Literacy, Munificence and Legitimation of Power during the Reign of the Party Kings in Muslim Spain
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and turn their backs on her in adversity!
Glory to us who make a stand.
(God has erased our names)
We defy death,
And take to a mountain that does not die
(they call it the people)
We will not run
We will stay home
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My heart criss-crossed with wounds
My heart damned in all texts
Lay now on the wrecks of the city
A putrid rose,
Quiet at hand
Having said “No” to the ark and love the motherland.

Appendix II

Literacy, Munificence and Legitimation
of Power During the Reign of the Party
Kings in Muslim Spain

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In this paper I shall deal with the political situation of al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) during the 
Muluk al-Tawd^if period in relation to the occurrence of munificence towards poets and learned men.1 The little
states rivalled each other in munificence and attracted poets to their courts, Seville especially being a paradise for poets. I want to investigate
how poets and learned men of lower class origins or those from ethnic
groups and religions other than the Arab and Berber aristocracy, were
able to acquire important posts at the courts due to their literary merits. Among the special cases I will study are the political careers of Ibn
'AmM'ar and Samuel han-Nagid.2 In eleventh-century al-Andalus it was
possible to get on in the world by means of skillful poetry and the
knowledge of how to write letters in rhymed prose.

Important sources for eleventh century Andalusian poetry are the
anthologies compiled by Ibn Bassâm (his Kitâb al-Dhakhira)4 and al-Fâth b.
Khâqân (his Qalâ'â'd al-Iqâyân).3 These books give a good impression of
the importance of poetry in eleventh-century Andalus, since they are
almost contemporary sources. Later sources include the anthologies
compiled by Ibn Sa'id al-Maghribi, such as 'Unwân al-Murqi^s^at wa-l-
Mutribât (Patterns of verses which make dance and sing),5 the Râyi^d al-Mubârizin (the Banners of the champions)6 and the Kitâb al-mughrib
fi hulâ l-maghrib (the Relator of extraordinary things about the Jewels of
the West).7 Among the later anthologies worth mentioning are Lisân
al-Din b. al-Kha^tîb's al-Ihâ^tah fi Akhbâr Gharbât,8 the (Comprehensive
book about the Events of Granada) which is more a biographical poetic
anthology than a survey of the events which took place in Granada, and
last but not least al-Maqqari's Na^f al-Tîb (Fragrance of Perfume),9
which, as we know, was originally meant as a kind of biography of the
aforementioned Lisân al-Din b. al-Kha^tîb. However, the first part of it is
an introduction to Andalusian history and poetry.
The Dhakhira is divided according to geographical regions. Part I comprises Cordoba and surrounding territories, part II the western regions of al-Andalus including Seville, part III includes the Eastern region, i.e. the region of Murcia, Denia and Valencia, and part IV includes an anthology of poets from foreign lands who praised Andalusia. The four main parts of the Dhakhira are split up into sections dealing with individual poets, and in many places narrations of historical events of the eleventh century are inserted, based on the authority of the contemporary historiographer Ibn Hayyân.

In most cases Ibn Bassâm first lists love poetry (nasîb), then laudatory poetry (madîh), and finally various kinds of descriptive poetry and Lisân al-Dîn b. al-Khatîb follows the same system later on in his Ihkâh. Al-Fâh b. Kháqân's Qa'id al-Ibyân more or less copies Ibn Bassâm's system. He divides his work into four sections headed by the poet he considered the leader of the group. Part I is devoted to the noble qualities of chiefs of state and their sons, with examples of pleasing stories of their lives, led by al-Mu'tamid, the king of Seville. Part II deals with the splendours of the vizirs and the poetry of the secretaries and masters of eloquence, starting with Ibn Zaydûn, and Part III deals with judges and scholars, headed by Abû I-Walîd al-Bâji. The fourth part deals with learned literary persons and excellent poets among whom Ibn Kháqân is the most prominent.

Both Ibn Bassâm and Ibn Kháqân's works were probably inspired by a nostalgic feeling about the greatness of literary activity in the eleventh century when there were so many kings and high functionaries who were Maecenates of poetry. Poetry flourished because of the support provided by the Party kings. Ibn Kháqân writes in his preface: 'When I saw that adâb, both prose and verse, grew weak and its swords became rusty in their scabbards, and its sparks were full of cinders, I saved what remained of its agonizing spasms and restored to it the spirit which had reached the highest perfection'.

In this climate literature was linked with power and power with literature. The latter is not always the case in other cultures, but in Arabic culture this was true from pre-Islamic times. In Christian Western Europe of the time, most kings were not literate and seldom cultivated knowledge or arts, but rather mainly practised war. Their noblemen also limited themselves to the practice of warfare. In the Arabic situation, the kings legitimized themselves with warfare and poetry, which correspond to the pre-Islamic virtues of bravery and generosity. In Western Europe high posts were occupied by noble families and people belonged to the aristocracy by birth and could not switch from one class to another, whereas in Muslim Spain poets could arise to power from a situation of miserable poverty by means of their poetry. One of the well-known examples of a poor poet who became a powerful vizir, was Ibn 'Ammâr, whose life and works we will dwell upon in the first part of this paper.

In Western Europe non-Christians could not rise to power. In al-Andalus some Jews rose to positions of influence at Muslim courts because of their literacy and poetic talents. The most conspicuous case is Isma'il (sometimes called Samâw'al) Ibn al-Naghrihah known as Shemu'el the Nagid. I will be stressing the impact of literacy upon the acceptance of non-Muslims in high posts in the Andalusian states in the second part of this paper, and in the third part I will deal with a poet-king and his preference of poetry above warfare.

Dealing with Ibn 'Ammâr's career from poet to vizir, shows how a poet of low origins started to make his living. Usually he was educated in a small village, the taste for poetry being given him by some grammarian who liked verse. Soon after, the poet perfected his skill in a larger town, and then began a life as an errant poet until the moment when he achieved success. Not a few of these errant poets came from the countryside.

Ibn 'Ammâr (1031–1084) was born near al-Shilb (the present-day Portuguese town Silves) of a poor family. The anecdotes that survive about him show us how he arrived in Silves with a mule as his only possession, not knowing if he would have anything to eat that day. Then he received a sack of barley from a merchant to whom he had addressed some verses. Another time, he presented himself before Abû 'Abd al-Rahmân ibn Tâhir, the ruler of Murcia, in a long garment of camel hair, with a hair-covering which made him appear ridiculous.

His miserable existence came to an end when he composed a poem ending with the letter rd' on the Sevillian 'Abbadid king al-Mu'tadid (d. 1068), who had just returned from a successful expedition against the Berber kings of Ronda. As a result of this rd' 'uyûn he received a poet's reward and was enrolled in the register of those who were entitled to receive a poet's pension. His relation with al-Mu'tadid's son, the later king al-Mu'tamid, was to become legendary. Al-Mu'tadid expelled Ibn 'Ammâr from his kingdom, because he disliked his ascendency over his son. Ibn 'Ammâr's place of exile was the North of Spain (Saragossa) and, during the course of this exile, he composed various poems, now famous, in which he asked repeatedly to be allowed to come back to Seville. After the accession to the throne by al-Mu'tamid in 1068 he became the new king's advisor and vizir, but after treacherous behaviour, including
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conspiracy with the enemy, and even composing an invective poem on the origin of al-Mu'tamid's dynasty and his wife Rumaykiyya, he was imprisoned and eventually killed. Although at the end of his life his own treacherous behaviour put an end to his career, we see at least how, in the beginning, he rose to power due to his poetic gifts.

The same holds true for the Jewish poet and learned man Shemuel han-Nagid who originated from Cordoba, where he received his education. Although he issued from a well-to-do and aristocratic family, it was not easy for a Jew to reach a powerful position at the Muslim courts. However, through his knowledge of Arabic poetry and adab he made an impression on the Berber/Sinhaja kings of Granada, so that they appointed him as a vizir and - according to Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic sources - as a general of the army. Apparently the importance of knowing poetry and adab in al-Andalus was such, that a non-Muslim, even a Jew, could rise to considerable power. In a recent publication, Scheindlin emphasizes how the situation in al-Andalus was an extraordinary one in this respect. He makes a comparison between the Jewish vizirs in al-Andalus with those in the East, saying about one of the first Andalusian Jewish vizirs, Hasday ibn Shaprut: 'It is instructive to compare Hasday's career with that of his younger contemporary Yahzqil ibn Killis, a courtier in the service of the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'tazz. Ibn Killis was a Jew who had converted to Islam; while he maintained his personal connections with Jews, he made a point of dissociating himself from Judaism. Hasday's case was quite different: not only he was openly Jewish, but he was also a central figure in the Jewish community itself.'

The same is true for Samuel han-Nagid. Let us quote another sentence by Scheindlin which points at the importance of Arabic culture in their rise to power. He says: 'The Jewish courtiers would not have been able to achieve their public positions if they had not been prepared for them by an Arab education similar to that enjoyed by their Muslim peers.'

The Jewish courtier Samuel han-Nagid alias Isma'il ibn Naghrila, who was also a general, is praised in Arabic sources mainly because of his intellectual activities. The Cordoban historian Ibn Ḥayyān says about him: 25

'This cursed (i.e. non-Muslim) man was a superior man although God did not inform him about the true religion. He possessed extensive knowledge and bore unpleasant behaviour with patience. He paired a solid and wise character with a clear mind and polite and friendly manners. Gifted with refined courtesy, he was able to

I now interrupt this notice, which was transmitted by Lisān al-Dīn b. al-Khāṭib in his Iḥāṣa as well as al-'Idhari's Bayān al-Mughrib for a while, in order to refer to the education of his son Yūsuf or Yosef, before continuing to render this passage.

Shemuel han-Nagid took great care of the intellectual education of his son Yosef. From the battle grounds he addressed a poem in Hebrew to the little Yosef, whom he urged to read anthologies of Arabic poetry, because one was only suitable for court life when one knew thousands of lines of Arabic poetry by heart. Thus the poet writes to his young son on this occasion: 26

1. Yosef, receive this book which I have chosen for you from the best of the language of the Arabs.
2. I copied it - while the deadly spear was whetted and the sword was drawn.
3. Whilst Death decreed that one army should be replaced by another one, every time anew.
4. I do not cease teaching you, although Death's mouth is open all around me . . .
5. In order that wisdom may come upon you, for that is dearer to me than discovering my foes defeated.
6. Take it and reflect upon it, and quit the crowds who deride language and speech.
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7. Know that the man of understanding is like a tree of sweet fruit whose leaves are healing remedies,
8. While the fool is like the tree of the forest whose limbs and branches will be consumed by fire in the end.'

This endeavour to educate his son in order to prepare him for later statesmanship is also mentioned in the passage by Ibn Hayyän quoted above, which I interrupted for a while. It reads: 27

'[Samuel han-Nag'id/Ism'îl ibn Naghrîla] had encouraged his son Yûsuf, who bore the kunya Abû Husayn, to read books. For him he brought together masters and writers from all directions, who instructed him and taught him. The art of writing was also part of this. Thus he prepared him for his first job, namely being secretary of [Buluqqîn], the son of his master, who was the candidate to take [his master's] place. This served as a preparation for the basics of his work. When Ism'îl [Samuel] died on the above-mentioned date, Bâdis approached Yûsuf. Bâdis showed himself to be satisfied with him, as a replacement for his father at [Bâdis'] service.'

But Yûsuf was not as modest as his father in his behaviour. Or, to put it in the terms of the Baydân al-Mughrib quoted in al-Ihdta:

'[Ism'îl or Samuel] left behind a son, named Yûsuf, who had never known the humility of the dhimma, nor the fihhy situation in which Jews must normally live. He was a good-looking man, sharp of wit. He started to improve his situation with enthusiasm. He collected taxes and extracted money and appointed Jews to all kinds of functions.'

It was his alleged cooperation with the enemy which brought an end to his life and power. 28 He was murdered in a riot by members of the Sinhaja of Granada and crucified at the gate to the town and many other Jews were killed. But then the source speaks about the cultural impact of both:

'His Death was not the loss of one person/ but with him the building of a whole people was demolished://
(Mâ kâna Qaysun hulku-hu hulku wâhidin/wa-lâkinna-hu bunyânu gawmin tahaddama//)'

Finally I will deal with one of the poet-kings of the period of the Party-Kings, al-Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbâd, king of Seville. 29 While the kings in the Christian West had their legitimacy of power mainly as defenders of the Faith, the Muslim kings in al-Andalus associated themselves more with the pre-Islamic or ancient Arab virtues of generosity and bravery. They fell short in defending their faith. In their virtues of generosity and bravery, they deviated from the middle course. They were not only generous towards poets, receiving them in drinking bouts and donating slave-girls to them, but were also generous towards themselves, indulging in drinking wine and making love to slave-girls. As far as their bravery is concerned, they did not fight with their Christian enemies to whom they instead paid tribute, but had continuous wars with each other.

Al-Mu'tamid (1040–1095) the poet-king of Seville, was a prolific poet and also a valiant king. He ended his life in exile in Aghmat, where Yûsuf ibn Tashûfîn sent all the Andalusian kings deposed by him around 1091.

He is a good example of a poet king who gained most of his repute as a hero in the battlefields of his time. Nevertheless, he was also a poet who considered poetry to be the most important aspect of statesmanship. Poetry gave the Andalusian king his prestige, although not in the eyes of Ibn Tashûfîn, who did not even know Arabic, 30 and who – according to various contemporary sources – criticised al-Mu'tamid because of his indulgence in wine drinking and womanising (he occupied himself only with the ajwafayn, the two holes, i.e. the belly and the vulva, so relates al-Hîmyari 115), and not devoting enough forces to save Islamic Spain from the threat of the Christian king Alfonso.

The role of poetry in his life was conspicuous. In his adolescence, during his father (al-Mu'tadid's) reign he became a friend of the former errant poet Ibn 'Ammâr and remembers their life in Silves in a poem ('How many nights I have spent at the barrage of the river in pleasure with a girl like the bending of the river with bracelets'). 31 During his
father's reign he had to make use of his poetry for political reasons. He lost the city of Malaga, when on expedition against Bādis of Granada in 1064 and, in order to avoid punishment tried to flatter his father al-Mu'tamid by composing a poem which has since become famous. Likewise poetry played a role in his initial acquaintance with his wife Rumaykiyya. The romantic anecdote is well known. Along the Great River (Guadalquivir) al-Mu'tamid and his vizir Ibn 'Amrār were playing *jida* ('continuing a line of poetry with the same rhyme and metre'). At one point Ibn 'Amrār was not quick enough to continue al-Mu'tamid's hemistich (*sana* *li-rhu min al-mā'i zarad* or 'the wind has spun a coat of mail of water') and a girl who was washing some linen in the river, suddenly appeared with the desired continuation (*ayyu dir^n* or 'What a shield it would be for battle, if it stiffened'). She was the daughter of a muleteer called Rumayk ibn al-Hajjāj, and al-Mu'tamid immediately wanted to marry her. She subsequently became his wife, was called I'īmād, and was later famous for her capriciousness.

When he was deposed, al-Mu'tamid composed poems about his miserable condition in exile in Aghmat, but this poetry — although famous in the anthologies — failed to save him from this situation and bring him to power again. This, however, was because the period of the Party Kings had come to an end and the Almoravids rose to power, whereupon the poetic climate deteriorated.

There were political and social reasons for this gradual deterioration of the poetic climate in the courts of al-Andalus. The Almoravid rulers did not have such an interest in poetry, if they knew the sophisticated language of Arabic poetry at all. Monroe describes the arrival of the Almoravids. (...)'

'The irruption of the Almoravids had profound and even dislocating effects on Andalusian culture. The former were strictly orthodox and they recognized the 'Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad. Their government was conducted through the support of the Malikite *faqahā* who constituted an intolerant, narrowly legalistic theocracy and imposed a tight control on the free expression of ideas. ( . . . )'

'Aristocratic poetry fell out of favour with the loss of royal patronage. Ibn 'Abdūn, a secretary under the Aftasid dynasty of Badajoz, wrote a long elegy to mourn the fall of his sovereigns who were murdered by the Almoravids. ( . . . )'

'Poets were often forced to entertain less-refined audiences than formerly and so they naturally tended to cultivate the lighter forms. For this reason the *muwashshahāt* enjoyed a great vogue at this time.'

To sum up my conclusions, during the period of the Party Kings in al-Andalus, the mastery of Arabic poetry and literature could break through the usual pattern of the layers of society: men and women of poor descent could come to power thanks to their skill in poetry and could become part of the aristocracy. We have seen how Ibn 'Amrār — a poor itinerant poet — came to power, or how Rumaykiyya — the daughter of a muleteer — became the wife of a king solely because of their poetic skill. We have also seen how members of a religious minority like the Jews could become influential in the Muslim courts and even acquire the status of vizir thanks to their knowledge of Arabic culture. This special situation came to an end with the arrival of the Almoravids who gave the religious sciences a higher status than Arabic poetry and literature. I do not know whether the period of the Andalusian Party kings is unique in Islamic history or whether there are other periods and countries in which similar situations can be found. However, if we compare al-Andalus with Christian Western Europe, intellectual activities had more status in the former than in the latter. The aristocracy in Christian Western Europe seemed too closed upon itself to make it possible for a poor, literate man to move towards the aristocracy. The survival of the Ancient Arab virtues in al-Andalus during the reign of the Party-kings brought a flourishing period of Arabic literature into existence which even now fires our imagination.

I am grateful that in the present-day Muslim world some of those who are in power take an interest in poetry and Arabic literature just as the Muslim kings of al-Andalus did. Otherwise the present Shaban Memorial Conference would not have been possible.
Notes

1. For this period, see Wasserstein (1985).
2. Lived 422/1031-477/1084.
14. For Christian nobility, see e.g. Th. Reuter, The Medieval Nobility: Studies on the Ruling Class of France and Germany from the 6th till the 12th Century (Oxford, 1979) and A. Borst (ed), Das Rittertum im Mittelalter (Darmstadt, 1976).
16. See note 3.
20. See above note 3.
24. See note 3; cf. also Wasserstein (1993); for his poetry, see Schippers (1994).

References

33. Al-Mu‘tamîd [1952], pp. 11–12.
34. Al-Mu‘tamîd [1952], p. 36.
36. Al-Mu‘tamîd [1952], p. 89.

Bibliography

Note: dates between square brackets relate to the date of the edition of classical works.

Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem, Kether 1970), I–XIII.
— (1930), III (Leiden 1930; repr. Beyrouth).
The Authenticity of the Poems ascribed to Umayya Ibn Abi-\$alt

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Umayya Ibn Abi-\$alt is a personality of some relevance both for religious and for literary history. As for the realm of literature, the poems ascribed to him are markedly different from what else is known of Arabic poetry of the early 7th century A.D. with respect to form and content: the polythematic qasida with its typical sequence of topics is missing completely; instead he deals with such subject matters as the creation of the world, the angels' service, the deluge, the resurrection of man and so on. These latter topics, on the other hand, are not likely to be dealt with by a pre-Islamic pagan poet and, as there is no evidence at all that the Ta'ifi Umayya was a Jew or a Christian, one has to ask what else he could have been.

From a Muslim point of view, this question is easily answered: he must have been a hanif, a member of the small group of monotheists on the Arabian peninsula who followed the monotheism of Abraham. Abraham's belief is attested to in the Qur\$an where it is connected with the Ka\$ba in Mecca; according to the Qur\$an, this first monotheism was corrupted later, which fact led to the predominance of shirk in Arabia. In Western research, some doubts have been cast on this concept of Heilsgeschichte as there is no biblical or extra-biblical evidence of Abraham's connection with Arabia, and these doubts naturally affect the hanifs. In 1990, however, Uri Rubin tried to rehabilitate the hanifs, arguing that some of them are described as enemies of the prophet Muhammad and that they therefore can hardly have been invented for apologetic reasons. Convincing as this argument sounds, the problem still remains that the reports on these hanifs are contained in quite heterogeneous sources and that Ibn Is\$aq's Sir\$a from which Rubin repeatedly quotes poetry is an unreliable source for poetry even in the eyes of ancient Arab scholars.

The aforementioned characteristics of the poems ascribed to Umayya...