005, 73.

inflect its own memories of al-Andalus, and the understanding of the frontier between the shores.

CONCLUSION

The corpus of early modern Muslim writing about Europe is far from being as large as the corresponding output of Western studies of so-called Oriental countries. Moreover, the works that do exist are still considerably understudied. Among these, al-Ghassânî's travel account stands out. It provides historians with sometimes unique information about the Spanish people and customs in the late seventeenth century, collected by an attentive and observant witness. He explored many aspects of life in Madrid and Southern Spain and researched the culture and history of the Iberian Peninsula. In its quality and depth, his account had no contemporary Arab or Turkish parallel, and few European. As an official envoy, al-Ghassânî met many important personalities; visited palaces, mansions, convents, and former mosques; and was invited to witness social, political, and religious occasions. This embassy had very few precedents in Spain, not least because it was sent by a Muslim power that was trying forcefully to capture all the Spanish possessions on Moroccan shores. The frontier that separated the peninsula from North Africa was a dangerous and confrontational one, marked by suspicion, endemic war, and the pervasive risk of captivity.

Beyond the substantial diplomatic and political benefits that al-Ghassânî's successful mission brought to himself and to the sultan, it also gave him the opportunity to write this remarkable text, and to map the new realities of the frontier between Morocco and Spain, Islamic North Africa and Christian Europe. Over the previous two centuries, it had evolved from a space of contentious circulation and cohabitation, toward a particularly rigid and militarized boundary. The very events that produced the embassy resulted from this dangerous reality. However, other political and cultural processes were also taking place. They were creating new passages between the shores and allowing for the experience of the Other through diplomacy. Al-Ghassânî surveyed the unyielding frontier while participating in changing the style of contacts between the civilizations. His mission and his text are all the more instructive as they help amend the prevailing view of the relations between an Islamic world, seen as growing ever more introverted, and an expanding Europe, whose increasing self-confidence translated into the production of knowledge about other cultures, including the Muslim East. Mûlay Ismâ'îl's strategy in provoking the embassy, and, even more significantly, al-Ghassânî's careful observation and study of Spain, provide more nuance in the analysis of these historical evolutions, and show how much can be gained by attending to contrary evidence.

Al-Ghassânî's text also negotiates the place that the memory of al-Andalus could take in the new forms of interactions that he was working toward reinforcing. He occupies an important and all-too-neglected place in the history of the representations of al-Andalus in early modern Arab culture. He was the first writer to confront his cultural memories of that glorious epoch with the sites and monuments themselves, with the reality of contemporary Spanish power, and with the ways devised by the Spaniards themselves, especially the descendants of Muslims, to come to terms with that past. The space that al-Ghassânî represented in his text is heterogeneous, as it incorporates the paradoxes of stratified realities: historical and memorial, political and poetic, imaginative and spectral.

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