

IIUM Journal of Religion and Civilisational Studies

Volume 7

Issue 1

2024



International Islamic University Malaysia

IIUM JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND CIVILISATIONAL STUDIES

(E-ISSN: 2637-112X)

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fauziah Fathil, Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Mohd Helmi Mohd Sobri, Editor

Dr. Alwi Alatas, Associate Editor

Dr. Mohamad Firdaus Bin Mansor Majdin, Associate Editor

Assoc. Pro. Dr. Rabi'ah Binti Aminudin, Associate Editor

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Prof. Dr. Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk, Qatar University, Qatar

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Adibah Binti Abdul Rahim, International Islamic University Malaysia

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fatmir Shehu, International Islamic University Malaysia

Prof. Dr. Hafiz Zakariya, International Islamic University

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rahimah Embong, UniSZA, Malaysia

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rohaiza Rokis, International Islamic University Malaysia

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sharifah Syahirah Binti Shikh, Kolej Universiti Poly-Tech MARA, Malaysia

Prof. Dr. Abdullahil Ahsan, Istanbul Sehir University, Turkey

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ahmed Alibasic, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina

Prof. Dr. Alparslan Acikgenc, Uskudar University, Turkey

Prof. Dr. Fadzli Adam, UniSZA, Malaysia

Prof. Dr. Syed Farid Alatas, Singapore National University, Singapore

Prof. Dr. Fahimah Ulfat, Tubingen University, Germany

Prof. Dr. James Piscatori, Durham University, United Kingdom

Prof. Dr. Jorgen Nielsen, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Samim Akgonul, Strasbourg University, France

Editorial Correspondence:

Editor, IIUM Journal of Religion and Civilisational Studies (IJRCS)

Research Management Centre, RMC

International Islamic University Malaysia

53100 Gombak Campus

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Tel: (+603) 6421 5002/5010

Fax: (+603) 6421 4862

Website: <http://journals.iium.edu.my/irkh/index.php/ijrcs>

Comments and suggestions to: alwialatas@iium.edu.my

E-ISSN: 2637-112X

Published by:

IIUM Press, International Islamic University Malaysia

P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Phone (+603) 6421-5018/5014, Fax: (+603) 6421-6298

Website: <https://www.iium.edu.my/office/iiumpress>

Papers published in the Journal present the views of the authors
and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Journal.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Editorial | 1 |
| <i>Fauziah Fathil</i> | |
| Articles | |
| In the Middle Kingdom: A Historical Survey on the Arabs and Persians' Ventures in China, 600s–1300s | 4 |
| <i>Aditya Pratama Widodo</i> | |
| Rereading the Biblical Story of Sarah and Hagar: A Note for Interfaith Activists | 21 |
| <i>Fachrizar Halim</i> | |
| The Role of Muwalladun, Mozarabs and Jews in Paving the Way for Coexistence in Andalusia 912 CE- 1110 CE: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of La Convivencia | 32 |
| <i>Muhamad Nor Aiman Bin Mohd Nor Zaidi</i> | |
| Women of Andalusian Court: Kingmakers, Advisors and Regents | 43 |
| <i>Noor Syuhada Binti Shahidan and Nurul Shahirah Binti Majlan</i> | |
| A Historical Look at the Transformation Agenda: Patriarchal Structures, Hegemony and the Fate of Nigerian Women | 54 |
| <i>Dauda I. Jimoh</i> | |
| The Reformation Encounter: Martin Luther's Assessment of Islam and the Turks in the Aftermath of Constantinople's Fall | 71 |
| <i>Abdulwahed Jalal Nori and Sarkawt Tawfeeq Sidiq</i> | |
| Challenges of Online Learning Faced by IIUM Malay Undergraduates during COVID-19: A Case Study | 82 |
| <i>Nur Atiera Binti Yunus and Iyad M. Y. Eid</i> | |

| | |
|---|-----|
| The Challenges of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) in Nigeria: From Environmental Movement to Movement for Self-Determination <i>Adam Umar Musa and Idris Saminu</i> | 97 |
| Islamic Ethics and Liberal Democracy: A Critical Analysis of Mustafa Akyol's Perspectives <i>Mohamed Fouz, Mohamed Zacky and Inaz Ilyas</i> | 114 |
| Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Traditionalism <i>Mehmet Vural</i> | 126 |

Women of Andalusian Court: Kingmakers, Advisors and Regents

Noor Syuhada Binti Shahidan¹, Nurul Shahirah Binti Majlan²

Abstract: This research paper explores the often overlooked yet significant political roles played by women in the Islamic Civilization of *al-Andalus*. Despite the predominance of men in administrative positions, women from the Andalusian court exercised authority as kingmakers, advisors, and, in rare cases, regents. It began by establishing the historical context of *al-Andalus* and the presence of women in politics whilst emphasizing the societal loss resulting from their exclusion in the three main roles examined. Furthermore, the paper addresses how these women wielded political influence, their strategies, and the cultural contexts that shaped their roles. The paper would also briefly explore the challenges and lack of societal recognition faced by the women. Despite limited translated sources, it highlights the importance of studying the political contributions of Andalusian court women for a deeper understanding of Islamic history in Spain.

Keywords: *Al-Andalus*, Andalusian women, Andalusian Court, kingmakers, advisors, regents

Introduction

Like other civilisations, women in the Islamic Civilisation of *al-Andalus* had their fair share of representation and roles in the local societal outlook. After the advent of Islam to *al-Andalus*, local women played significant roles in various aspects of Andalusian society, including the political structure. Despite the predominance of men in *al-Andalus*' political landscape, women were able to assert their influence and make their presence felt in politics.

Through various sources, it is evident that women in *al-Andalus* played political roles, gaining influence and authority in state affairs. While no women ruled any dynasty or kingdom in *al-Andalus*, women of the court played significant roles in the Andalusian politics. From the establishment of the Emirate of Cordoba to the decline of the Nasrids of Granada, various court women played some political roles providing intelligence, advice and support to individuals in power. This aligns with the proverbial phrase, 'a man with dreams needs a woman with a vision'.

¹ Noor Syuhada Binti Shahidan is a Master's candidate in the Department of History and Civilisation, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. She can be reached at hada0604@gmail.com

² Nurul Shahirah Binti Majlan is a Master's candidate in the Department of History and Civilisation, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. She can be reached at shahirah.majlan@live.iium.edu.my

While the literal sense of ‘advice’ and ‘support’ provided by women may have been downplayed as trivial, the political roles played by the women of the Andalusian court not only influenced the fate of the state but also shaped Andalusian political dynamics. This perspective was discussed by Ibn Rushd in his commentaries on Plato's *Republic*. According to Melkebeek (2021), Ibn Rushd shared similar view with that of Plato on women and politics despite the former's critiques against the latter's work. In the translated version of Ibn Rushd's commentary on Plato's *Republic* by Erwin Rosenthal, it is stated that:

... whether women possess natures similar to the natures of every single class of citizens – and in particular the Guardians – or whether the feminine natures are different from the masculine.

If the former is the case, then women are essentially on the same level as men in respect of civic activities in the same classes, so that there are among them warriors, philosophers, rulers, and the like. Otherwise, women are only fitted for such activities in the State as the whole male population is not qualified {to discharge} such as upbringing, procreation and the like. (Rosenthal, 1969, p. 164)

This indicates that, like men, women had the potential for administrative positions and roles. However, Ibn Rushd's statements however, should not be seen in favor of feminism, instead, they underscore the importance of utilising the full spectrum of human potential in the societal structure of a state (Melkebeek, 2021). Hence, disregarding certain human potentials, including women's, could be detrimental to the state.

In the case of *al-Andalus*, certain women had their fair share of political influence and roles in the court. Most commonly, women of the court, as mentioned earlier, were relied upon for their advice and views. However, there were instances where court women had full authority over decision-making in the administration, surpassing the roles and influence of other court members. With that in mind, this article will explore the political roles of Andalusian women in three main capacities: kingmakers, advisors, and regents. The central focus of this article will revolve around the following questions:

- a) How did the women of the Andalusian court exercise their political influence and roles?
- b) How did they manage to gain their influence and roles?

To address these questions, the article will delve into the historical backgrounds of court women through an analysis of various secondary documents. Other than the scarcity of primary sources, the researchers' lack of fluency in the Arabic language has hindered the paper's utilisation of available resources. Thus, secondary sources would be largely used in the paper's discussion. It will be divided into subtopics based on these roles as the main themes of each subtopic. Each role will be explored through in-depth discussions of selected court women, covering their backgrounds and how they assumed their political roles based on the aforementioned themes.

Kingmakers

One of the common political roles of Andalusian court women was that of kingmakers. Typically, a kingmaker's role is understood as the power to ‘make’ an individual into a king or, in a more nuanced explanation, to hold authority over the succession process within a state. However, the role of kingmakers can be somewhat contentious due to the question of the eligibility of these

individuals who wield such power. It has been asserted that "...kingmakers across the globe were not usually eligible for the supreme honor they could confer on others," suggesting that some kingmakers may not have been as reliable as they appeared to be (Duindam, 2016, p. 146). Thus, it can be affirmed that the Andalusian court women were eligible kingmakers.

As kingmakers, women of the court possessed the authority to select the next successor after the death of a king. In some cases, they could transfer power to a new ruler if they deemed the current ruler unfit or unqualified. However, it is worth noting that women of the court also had the opportunity to choose their own sons as the new ruler. This raises the question of whether their actions were driven by self-interest or the view of what was best for the state. Regardless of their motivations, it is undeniable that women as kingmakers played a significant role in shaping the political landscape of *al-Andalus*. To delve deeper into the discussion of women as kingmakers in *al-Andalus*, this article will analyse two specific cases.

Tarub

Tarub was known as one of the favorite wives of 'Abd al-Rahman II (r. 822-852 CE) of the Emirate of Cordoba. Tarub had elevated her status as the emir's favorite and the two wedded soon after. Originally, Tarub was a *jāriyah* or a slave girl brought in as one of the emir's concubines (Mourtada-Sabbah and Gully, 2003). Tarub was described as "...a woman of extraordinary beauty held him (Abd al-Rahman II) in thrall all his life" (Rahman, 2001, p. 109). Due to the emir's deep affection for his favorite wife, Tarub had a tight grip over the emir as well as his court. On one occasion, it was mentioned that:

Once an angry Tarub shut herself in boudoir and would not talk to 'Abd ar-Rahman. Royal messages failed to thaw the haughty beauty. At last, 'Abd ar-Rahman ordered that a pile of gold be placed at the closed door. The magic worked, and the door opened. (Rahman, 2001, p. 572)

The account proves the emir's concern over his favorite wife's outburst and tantrums. Due to the emir's focus on the patronage of arts, he delegated his political duties to Tarub and her Spanish *mawla*, Nasr (Mourtada-Sabbah & Gully, 2003). This resulted in the dominance of both Tarub and Nasr in the administrative affairs of the emirate which many of the members of the court disapproved of and were discontent with. However, it seemed that the emir's favorite wife realised that her influence and authority would not last long. Subsequently, to maintain her power and influence, Tarub had to take a step further by using her son, 'Abd Allah. She persuaded 'Abd al-Rahman to name their son, 'Abd Allah as his successor, and to make sure that she achieved that goal, Tarub had influenced other members of the court, including the ladies-in-waiting, servants, eunuchs and advisors to persuade the emir as well (James, 2009). The question remains: was her son just a tool or was it her way to secure his right to the throne? Was her kingmaker role just a ploy to gain dominance over *al-Andalus*? Nevertheless, she eventually succeeded in making her son the next heir to the Cordoban throne. But was this the perfect ending to the tale of Tarub and her son?

Initially, 'Abd Allah was named as the next successor of 'Abd al-Rahman II (r. 822-852 CE). Yet, while Tarub's beauty and persuasion gained her distinguished status, her lack of patience eventually caused her to fall from grace. To secure her son's throne, Tarub and Nasr had conspired

to assassinate the emir through poison. However, James (2009) had mentioned that the emir was aware of their scheme and when Nasr intended to give him the poison, he ordered the *mawla* to drink it first. Thence, what appeared to be a plot to poison the king turned into the tragic – some might say, comical – end of Nasr by his own hands. It was safe to say that Nasr got a taste of his own medicine. When 'Abd al-Rahman II eventually died in 852, his other son, Muhammad I (r. 852-886 CE) pledged an oath and ascended the throne as the next emir of Cordoba (James, 2009). One might question: if Tarub was patient, would her son become the emir? It was difficult to tell whether 'Abd Allah stood a chance in ascending the throne if his mother had been patient. Yet, it can be implied that while Tarub's hunger for power had motivated her to persuade the emir to name her son the next emir, it was her same trait that destroyed her plan. Nonetheless, her role as kingmaker was significant to analyse.

Aisha al-Hurra

Traditionally, the Nasrid mother queen was known as Aisha al-Hurra or her Spanish name, Aixa, but some sources addressed the mother queen as Fatima due to findings from certain primary sources (Collins & Goodman, 2002). On the other hand, the name '*al-Hurra*' – or in some sources, *La Horra*, was a noble title given to the queen which means 'the Honored' (El-Azhari, 2019). This denoted Aisha's position within the Andalusian court. According to Mourtada-Sabbah and Gully (2003), the queen was also referred to in some Spanish texts as *La Sultana Madre de Boabdil*, which directly meant the sultana, mother of Boabdil. Though little was known about her life before becoming queen due to scarce information, it has been suggested that Aisha was of royal blood and was already part of the Nasrid Dynasty before her marriage to Boabdil's father. As mentioned by Echevarría (2009), she was said to be the daughter of the Nasrid ruler, Muhammad IX El Zurdo (the Left-Handed). This implied that Aisha may have possessed some administrative skills and knowledge due to her childhood within the court. Aisha's royal lineage and status as the daughter of one of the most powerful Nasrid rulers had resulted in her gaining support from the members of the court including an influential faction of Granada known as the Abencerrajes (Echevarría, 2009). This would later be her edge in gaining influence over the court of Granada. Yet, her political presence would not be felt till after many years of her marriage to Abu-I-Hasan (r. 1464-1484 CE).

During the short second reign of Abu Nasr Sa'd, he had arranged the marriage between Aisha al-Hurra and his son, Abu I-Hasan Ali or Muley Hacén. This arrangement was not based on passion but rather, political interest. The marriage was intended to overcome the obstacles to the dynasty's sovereignty during the reign of Sa'd. However, in a twist of events, Sa'd was betrayed and overthrown by his son, Abu I-Hasan (Kennedy, 2014). The cycle would later be repeated when the latter was overthrown by his son, Boabdil. Like his father, Abu I-Hasan must ensure that he gained all the support he could to secure his throne and authority over Granada. It was mentioned, "This marriage brought him a measure of political support as the perceived continuer of his father-in-law's general policies, among these supporters there were no doubt several members of the Abencerraje lines" (Echevarría, 2009, p. 38). Thus, following through with his father's strategy, he utilized his marriage to gain support from the political factions of the court, especially from the Abencerrajes. From this marriage, they had two sons; Muhammad Abu 'Abd Allah (Boabdil) and Yusuf. It seemed that this marriage had also borne potential heirs for the Nasrid throne. However, how long could Abu I-Hasan depend on his wife's influence to maintain his political position? Regardless of how he had greatly benefitted from the marriage, the situation would later take a

drastic turn. While some historians had depicted the later reign of Abu I-Hasan as some form of an epic-romantic tale, some have noted the following events as the turning point in the history of *al-Andalus*.

During a series of catastrophic military expeditions and attacks, Abu I-Hasan had fallen in love and married a Spanish war prisoner by the name of Isabel de Solis – after her conversion to Islam, she had taken the name Zoraya (Mernissi, 2006). According to Hitti (1984), it was depicted that Aisha was jealous of Abu I-Hasan's devotion and infatuation toward his new Spanish wife. Yet, it seemed that 'infatuation' was the least of her concern. As Zoraya's influence over Abu I-Hasan grew, she did not shy away from influencing his decision-making in the court's administrative affairs. Many of Abu I-Hasan's policies had outraged the members of the court as they had affected Granada's economy and the well-being of the people. Yet, situations escalated when Abu I-Hasan, who was persuaded by Zoraya, named one of their sons as his successor (Pamele, 2006). If Zoraya's son, a ruler of Spanish blood, were to ascend the throne, the primary concern would be the possible usurpation of the Spanish into the Nasrid court. In retrospect of the vigorous annexation of the petty Muslim kingdoms into the hands of Christian Spanish kingdoms, the trepidation and paranoia of the members of the court were justified. This had driven them to call for the assistance of Aisha al-Hurra but before Aisha could act, she and her son, Muhammad were imprisoned (Pamele, 2006). Still, the queen did not give in and orchestrated her strategies to overthrow her husband. It was mentioned that "...Ayesha (Aisha) lowered Boabdil in a basket, telling him to come back with an army and assert his rights" (Pamele, 2006, p. 105). This can be viewed as the start of Aisha's kingmaking process for her son. While Boabdil may not be regarded as a strong prince, his mother's advice motivated him to overthrow his aging father. Also, the timing had played out in Aisha's plan as the Nasrids were facing threats from the Christian kingdoms. It seemed that while his Spanish wife may have greatly influenced his decisions in domestic affairs, Abu I-Hasan was on his own in facing the threats of his enemies. As if fighting a war against the Christian kingdom was not enough, he now had to face the army of his son and first wife. This had led to a civil war in 1482 between Abu I-Hasan and Muhammad, with Aisha as his right-hand. In between the internal conflicts, Aisha had transferred the power to the throne from her husband to her son, Muhammad XII or Boabdil (r. 1487-1492 CE) thus, marking the reign of the last ruler of the Nasrids of Granada (Mourtada-Sabbah & Gully, 2003).

While some may perceive Aisha's kingmaking moment as a gesture of jealousy or revenge for the scorned wife, the political means behind her actions outweighed those assumptions. Other than situations before her imprisonment, justifications for her role as kingmaker can also be related to her continuous political role till the end of her son's reign – and the end of the Nasrids of Granada.

Advisors

Apart from their roles as kingmakers, women in the Andalusian court also served as advisors to the rulers. As advisors, these women significantly influenced decision-making and policy development within the court. While they often lacked an official title signifying their position as advisors to the rulers, their opinions sometimes carried more weight than those of other court members. Consequently, women were at times perceived as a threat when they assumed the role of an advisor, as evidenced in the case of Boabdil's mother, Aisha al-Hurra, whose position as her son's confidante

was labeled or described as that of an ‘evil genius’ in some sources (Hitti, 1984). However, the characterization of Aisha as ‘evil’ was perhaps an exaggeration, as it failed to recognize her as a ‘genius’. Furthermore, there were numerous Andalusian court women, aside from Aisha al-Hurra, who showcased their intelligence and sophistication through their roles as political advisors. Therefore, in this section of the article, we will analyze two prominent figures in their roles as political advisors within the court.

Al-Zahra

During the pinnacle of the Emirate of Cordoba, al-Zahra was regarded as one of the most influential women in the court. Other than being the wife of one of the most powerful emirs of Cordoba, she had played a significant role in the political structure of *al-Andalus*.

Despite the popularity of al-Zahra in many of the Andalusian sources, information about her early life was recondite. Al-Zahra, which meant ‘blossom’, was the favorite concubine or, as stated in some sources, wife of ‘Abd al-Rahman III (r. 912-961 CE). As the favorite, al-Zahra had great influence over the emir, thus allowing her role to be extended beyond personal companionship, as she also served as a trusted advisor on political and administrative matters. As stated by Mourtada-Sabbah and Gully (2003), ‘Abd al-Rahman III would consult her in regards to any administrative issues and the emir would act according to her advice. One of the most significant moments of al-Zahra’s influence over the emir was the construction of Madinat al-Zahra. While many sources highlighted the monument as the testament of the emir’s dedication towards his beloved wife, it was mentioned in some sources that al-Zahra had played a role in its construction. Additionally, whilst some have mentioned that ‘Abd al-Rahman III used his fortune to build the city in honor of his favorite wife, others suggested that al-Zahra had used some of her own funding for the project (Sajadian, 1984; Martin, 2012). Yet, to what extent the emir’s favorite had financially contributed to the project was undisclosed. Still, it is most likely that the emir’s fortune may have been used for most of the project’s expenses due to his deep admiration and adulation for his wife. It would be nonsensical if the emir – a person of great wealth and power, would let his wife fund the entire project. Nonetheless, the infamous city of Madinat al-Zahra was built in 926. Named after his wife which in translation means ‘the City of Flowers’, the city was decorated to level with the prestige of his wife (Migeon & Saladin, 2012). The interior of the city was described as following:

The magnificent residence could accommodate the caliph’s court and a guard of 12,000 horsemen. It had a fountain decorated with a golden swan in the caliph’s pavilion. He set up a statue of al-Zahra, his concubine, over the palace’s entrance. (Migeon & Saladin, 2012, p. 33)

While the city was built to demonstrate his love, he also had a lot to gain from the city. It elevated the Emirate of Cordoba into a metropolitan of *al-Andalus*. Also, it paved the inspiration for future architectural monuments not only in *al-Andalus* but also in other parts of the medieval world. Through al-Zahra’s advice, it did not only aid in symbolizing her status as the emir’s favorite, but it also ultimately elevated the status of Cordoba and its architectural standards.

Other than the construction of Madinat al-Zahra, another key moment to be discussed was her role in the undoing of ‘Abd Allah, the son of ‘Abd al-Rahman III. Al-Zahra's loyalty and political acumen were further demonstrated through her intervention in a critical succession crisis. At one point, al-Zahra had got wind of ‘Abd Allah’s plot to assassinate his father and his brother, al-Hakam, who had been chosen the next successor to the throne. Due to her interference, the prince was executed on the emir’s order after he refused to stop with the plan when being confronted (Mourtada-Sabbah & Gully, 2003). This scenario distinguished al-Zahra from other corrupted advisors. As she knew of the prince's treason, she did not act on her own; instead, she let the emir have the final say in punishing his son. This decisive action led to the execution of the rebellious prince, thereby averting a potential crisis and securing the stability of the Caliphate.

Al-Zahra emerged as a powerful and influential figure in the court of Cordoba, wielding considerable influence while demonstrating unwavering loyalty to Abd al-Rahman III. Her advisory role, involvement in significant political events, and the lasting legacy of Madinat al-Zahra all attest to her significant impact on the Emirate of Cordoba. Despite the lack of detailed information about her early life and the ambiguity surrounding her financial contributions to the city, al-Zahra's legacy as a prominent advisor of the caliph in 10th-century *al-Andalus* remains undeniable.

Regent

In Islamic history, the role of regent is quite rare and unfamiliar, particularly due to the common practice of selecting child successors. The idea of a queen mother serving as a regent in early Islamic kingdoms was virtually nonexistent. This however, changed when one of the queens during the Caliphate of Cordoba made history as the first to become a regent for her son.

Subh

The only instance that can be narrated under this subtopic was Subh, the wife of al-Hakam II (r. 916-976 CE). As the women of the Andalusian court, she was well regarded for pushing the boundaries in selecting herself as the regent of her son (r. 976-998 CE) – which was unorthodox in the traditions of Islamic kingdoms. Like other women, Subh had great influence over the court due to her husband's adulation for her beauty and intelligence. Before becoming queen, Subh or Aurora was a Basque slave who climbed the social ladder as the caliph’s concubine and subsequently his wife (Perry et al., 2021).

Subh always had the ambition to secure her son's position as the next caliph. At first, she had hoped for her eldest child, 'Abd al-Rahman, to become the ruler. Unfortunately, this ambition was thwarted as the child died in infancy (Catlos, 2018). It is unclear whether the queen mourned this loss or stayed determined in her pursuit of her goal. Nevertheless, she ultimately accomplished what she sought for with her second child. After the death of al-Hakam II, his 9-year-old son, Hisham II, became the ruler, and Subh was chosen as his regent (Mourtada-Sabbah & Gully, 2003). Amidst this crucial period of power transfer, a new individual surfaced in the political arena, referred to as Ibn Abi Amir, who would eventually assume the name Almanzor. He strategically

used his intelligence and charisma to enter the political arena, which helped him to earn a position in Cordoba's administrative apparatus and gain the attention of Vizier Al-Mushafi (Barry, 2018). Consequently, he took on the post of Subh's secretary, which marked his first entry into a position of considerable power in the realm of palace politics. In the complex web of political manipulation, there were numerous rumors and guesses regarding his personal relationship with Subh. He continued to rise through a series of assignments, including a crucial position managing the distribution of funds for a military expedition.

With the backing of Ibn Abi Amir and Al-Mushtafi, Subh took steps to strengthen the assurance of her son's rightful claim to the throne. In Andalusian tradition, the transfer of power or succession was usually given to the eldest, known as *al-arshad*. Therefore, the original heir to the throne was Al-Hakam's brother, Al-Mughira, rather than his son (Mourtada-Sabbah & Gully, 2003). In order to prevent this, Subh and her accomplices, namely Ibn Abi Amir and Al-Mushafi, devised a plot to eliminate the danger. Both the men and their army had then confronted Al-Mughira at his residence. Despite Al-Mughira's disavowal of any interest towards the throne, he was strangled to death, thus leaving Subh's son as the only living heir to the throne (Barry, 2018). The nine-year-old Hisham II (r. 976-1008 CE) was declared as Caliph and the ceremony, which took place the next day, had been led by Al-Mushtafi (Barry, 2018).

With her son's ascension, Subh acquired the ability to exert her influence through her son's regency. On a water foundation in Écija, Subh had been mentioned in the plaque of the inscription as the queen-mother of his caliph son (*sayyida al-walada umm amir al-mu'minin*) (Martin, 2012). This signified the Andalusian society's acknowledgment of Subh's position as queen-mother or regent. According to Martin (2012), the title '*sayyida*' would later be used for other queen-mothers or regents after the 10th century. Hisham II may assume the title of Caliph but the true controller of the state's affairs would be his mother. In her reign of regency, Subh had also ensured to be surrounded by her closest allies. Due to their alliance – ultimately their main role in al-Mughira's demise – al-Mushafi and Ibn Abi Amir had climbed into the court's high ranks being elected as *hajib* (chief minister) and the state's counselor respectively (O'Callaghan, 1975). On the other hand, Subh had taken more drastic measures to ensure her total control over the Caliphate. As such, the mother queen had taken it upon herself to tutor the boy and following Ibn Abi Amir's advice, the boy was confined within the palace grounds of Alcázar (Mourtada-Sabbah & Gully, 2003; Barry, 2018). Yet, was her plan successful? Even as it seemed that Subh's vision of gaining control was fulfilled, the ambitious queen failed to anticipate any long-term possibilities or problems of her plans. Most significantly, Subh's trust in her closest allies would cost her fate in the Andalusian court.

Subsequently, Ibn Abi Amir's influence and control gradually increased. After deposing al-Mushtafi, he assumed the role of *hajib* (Mernissi, 2006). With al-Mushtafi no longer in the picture, Ibn Abi Amir became the queen's closest and most trusted ally, which further solidified his access to and influence over the state's decision-making. It took over twenty years for Subh to be aware of Ibn Abi Amir's true intentions but by that time, it was a little too late. In her last resort, Subh tried to recruit other officials to rival Ibn Abi Amir but this proved to be fruitless as his influence was too powerful for her to topple (Mernissi, 2006). In 997, Subh's regency met its eventual end as Ibn Abi Amir consolidated his power. He was later famously known as Almanzor from his self-proclaimed title, *al-Manşūr bi-Allah* which meant 'made victorious for God' and he continued to

control the Caliphate until his death (Barry, 2018). Though still holding the title as caliph, Subh's son remained powerless and remained to be confined by Ibn Abi Amir.

Though her control subsequently ended by her own ally, Subh's failure was not due to her lack of intelligence but simply due to the regular norms of politics. As such, in every political game, there would be a winner and a loser. Subh, who had her fair chance of winning, lost the game in her battle against Ibn Abi Amir. Even so, her ability and intelligence had resulted in the expansion of the Caliphate's sovereignty and domains. She was able to identify the strengths and potential through alliances to strengthen the state's position under her regency. Yet, like many other successful historical events, betrayal and over-dominance ended of the regent's influence.

Conclusion

The participation of women in the Islamic Civilization of *al-Andalus*, particularly in politics as influential figures who played key roles in selecting kings, providing counsel, and acting as regents, was remarkable and captivating. These women challenged traditional standards and made a significant impact on the political sphere of their era. Women such as Aisha al-Hurra and Tarub, who held the power to determine the next ruler, exerted substantial influence in the process of succession, underscoring their strategic importance in defining the future of their dynasties. Their acts and decisions had significant and wide-ranging implications, indicating that they were not passive observers in political matters. In addition, women like al-Zahra showed their intelligence and sagacity as counselors, providing guidance to kings in navigating intricate administrative and military obstacles. Their counsel frequently surpassed that of other court members, emphasizing their crucial involvement in shaping policy and decision-making. One of the most revolutionary roles performed by a woman in *al-Andalus* was that of a regent, as demonstrated by Subh's extraordinary rise to power as the regent for her son. Subh's adeptness at maneuvering through the intricate political terrain of the day defies conventional expectations and demonstrates her unwavering resolve to ensure her son's ascension to power.

Essentially, the women of *al-Andalus* challenged and surpassed cultural standards and expectations by actively engaging in politics, thereby making a lasting impact on the history of this exceptional culture. Their contributions warrant acknowledgment and deeper investigation as integral components of *al-Andalus'* intricate historical fabric. Although certain instances have characterized these women as malevolent or opportunistic, it is crucial not to overlook their roles and the impact they had on the Andalusian court. The various positions and levels of participation of these women, whether as power brokers, counselors, or temporary rulers, had a significant impact on the political landscape of *al-Andalus*. Their actions demonstrated their intellect, sway and ability to overcome obstacles, thereby challenging traditional beliefs about the limited role of women in politics. The study of the political influence of Andalusian court women was crucial in understanding the history of Islamic Spain, regardless of the specific conclusions of the study. An obstacle that researchers may have when investigating this subject is the absence of translated sources. Nevertheless, with the increasing body of literature on the historical context of Islamic Spain, it is probable that the examination of women in *al-Andalus* will also experience future growth.

References

- Abun-Nasr, J. M. (Ed.). (1993). *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- El-Azhari, T. (2019). *Queens, Eunuchs and Concubines in Islamic History, 661-1257*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd.
- Barry, M. B. (2016). *Homage to Al-Andalus: The rise and fall of Islamic Spain*. Dublin: Andalus Press.
- Bennison, A. K. (2016). *Almoravid and Almohad Empires*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Catlos, B. A. (2018). *Kingdoms of Faith: A New History of Islamic Spain*. London: Hurst & Company.
- Collins, R., & Goodman, A. (Eds.). (2002). *Medieval Spain: Culture, Conflict and Coexistence*. Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.
- Duindam, J. (2016). *Dynasties: A Global History of Power, 1300-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Echevarría, A. (2009). *Knights on the Frontier: The Moorish Guard of the Kings of Castile (1410-1467)* (M. Beagles, Trans.). Leiden & Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV. (Original work published 2006)
- Hitti, P. K. (1984). *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (10th ed.). Hampshire & London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd.
- James, D. (2009). *Early Islamic Spain: The History of Ibn al-Qutiya*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Kennedy, H. (2014). *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Martin, T. (Ed.). (2012). *Reassessing the Roles of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture (Volume 1)*. Leiden & Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV.
- Melkebeek, T. (2021). The Medieval Islamic Commentary on Plato's Republic: Ibn Rushd's Perspective on the Position and Potential of Women. *Islamology* 11(1), pp. 9-23. Doi: 10.24848/ismlg.11.1.02.
- Mernissi, F. (2006). *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (M. J. Lakeland, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1990)
- Migeon, G. & Saladin, H. (2012). *Art of Islam*. New York: Parkstone Press International.
- Mourtada-Sabbah, N. & Gully, A. (2003). 'I am, by God, Fit for High Positions': On the Political Role of Women in al-Andalus. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 30(2), pp. 183-209. Doi: 10.1080/1353019032000126527.
- O'Callaghan, J. F. (1975). *A History of Medieval Spain*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Pamele, M. P. (2006). *A Short History of Spain*. New York: Cosimo, Inc.

Perry, C., Eltis, D., Engerman, S. L., & Richardson, D. (Eds.). (2021). *The Cambridge World History of Slavery: Volume 2, 500 AD-1420 AD*. New York: Cambridge University of Press.

Rosenthal, E. I. J. (1969). *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's Republic*. London & New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sajadian, M. (1984). *Madinat Al-Zahra and its Sculptural Décor*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Syed Azizur Rahman. (2001). *The Story of Islamic Spain*. New Delhi: Goodwork Books.