



**Eric Calderwood.- *On Earth or in Poems: The Many Lives of al-Andalus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023), 345p.**

Calderwood's 2023 monograph, *On Earth or in Poems: The Many Lives of al-Andalus*, offers an original and insightful study of how medieval Muslim Spain or al-Andalus continues to signify in multiple ways for modern scholars and artists and their audiences. The use of various methodological approaches, from historical and literary criticism to critical responses to artistic sources such as film, television, and music, allows Calderwood to imagine new ways of approaching discourses of the Spanish past and contemporary Arabic society. While in his first book, *The Legacy of al-Andalus*, Calderwood examined al-Andalus and the related idea of *convivencia* in the context of Spanish colonialism in Morocco, in this study Calderwood goes in a new and fascinating direction, analyzing how the notion of al-Andalus itself is adopted and transformed by modern authors, artists and communities who seek to express something about the contemporary world and their place in it. Calderwood examines in the book's five chapters a series of texts (literary, filmic and musical), examining how authors and communities position themselves and are positioned in turn by the al-Andalus they have selected. Calderwood grounds his work in original readings of poetry, film, and performances from the Arab world, as well as in the work of other scholars, such as Rachel Scott, AbdoolKarim Vakil, Jonathan Shannon, Christina Civantos, and José Antonio González Alcantud, who deal in various ways with the cultural legacy of al-Andalus in the modern world.

In the opening chapters, Calderwood examines how the notion of al-Andalus is reimagined as a lynch pin in key ethno-nationalist narratives in the Arab (Levantine and Moroccan) world. In the fascinating first chapter Calderwood focuses on the ways in which modern Arab thinkers and artists have celebrated the Arabness of Spain. He frames al-Andalus as imagined in the works of the modern Syrian singer Fayruz, the Egypt-based Jurji Zaydan, and several contemporary Ramadan miniseries as the result of nineteenth-century European Orientalism, its reception in the Arab-world, and the emergence of modern pan-Arab nationalism. Chapter two explores a reaction against the Arabized al-Andalus explored in the first chapter. Calderwood here turns to a series of texts that offer a Berberized version of Andalusian history that centers on a long history of exchange between Spain and North Africa that predates the Arab history of Muslim Spain founded by the Umayyads in the eighth century, and in which ethnic Berbers such as the Sanhaja and Zirids are central actors. This "Berberized" version of Andalusian history includes some of its most important periods, including the Almoravid and Almohad Berber empires. Calderwood shows

how this Berberized version of al-Andalus has its roots in Moroccan nationalist thought of the 1930s and in Berber nationalist/cultural movements in Europe and North Africa that seek to make Berber contributions visible in the wake of colonial and Orientalizing forces that imagine Berbers and Arabs as distinct races. Calderwood examines, along with modern Amazigh histories, political manifestos and historical novels, an important Berber exhibit at the Alhambra in Granada as well as the 2006 comedic film, *Abdu in the Time of the Almohads*, which, à la *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, invites modern (Moroccan) viewers to question contemporary attempts to reclaim the Almohad dynasty for the twenty-first-century Moroccan nation. This chapter is an important intervention that brings art and culture into dialogue with the arguments of historians such as Ramzi Roughi concerning the role and nature of Berbers in the larger discourses of North African and Iberian history and culture.

In the third chapter Calderwood turns toward an examination of how certain figures from al-Andalus such as the Umayyad princess Wallada of the taifa of Córdoba become premodern Muslim models for modern women and feminist scholars. Calderwood shows how Andalusí figures such as Wallada have become part of what makes al-Andalus “productive for feminist projects in the Middle East and North Africa” by providing an “indigenous or ‘authentic’ Arab or Muslim feminism” (110). Calderwood brings several Arab feminist voices to bear on this topic, including the Egyptians Zaynab Fawwaz and Radwa Ashour, the Lebanese poet Warda al-Yaziji, the Syrian author Salma al-Haffar, Fatema Mernissi, as well as the voices of a new generation of North African feminists and “cyberactivists” that have recovered Wallada and al-Andalus as a way to articulate their ideals.

In chapter four, Calderwood explores how Palestinian poets and Israeli publishers and musicians evoke the potential of al-Andalus as a model of political coexistence or hope for modern Palestinians and Israelis. Palestinian journalists and authors evoked al-Andalus in the 1930s and 40s (under the British Mandate) to explicitly compare their fate to those of the Muslims of Spain. Calderwood examines how Palestinians have used the notion of al-Andalus to reflect several temporal modalities, from nostalgic past, tragic present, to a possible (positive) future. Calderwood focuses, among others, on the poet Mahmud Darwish and his notion of the “Andalous of the possible” (159), i.e. the idea that Palestine could continue to exist and be the spiritual home of its people. Calderwood also analyzes how al-Andalus is significant for Israeli scholars and musicians, focusing on the creation of the Hebrew-language Andalusí Publishing house and Israeli Andalusian Orchestra founded by Moroccan immigrants to Israel.

In the final chapter, Calderwood looks at what modern musicians and other artists are attempting to do when they use al-Andalus, exploring particularly the creative performative potential of al-Andalus for North African and Spanish musicians. He offers several examples, noting that in many cases claims of al-Andalus are used by groups that bring together North African and European

musicians, particularly Spanish-Moroccan, that play a variety of styles of music, from flamenco and North African orchestral music to rap. The final section focuses on hip-hop artists who use al-Andalus in framing their experiences as Moroccan immigrants in Spain.

In the study's epilogue Calderwood pivots to Illinois and to a local mosque whose architecture evokes the Great Mosque of Cordoba. Through a comparison of the debate between Church and civil society over ownership of the Great Mosque he returns to the central questions of the book, namely, who "owns" al-Andalus, i.e. who has the right to its stories and who gets/chooses to tell them. This brief but powerful epilogue returns to some of the themes of Calderwood's previous studies (for example, "The Reconquista of the Mosque of Córdoba" *Foreign Policy* 2015), but which are framed here in new ways and put into dialogue with the many voices and case studies in the preceding chapters.

This study will take a prominent position among scholarship on the legacy of al-Andalus in the modern world (for example, the work of Christina Civantos), the historiography of Iberia and Muslim Spain (for example, the work of Aljandro García-Sanjuán), as well as the history of Spanish and Arabic literature, where I know its impact will be significant. As in his other studies, the variety of sources, from the canonical to the novel and lesser known, across a wide range of types or modes – from newspaper articles, scholarly editions of medieval texts, political speeches from colonial archives to contemporary t.v. miniseries or hip-hop songs in a variety of languages, from colloquial Moroccan, *Fuṣḥā*, or Shami to Spanish, Catalan or English – offers scholars a glimpse of how civil society, political elites, artists, and scholars move in the same cultural systems and speak to each other in ways that are often hard to recover or even be aware of, and that are very difficult to capture after the fact. The choice of venue for this monograph, Harvard University Press, in addition to being an academic press of the highest quality, ensures the dissemination of the work to scholars and libraries worldwide.

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