

Solidarity (*ʿAṣabiyyah*), Luxury (*Taraf*), and Subjugation (*al-Ummah al-Maghlūbah*): A Khaldūnian Interpretation of Nasrid Granada

*Dr Ghadi Amer*¹

Introduction: Umayyad *ʿAṣabiyyah* and the Foundation of al-Andalus

Al-Andalus endures as one of history's most compelling laboratories for the political theories of Ibn Khaldūn. Few civilizations have traced, with such architectural precision and documentary richness, the full arc that his

1 This study synthesizes and expands upon several works produced by the author between 2020 and 2024; it builds upon research from the Master's degree *Máster Universitario en Tutela de Patrimonio Histórico-Artístico: El legado de al-Ándalus* regarding Alhambra inscriptions and incorporates findings from an internship at the *Laboratorio de Arqueología y Arquitectura de la Ciudad (EEA-CSIC)*. The analysis of the mural paintings in the *Sala de Los Reyes* was conducted under the supervision of archaeologist Jesús Bermúdez of the *Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife*. Additionally, the study integrates an article presented at the International Congress of Spanish History (University of Warsaw, May 2023) and the podcast episode "The Paintings of the Hall of Kings at the Alhambra, Spain" (September 2024), produced for Multicultural Middle Ages and sponsored by the Medieval Academy of America and the University of Notre Dame (available at: <https://www.multiculturalmiddleages.com/post/the-paintings-of-the-hall-of-kings-at-alhambra-spain-amer>). This synthesis provides a nuanced Khaldūnian interpretation of the decline of the Nasrid Kingdom leading up to 1492.

al-Muqaddima identifies as universal: the consolidation of royal authority (*mulk*) through group solidarity (*‘aṣabiyyah*), its gradual erosion through sedentary luxury (*ṭaraf*), and the ultimate subjugation of the defeated, who betray their own diminishment by imitating the conqueror’s customs (*iqtidā’*). That trajectory begins not in Iberia but in the Arabian Peninsula – in the rivalry between the *Banū Hāshim* and the *Banū Umayya*, two branches of the *Quraysh* whose contest for the caliphate shaped the collective memory of the Muslim community for centuries (Fig. 1). This foundational antagonism received systematic examination from Ibn Khaldūn’s own student, the Egyptian historian al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442), in his *Kitāb al-Nizā‘ wa al-Takhāṣum fīmā bayna Banī Umayya wa Banī Hāshim*², which documents the grievances and claims of both parties without advocating for either.³

The *Abbasid* revolution of 747–750 CE – which culminated in the massacre of the Umayyad ruling house – forced the surviving prince ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I, *Ṣaqr Quraysh*, across North Africa and into the westernmost frontier of the Islamic world. It was precisely the *‘aṣabiyyah* forged in that persecution and exile that furnished him with the political will to establish the Umayyad Emirate of Córdoba: not a new beginning, but a reaction – an Umayyad answer to Abbasid dominance, transplanted to the banks of the Guadalquivir⁴. Al-Andalus itself can thus be understood as the historical outcome of this inter-dynastic conflict: an Umayyad state established not in the heartlands of Islam, but on its western frontier, through the *‘aṣabiyyah* forged in dispossession. Seven centuries later, that same civilizational energy – transformed, refined, and finally exhausted – found its terminal expression in the Nasrid palatine city of the Alhambra. As Bernard Vincent has observed, the year 897/1492

2 al-Maqrīzī “منع بجي ملو لؤسلا محضو” (posed the question and did not answer it), instead compiling evidence of the violence inflicted upon the Prophet’s family by both Umayyads and Abbasids, leaving judgment to the reader. Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Nizā‘ wa al-Takhāṣum fīmā bayna Banī Umayya wa Banī Hāshim*, ed. Ḥusayn Mu’nis, Dhakhā’ir al-‘Arab 62 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, n.d.), 5.

3 Luis F. Bernabé-Pons, “The Last Muslim Inhabitants of a Newly-Christianized Granada: Mudejars and Moriscos,” in *A Companion to Islamic Granada*, ed. Bárbara Boloix-Gallardo (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 231.

4 For further reading on this topic, consult: Ibn al-Athir, *Al-Kamil fī al-Tarikh* (*The Complete History*), ed. Abi al-Fidā’ ‘Abd Allāh al-Qāḍī, 11 vols. (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1987); al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk* (*History of the Prophets and Kings*), ed. Muhammad Abu al-Fadl Ibrahim, 10 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma‘ārif, 1960–1969); and al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Nizā‘ wa al-Takhāṣum fīmā bayna Banī Umayya wa Banī Hashim* (*The Dispute and Contention Between the Umayyads and the Hashimites*), ed. Husayn Mu’nis, Dhakhā’ir al-‘Arab 62 (Cairo: Dar al-Ma‘ārif, n.d.).

stands as a profoundly symbolic date, and one that Ibn Khaldūn’s framework, elaborated from within Granada’s last chapter, had already made theoretically legible.⁵ It is through his concepts that we can analyse not only the rise and fall of these polities, but the complex iconographic programmes their reigns produced – programmes that found their most exquisite expression in the palaces of the last Islamic dynasty of al-Andalus.

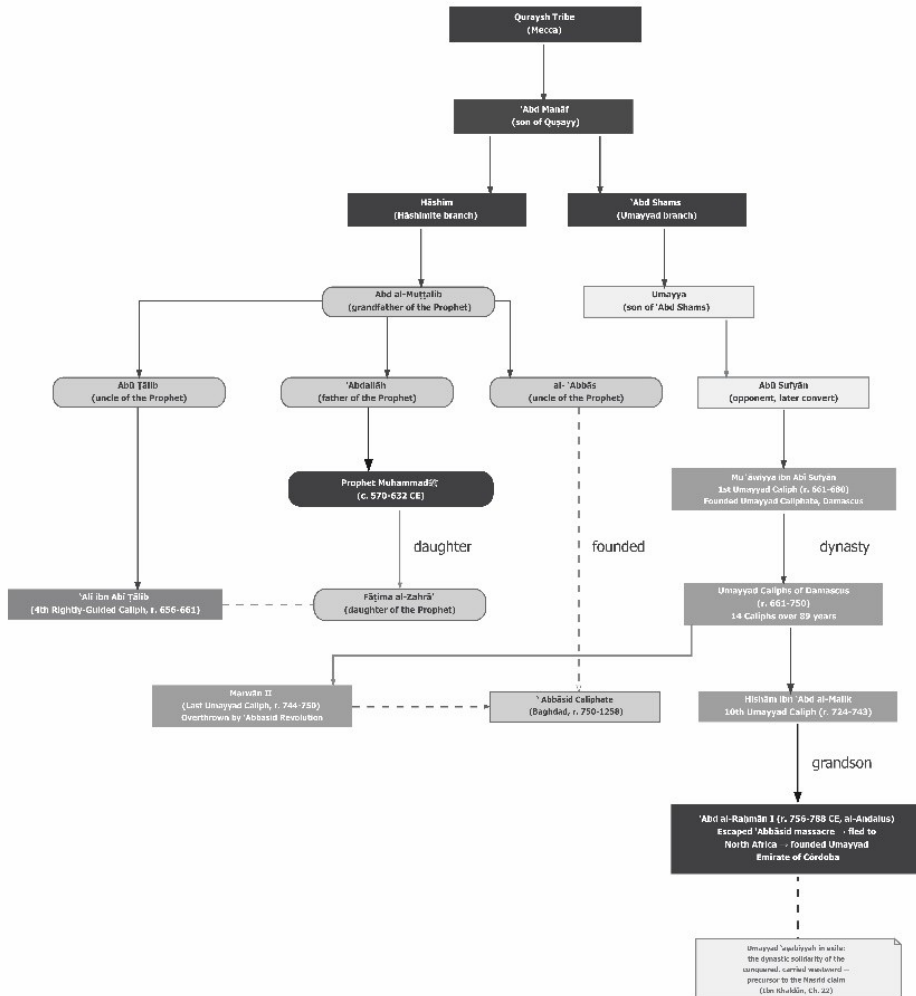


Figure 1. Genealogy of the *Quraysh*: The *Hāshimite* and *Umayyad*

- 5 Bernard Vincent, “1492: From Islamic to Christian Granada,” in *A Companion to Islamic Granada*, ed. Bárbara Boloix-Gallardo (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 164–184; al-Maqrizi, *Kitab al-Nizaʿ wa al-Takhāsum*, 4.

Clans and the Transition of *ʿAṣabiyyah* to al-Andalus. Digital illustration by the author.

Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) and al-Andalus

Ibn Khaldūn's connection to al-Andalus was biographical, intellectual, and diplomatic. He maintained an intense correspondence with Ibn al-Khaṭīb and Ibn Zamrak – the two most powerful figures of Muḥammad V's chancellery – letters preserved in his autobiography (*al-Taʾrīf*) that reveal mutual esteem and intellectual kinship.⁶ In late 1364 he was dispatched by Muḥammad V on a diplomatic mission to Pedro I of Castile in Seville: “*My commission was to ratify the peace-treaty between him and the kings of Muslim Spain. I took along precious gifts: silk cloths and full-blooded horses with heavy golden harness.*”⁷ This embassy placed him at the precise intersection of the forces he theorized – Christian *ʿaṣabiyyah* ascending and Nasrid *ʿaṣabiyyah* dissolving – in real time. The sultan subsequently arranged for Ibn Khaldūn's family to be brought from exile in Constantine to Almería; a letter from the sultan (written on Muḥammad V's behalf by Ibn al-Khaṭīb himself) survives, acknowledging Ibn Khaldūn's critique of court policy and recommending caution when he considered returning to Bijāya.⁸ His treatment of Iberian history in the *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* spans over 200 pages in its critical edition (vol. 7, pp. 369–580), covering Islamic al-Andalus from the conquest to the Nasrid dynasty and the Christian kingdoms from Pelayo to Enrique III.⁹ His presence at the Nasrid court, his correspondence with its people of the pen (scribes, poets, and administrators), and his diplomatic experience of the Christian frontier collectively ground his theoretical framework not in abstraction but in observed political reality.

The following table maps the core Khaldūnian concepts against their sources in *al-Muqaddima* and their Nasrid manifestations.

6 Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Taʾrīf bi-Ibn Khaldun wa-rihlatihi gharban wa-sharqan*, ed. Muhammad ibn Tawit al-Tanji (Cairo: Lajnat al-Taʾif wa-al-Tarjama wa-al-Nashr, 1951), 224–231.

7 Ibid., 241–243.

8 Ibid., 232–236.

9 Ibn Khaldun, *Kitāb al-ʿIbar, wa-Diwan al-Mubtadaʾ wa-l-Khabar*, 14 vols. (Tunis, 2006–2013), vol. 7, 369–580.

Concept (Arabic Transliteration)	English trans	<i>Al-Muqaddima</i> ¹⁰ : Reference	Nasrid Application
الأمة المغلوبة (‘ <i>Al-Ummah al-Maghlūbah</i>)	The conquered nation	<i>Al-Muqaddima</i> , Ch. 24 ¹¹	The Nasrid Kingdom’s final decades exemplify this theory: after becoming tributaries to Castile, Granada suffered economic dependency and political subservience.
عصبية الغالب (‘ <i>Aṣabiyyat al-Ghālib</i>) ¹²	The conqueror’s group cohesion	<i>Al-Muqaddima</i> , Ch. 17, 22 ¹³	Unlike the Nasrids, who dissolved into luxury within the Alhambra, the northern Christian kingdoms (Castile, Aragon, León) maintained their martial ‘ <i>aṣabiyyah</i> through centuries of Reconquista warfare.

10 Note on editions: The *Muqaddima* is organized into chapters (*fuṣūl*), each bearing a title reflecting its specific theme. It constitutes the first book (*al-kitāb al-awwal*) of Ibn Khaldūn’s larger historical work, *Kitāb al-‘Ibar, wa-Dīwān al-Mubtada’ wa-l-Ḥabar* (The Book of Lessons and the Record of Beginnings and Events). Given the variance in pagination across printed editions, this study primarily utilizes Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddima* (Amman: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyya, 2009). This edition has been cross-referenced with Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddima* (Būlāq: Dār al-Ṭibā’a al-‘Āmira, 1857), supervised by Naṣr al-Hūrīnī; and Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddima*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām al-Shaddādī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 2006). Where page references are provided, they correspond to the 2009 Amman edition; however, readers may locate cited passages across other versions via the consistent chapter titles (*‘unwān al-faṣl*). Comparative reference was also made to Ibn Khaldūn, *Les Prolégomènes d’Ibn Khaldoun*, trans. William MacGuckin de Slane, 3 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1862–1868). The Arabic quotations from *Al-Muqaddimah* are drawn from the Amman edition (2009) with English translations by the author unless otherwise indicated.

11 Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima*, 77.

12 A different application of ‘*aṣabiyyah* is as follows.: While the Nasrids experienced the erosion of their group cohesion, the Catholic kingdoms of northern Iberia exemplify ‘*aṣabiyyah* in its ascendant phase. Their shared religious identity as Catholics, reinforced by centuries of Reconquista warfare, provided an ideological foundation for group cohesion that transcended individual dynasties. Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile united the two strongest Christian kingdoms through marriage (1469), consolidating their ‘*aṣabiyyah* at the precise moment the Nasrid court fragmented. Their belief in reclaiming *al-Andalus* for Christendom functioned as a bond stronger than tribe, fulfilling Ibn Khaldūn’s principle that kingship passes to the group that preserves its cohesion while the previous rulers dissolve in luxury (see *al-Muqaddimah*, ch. 2; Amman 2009, 73–76).

13 Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima*, chs. 17 and 22.

Concept (Arabic Transliteration)	English trans	<i>Al-Muqaddima</i> ¹⁰ : Reference	Nasrid Application
الترف (<i>taraf</i>)	Luxury / opulence	<i>Al-Muqaddima</i> , Ch. 11, 13, 18 ¹⁴	The Alhambra embodies Khaldūn's description of a dynasty that has transcended the necessities of life.
اقتداء (<i>iqtidāʿ</i>)	Imitation / emulation	<i>Al-Muqaddima</i> , Ch. 23 ¹⁵	Nasrid imitation of Christians: figurative paintings of the Sala de los Reyes depicting chivalric scenes with Christian knights; adoption of Gothic decorative elements in Nasrid architecture.
أهل القلم (<i>Ahl- al qalam</i>)	People of the pen (scribes, poets, administrators)	<i>Al-Muqaddima</i> , Ch. 25 ¹⁶	Early stage (sword dominant): Muḥammad I Ibn al-Aḥmar (1238–1273) conquers Granada through military force; early construction focuses on the Alcazaba.

Ahl al-Qalam and the Inscriptional Programme of the Alhambra

“اعلم أن السيف والقلم كلاهما آلة لصاحب الدولة يستعين بهما على أمره، إلا أن الحاجة في أول الدولة إلى السيف ما دام أهلها في تمهيد أمرهم أشد من الحاجة إلى القلم؛ لأن القلم في تلك الحال خادم فقط منفذ للحكم السلطاني والسيف شريك في المعونة.”¹⁷

In chapter 25 of the *Muqaddima*, titled “On the disparity between the ranks of the sword and the pen in states” (*Fī at-tafāwut bayna marātib as-sayf wa al-qalam fī ad-duwal*), Ibn Khaldūn articulates the theory of dynastic development that most directly illuminates the Nasrid investment in epigraphic poetry. At the state's founding, the sword predominates; the *qalam* serves merely as executor of sultanic orders. As rule stabilizes, “the people of the *Qalam* become more influential, of higher rank, and enjoy greater wealth and honour. They sit closer to the sultan... ministers and men of the sword become

14 Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima*, chs. 11, 13, and 18.

15 Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima*, ch. 23, 77.

16 Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima*, ch. 25, 130.

17 Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima*, 129.

dispensable and are kept distant from the inner circle of the sultan, fearing for their lives.”¹⁸

Three poets of the Nasrid Royal Chancellery (*Dīwān al-Inshāʿ*) embody this theory with documentary precision. Ibn al-Jayyāb (1274–1349) served as head of the Office of Redaction across six reigns and was the first to systematize the Alhambra’s inscriptional series, deploying the full vocabulary of nuptial, astral, and paradisiacal metaphors that would constitute the palace’s symbolic programme. Ibn al-Khaṭīb (1313–ca. 1374) was the most distinguished intellectual figure of the entire Nasrid period – simultaneously vizier, historian, philosopher, physician, and Sufi theorist – and author of the *Iḥāṭa*, the foundational history of Nasrid Granada, in which he defined the Alhambra as “a bride sweetened by rain, adorning the hill and courting the stars” Ibn Zamrak (1333–ca. 1393) is the author of all ten aulic poems of the Two Sisters Room (*sala de Dos Hermanas*) (Fig. 2), the *Mirador de Lindaraja* (Fig. 3), and the 12-verse poem of the *Fuente de Los Leones* (Fig. 4) – whose verses still speak from the Alhambra’s walls today while the military commanders of Muḥammad V’s reign are largely forgotten.¹⁹

18 Ibid., 130.

19 José Miguel Puerta Vilchez, *Leer la Alhambra: Guía visual del Monumento a través de sus inscripciones* (Granada: Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife / Edilux, 2010), 45–62; Emilio García Gómez, *Ibn Zamrak: El poeta de la Alhambra* (Granada: Patronato de la Alhambra, 1975), 30–45.

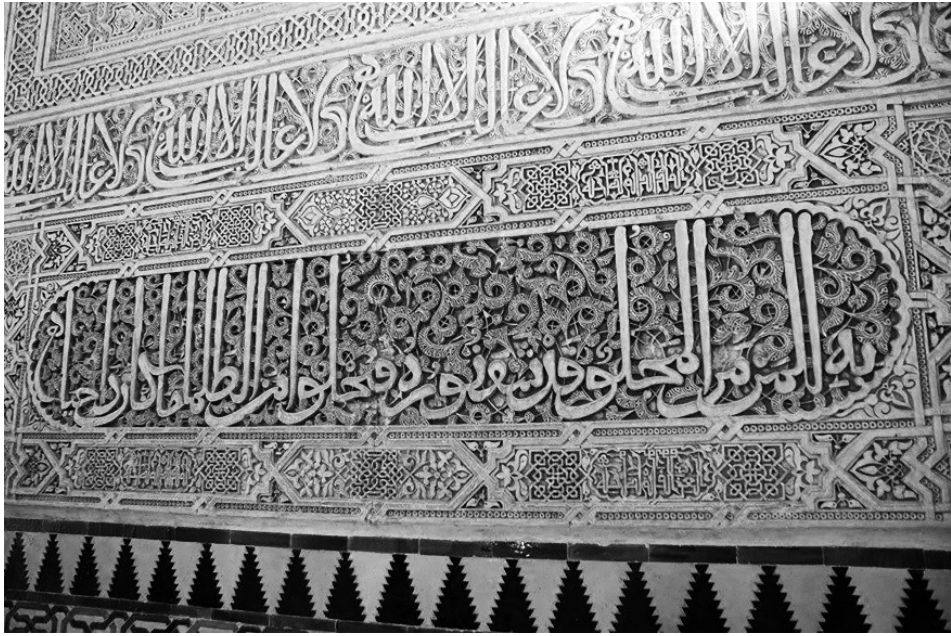


Figure 2. Poetic programme of Ibn Zamrak, *Sala de las Dos Hermanas*, Alhambra.

أَنَا الرُّوضُ قَدْ أَصْبَحْتُ بِالْحُسْنِ حَالِيَا .. تَأَمَّلْ جَمَالِي تَسْتَفِدْ شَرْحَ حَالِيَا
 وَيَا حَبْدًا "مُحَمَّدٌ" وَهُوَ مَفْخَرِي .. وَأَشْرَفُ مَنْ قَدْ كَانَ أَوْ هُوَ آتِيَا
 بَنَى لِي مَقَامًا وَهُوَ فِي الرَّفْعِ غَابِيَةٌ .. يُقَصِّرُ عَنْهُ مَنْ عَدَا مُتَعَالِيَا
 فَكَمْ فِيهِ لِلْعَيْنَيْنِ مِنْ مُتَنَزِّهِ .. يُجَدِّدُ فِيهِ الْحُرْمَا كَانَ مَمْنِيَا

Translation: "I am the garden, dressed in beauty; gaze upon my splendour and you shall know my heart. How excellent is Muḥammad, my source of pride – the most noble of those who passed and those to come. He raised for me a monument of such height that even the most ambitious fall short of its reach. How many delights are here for the eyes, where the noble spirit finds its longings renewed."

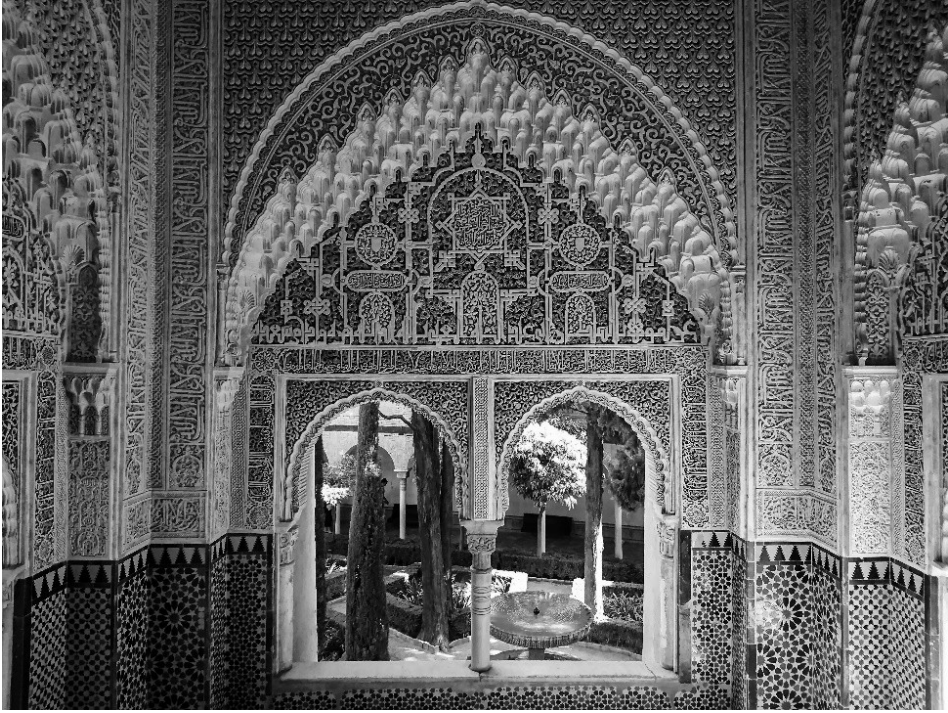


Figure 3. Detail of the poetic inscriptions by Ibn Zamrak at the *Mirador de Lindaraja*.

أَلَا مَجْرَطَانِلِلْ فُشْكَتِ دَّجْلِب .. أَلْأَقِصِ نَوِيْعِلِلْ وَدَبَتِ دَّجْلِ أَنْ
 أَلْأَوْنَ كِلِمْلِ أُوْرِيْحَتِمْ أَخْرَنْم .. تَلِفْحِ دَّعَنْصَنْم هُوْطَاوْشِ رَحَبْ

Translation: “I am a pool that appears to the sight as a polished surface, a deep sea that reveals beauty to the observer. A sea whose shores are of elaborate workmanship, carved from marble chosen by the King as a bounty. The water flows through it like liquid pearls, pouring over a stone base crafted with precision. The water cloaks me at times like a robe, and then I strip away that grandeur. You see me and you see the pouring streams at my edges like ice that has begun to melt. When the water swells over us, we become like a sky adorned with pearls.”



Figure 4. Close-up of the poetic programme of Ibn Zamrak, *Fuente de los Leones*.
Photograph by the author, December 2020.

تَبَارَكَ مَنْ أَعْطَى الْإِمَامَ مُحَمَّدًا .. مَغَانِي زَانَتْ حُسْنَهَا الثَّمَائِلُ
أَفِي هَذَا الرُّوضِ الْبَدِيعِ عَجَائِبٌ .. لَأَوْصَافِهَا اللَّهُ الْبَدِيعُ يُطِيلُ

Translation: “Blessed is He who granted the Imam Muḥammad mansions that excel in beauty. In this wonderful garden, are there not marvels whose descriptions God, the Creator, makes eternal? Like molten silver flowing among jewels, it charms with its purity and fluidity; the running water resembles the solid ice, such that we know not which of them is truly flowing.”

The *Fachada de Comares* poem – composed by Ibn Zamrak for Muḥammad V – delivers a message calibrated to a precise historical moment: “*My position is a crown, and my door is the forehead: in me, the West envies the East. Muhammad V has entrusted me to open swiftly to the victory that knocks; for I am waiting for him to appear, just as the horizon reveals the morning. May God make his work as great as his character and his countenance are noble!*” (Fig. 5) The victory invoked is Muḥammad V’s reconquest of Algeciras from Castile in 1369 – the last great Muslim military triumph in the Iberian

Peninsula – encoding political event within the language of divine mandate and converting the gate into a triumphal arch.²⁰

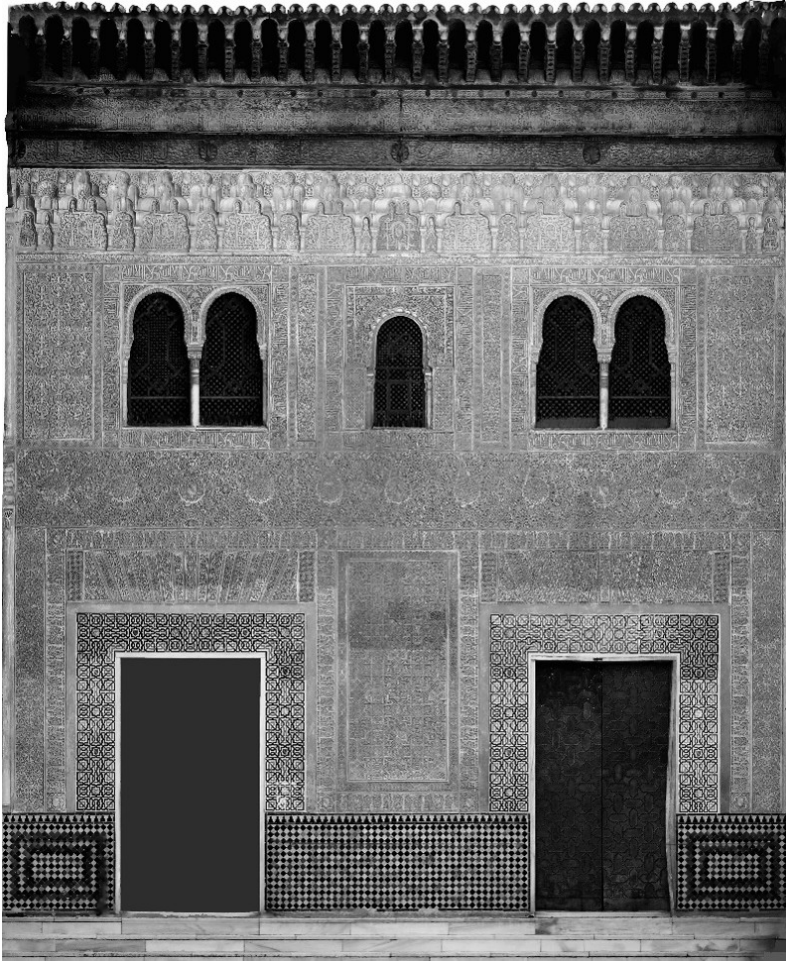


Figure 5. The poetic programme of the *Fachada de Comares* (Comares Façade), *Patio de Los Arrayanes*. The inscription celebrates Muḥammad V's military triumph at Algeciras in 1369, transforming the palace entrance into a monumental symbol of victory and divine mandate. Architectural documentation by Antonio Almagro Gorbea, courtesy of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (Inv. AA-415_34). https://www.academiacolecciones.com/arquitectura/inventario.php?id=AA-415_34

The Nasrid motto *Wa-lā ghāliba illā Allāh* (There is no conqueror but God) (Figs. 6.7), inscribed on virtually every surface of the palace – walls, ceilings,

²⁰ Ibid., 120–123.

fountains, doorways, and the margins of its poems – is simultaneously a profession of faith and, within Ibn Khaldūn’s framework, an unconscious historical prediction: the dynasty that covers its palace in a declaration of God’s exclusive sovereignty has already acknowledged, if only theologically, that its own authority is contingent and temporary.

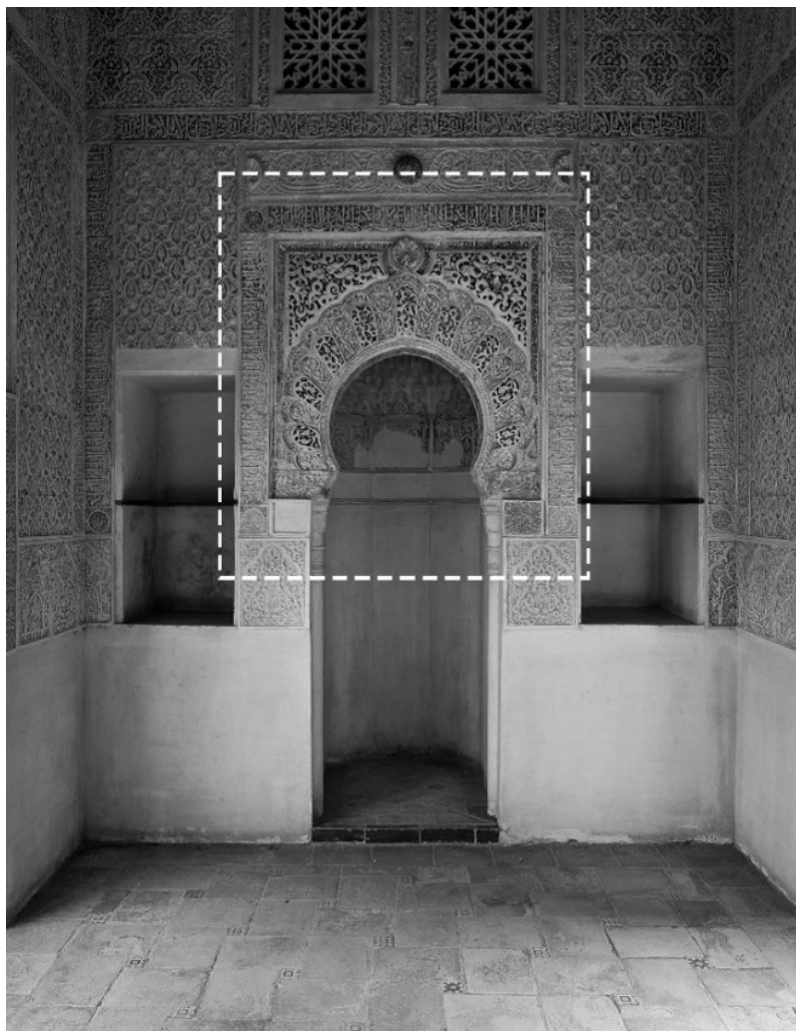


Figure 6. The Nasrid motto *Wa-lā ghāliba illā Allāh* (There is no conqueror but God)
 Photograph by the author, December 2020.



Figure 7. The Nasrid motto *Wa-lā ghāliba illā Allāh* ('There is no conqueror but God') inscribed on a column situated at the Mexuar. Photograph by the author, December 2020.

Finally, the cosmic dimension of Nasrid epigraphy finds its most spectacular expression in the cedarwood ceiling of *Salón de Comares*, which represents the seven heavens of *Sura al-Mulk*, and in the Mirador de Lindaraja tympanum calligram, the most formally complex example of the Royal Architectural Calligram category. Similarly, the Oratorio del Partal contains *Qurʾānic* inscriptions (Quran 2:238) within the *mihrāb* that anchor the space in daily liturgical practice (Fig. 8).



*Figure 8. The mihrāb of the Partal Oratory (Oratorio del Partal).
The inscription within the dashed square features a portion of Qur'an 2:238:*

“حَافِظُوا عَلَى الصَّلَوَاتِ وَالصَّلَاةِ الْوُسْطَى”

(Guard strictly the prayers, especially the Middle Prayer), widely interpreted in Islamic tradition to refer specifically to the *ʿAsr* prayer. Photograph by the author, February 2022.

Arabic Epigraphy and Catholic Power: The Alcázar of Seville²¹

The Nasrid dynasty's emphasis on the power of language in their propaganda highlights a significant phenomenon within the Christian kingdoms: the presence of Arabic inscriptions in the Alcázar²² of Seville. The Alcázar constituted an integral part of the architectural enhancements undertaken within Seville during the reign of the Almohad Caliphate. Given Seville's status as the capital city at that time, the Almohad monarchs contributed significantly to the city's architectural landscape²³. Subsequent modifications were implemented during the reigns of King Alfonso XI and his successor, Pedro I of Castile, also known as Pedro the Cruel. While Muḥammad V of Granada was living in exile under his protection, this had a great influence on Pedro's decision to make modifications to the Romanesque style of architecture — a medieval style rooted in classical Roman architecture — and Pedro had grown up in Seville surrounded by Islamic culture. Thus, his decision to adopt the Mudéjar style²⁴ expressed an important aspect of his own identity that emphasized his Andalusian roots and transcended religious associations.²⁵

This exemplifies the intricate and often-tense relationship between Muslim and Christian powers in medieval Iberia. This period witnessed significant

21 For further reading: Julie Marquer, "A Methodological Approach to the Study of Arabic Inscriptions in Castilian-Aragonese Kingdoms," *Histoires* 2, no. 2 (2022): 157–169, <https://doi.org/10.3390/histoires2020012>.

22 *Alcázar* is a word derived from the Arabic رصوفا which means palace/ *palacio*, and it is still used in Spain by Spanish Orientalists and Arabists.

23 See *Atlas de architecture Almohade* Atlas of Almohad architecture <https://www.ataral.es>

24 King Alfonso XI and his successor, Pedro the Cruel, both undertook extensive renovations and additions to the Seville Alcázar in the 14th century, employing the Mudéjar architectural style. This reflects the enduring presence of Islamic culture and craftsmanship within the city, particularly among its artisans. However, the reasons behind their choice of this style differed. For Alfonso, the Mudéjar style served as a symbol of Christian victory over Islamic forces. By commissioning Mudéjar architecture, he not only physically incorporated elements of the conquered Islamic culture into the Alcázar but also symbolically claimed ownership over it, mirroring his military conquest of Islamic territories. For further readings on Alfonso's policy, see: Jaume Aurell, "Alfonso XI of Castile: From Self-Knighting to Self-Crowning," in *Medieval Self-Coronations: The History and Symbolism of a Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 221–241; and Peter Linehan, "Alfonso XI: 'A King Entire,'" in *At the Edge of Reformation: Iberia before the Black Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198834199.003.0007>.

25 D. Fairchild Ruggles, "The Alcazar of Seville and Mudejar Architecture," *Gesta* 43, no. 2 (2004): 87–98, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25067097>.

cultural exchange, evident in the appropriation of Arabic inscriptions by Christian rulers like Pedro I for their own propaganda purposes. These inscriptions serve as concrete evidence of this cultural permeability and the need for political legitimation in a highly contested environment. The adoption of Islamic symbols of authority by a Christian monarch necessitates a critical examination of the function and meaning of such ornamentation. Epigraphy, deeply intertwined with Islam and the *Qur'ānic* message, presents a unique challenge when employed by a non-Muslim patron. While often dismissed as mere decoration, these Arabic inscriptions demonstrate a conscious political intent and a subtle connection between the courts of Seville and Granada.

Intended to enhance the monarch's prestige and legitimize his temporal power through association with spiritual authority, the inscriptions also convey the Castilian monarch's ambition to assert dominance over both his Christian and Muslim rivals. This is further evidenced by the multilingualism within the Alcázar and Pedro I's adoption of titles traditionally associated with Muslim sultans, signifying his aspirations to rule over the entire Iberian Peninsula.²⁶

An illustration of the use of Arabic epigraphy in the Castilian Alcázar can be found in the Bedroom of the Sultan, *Palacio de Pedro I* (Fig. 9):

An important observation is the use of the Divine Name *Allah*, signifying a supplication for blessings upon the king, as it is understood in Islamic thought that the use of the Divine Name indicates a prayer for goodness and blessings.

Further, regarding the use of the term *Sulṭān* instead of *Malik* (King),²⁷ the Arabist Rafael Valencia offers the following observation: *Sulṭān* refers to the one who exercises power in a practical manner, while "*Malik*" denotes the

26 Julie Marquer, "Epigrafía y poder: el uso de las inscripciones árabes en el proyecto propagandístico de Pedro I de Castilla (1350–1369)," *e-Spania* 13 (June 2012), <https://doi.org/10.4000/e-spania.21058>.

27 The use of the title *Malik* in Mudéjar inscriptions represents a significant innovation in both Islamic and Mudéjar contexts. This fact demonstrates the audacity with which Christian monarchs adopted and adapted elements of Arab culture to legitimize their power. However, it is the recurrent appearance of the term "*Sulṭān*" on the palace walls, particularly in Kufic and Naskhi scripts, that is most revealing. This deliberate choice suggests a clear intention to claim a political authority that transcended the borders of the Kingdom of Castile, extending to the entire Iberian Peninsula and, specifically, to the Kingdom of Granada. The coexistence of both titles, *Malik* and *Sulṭān*, in Mudéjar inscriptions reflects a complex dynamic of power and an ambiguous cultural identity in the context of the Reconquista.

holder of sovereignty. This distinction supports the concept of utilizing Arabic inscriptions as a component of political propaganda²⁸.



Figure 9. Epigraphic programme in the Bedroom of the Sultan (*Palacio de Pedro I*). The inscriptions feature the honorifics: “Giving Glory to Sulṭān Badr, in reference to King Don Pedro I, may Allah strengthen him”, and “Giving Glory to Sultan Badr, may Allah protect him”, alongside the formulaic “The kingship belongs to Allah, Greatness is for Allah”. The choice of Badr reflects a significant linguistic and orthographic adaptation by the scribe to Arabicize the name Pedro while maintaining its recognizable consonants.

Another example cited on the façade of the same Royal *Alcázar* of Seville, is the usage of the Nasrid motto:

‘Wa-lā gālība illā Allāh’ (“And there is no conqueror except Allah (God)”).

Additionally, the following wishes are also cited in the same location:

‘Al-yūmn wal-salamāh, Wa al-īzzah wa al-karamah’ (“Prosperity, and safety, and honor, and dignity”). *‘Al-sa’ad al-da’īm’* (“Everlasting happiness”). *‘Al-ni’mah al-šamilah’* (“The all-encompassing blessing”).

28 Rafael Valencia, “Las inscripciones árabes en el arte mudéjar,” in *Mudéjar. El legado andalusí en la cultura española*, ed. Gonzalo Borrás Gualis (Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, 2010), 297.

The Alcázar of Seville serves as a primary exemplar of how Arabic epigraphy functioned as a fundamental instrument for the construction and legitimization of political sovereignty in medieval Iberia. An analysis of Mudéjar inscriptions reveals that Christian monarchs strategically appropriated Islamic visual and linguistic codes to consolidate their authority. Specifically, the adoption of titles such as *Malik* and *Sultān* reflects a deliberate programme of cultural syncretism, projecting an image of power that transcended contemporary religious and sectarian boundaries. The palace façade functioned as a potent political communiqué from Pedro I of Castile to neighbouring Nasrid rulers. Ultimately, this architectural programme represents a significant assertion of Castilian royal authority, grounding it in divine mandate; this is most vividly evidenced by the juxtaposition of the Gothic script positioned above the Nasrid motto, *wa-lā gālība illā Allāh* (“There is no victor but God”) (Fig. 10):



Figure 10. Façade of the *Palacio de Pedro I*, Alcázar of Seville. The architectural programme demonstrates the strategic appropriation of Islamic visual codes by Christian monarchs to consolidate authority. Notably, the Gothic script – detailing that the “The very high and very noble and very powerful and very conquering Don Pedro, by the grace of God king of Castile and Leon, ordered to be made these fortresses and these palaces and these gates which were made in the year one thousand and four hundred and two”²⁹ – is positioned directly above the Nasrid motto, *Wa-lā gālība illā Allāh* (“There is no conqueror but God”).

29 Marquer, “Epigrafía y poder,” *e-Spania* 13 (2012): 12, <https://doi.org/10.4000/e-spania.21058>.

More political messages in the Alcázar appeared on the door of the Hall of Ambassadors, also known as the *Hall of the Half Orange*:³⁰

“Our lord, the magnificent sultan, the noble Don Pedro, King of Castile and León – may God perpetuate his happiness and prolong his life – ordered the crafting of these doors, intended for this hall topped with a splendid dome, from a noble batch of prized cypress wood.”

“Our lord extended satisfaction, and in our fortunate city, halls and Alcázars were built since his arrival in the territory of Seville.”³¹

The Gate of Justice (*Puerta de la Justicia*): Inscription, Sovereignty, and the Transfer of Power

La Puerta de La Justicia, constructed under Yūsuf I in 749/1348, carries the most politically charged epigraphic programme in the entire Alhambra. The hand of *Fāṭima* (*khamsa*) carved in the keystone is flanked by a key – symbolizing access to divine protection (Fig. 11).

The outer part of the gate, in an inscription on a cornice at the top of the tympanum, carries Arabic inscriptions and the prayer of Yūsuf I (Fig. 12), reading:

He ordered the construction of this gate, called *Bab al-Shari’a* [Gate of the *Shari’a*/Law], may Allah make the law of Islam fortunate through it and transform it into a cause of permanent glory throughout the ages! Our lord, the Prince of the Muslims, the just and valiant Sultan, Abū l-Hayyay Yūsuf, son of our lord, the revered and valiant Sulṭān, Abū al-Walid ben Nasr (Ismail I). May Allah reward their virtuous deeds in Islam and accept their strenuous exploits in the cause of Allah. This was concluded in the month of the noble birth [Rabi’ al-Awwal] of the year 749 [AH]. May Allah transform it into a protective device and consign it among the eternal works of piety!³²

30 As Peter Burke demonstrates in *Cultural Hybridity*, cultural adaptation must be analysed as a double movement of decontextualization and recontextualization. Some terms present in the inscriptions that have a specific meaning in Islam thus acquire another significance, or rather another connotation, in the Alcázar of Seville. Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 93.

31 Marquer, “Epigrafía y poder,” *e-Spania* 13 (2012): 2, <https://doi.org/10.4000/e-spania.21058>.

32 Juan Antonio Vilar Sánchez, “La Bab al-Shari’a. Puerta Principal de la Alhambra,” Academia.edu, accessed April 15, 2026, https://www.academia.edu/39799678/LA_BAB_AL_SHARIA_PUERTA_PRINCIPAL_DE_LA_ALHAMBRA



Figure 11. La Puerta de La Justicia. Architectural documentation by Antonio Almagro Gorbea, courtesy of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (Inv. AA-415_34). https://www.academiacolectaciones.com/arquitectura/inventario.php?id=AA-401_16

أَمَرَ بِنَاءِ هَذَا الْبَابِ الْمُسَمَّى بِابِ الشَّرِيعَةِ أَشْعَدَ اللَّهُ بِهِ شَرِيعَةَ الْإِسْلَامِ وَجَعَلَهُ ذَرِيعَةً لِلْعِزِّ الدَّائِمِ عَلَى مَرِّ الْأَعْوَامِ! سَيِّدُنَا
 أَمِيرُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ، السُّلْطَانُ الْعَادِلُ الْمُجَاهِدُ، أَبُو الْحَجَّاجِ يُوسُفُ، ابْنُ سَيِّدِنَا السُّلْطَانِ الْمُعْظَمِ الْمُجَاهِدِ، أَبِي الْوَلِيدِ بْنِ تَصْرٍ
 (إِسْمَاعِيلَ الْأَوَّلِ). جَزَى اللَّهُ فِي الْإِسْلَامِ أَعْمَالَهُ الصَّالِحَةَ وَتَقَبَّلَ جِهَادَهُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ حُسْنًا. وَتَمَّ ذَلِكَ فِي شَهْرِ الْمَوْلِدِ الْمُعْظَمِ
 مِنْ سَنَةِ تِسْعٍ وَأَرْبَعِينَ وَسَبْعِمِائَةٍ (749). جَعَلَهُ اللَّهُ وَقَايَةً وَسَجَلَةً فِي الْبَاقِيَّاتِ الصَّالِحَاتِ!



Figure 12. The Arabic inscription of *Puerta de La Justicia*.

The gateway's Arabic dedication identifies the sultan as guardian of justice and divine order; the formula *Wa-lā ghāliba illā Allāh* is inscribed above as both dynastic motto and theological assertion – sovereignty belongs to God alone, and the sultan exercises it as divine delegate.³³

Inside the gate, we find a Latin inscription praising the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile: The most high, Catholic and powerful persons, Sir Ferdinand and Lady Isabella, our King and Queen, conquered by force of arms this kingdom and city of Granada, which, after being laid siege to for a long time, was surrendered by the Moorish king Muley Hassan at the same time as the Alhambra and other fortifications on the second day of January of the year one thousand and CCCXCII. On the same day Their Highnesses placed Sir Yñigo López Mendoça, Count of Tendilla, their vassal, in the Alhambra as governor and commander. On their departure they left him in the said Alhambra, with five hundred knights and thousand foot soldiers and they ordered that the Moors remain in their houses with their lackeys too. This Count ordered by Royal Decree the construction of this water cistern.

ملوك الكاثوليك العظام والأقوياء «دون فيرناندو» و«دونيا إيسابيلا» ملكتنا وملكتنا، غزوا بقوة السلاح هذه المملكة ومدينة غرناطة، وذلك بعد أخذ معاليها بنفسهم بعد حصارها لوقت طويل سلمهم إياها الملك المسلم مولاي الحسن بحمراثا وقلاع أخرى في الثاني من يناير لعام ألف وتسعمائة واثنان وتسعون. وفي نفس هذا اليوم سُلِمَ فيها رعاياها بواسطة العمدة والنقيب إلى دون «إنيجو لوبيث دي مندوثا»، كونت مدينة تينديا ليكونوا رعاياه، ورحل إليها رعاياه في خمسمائة فارس وألف راجل، وأمر المسلمين بالبقاء في منازلهم في المدينة كما كانوا من قبل. وقد قام هذا الكونت بحفر هذا الجب بناء على طلب رعاياه

Puerta de la Justicia is the threshold at which Ibn Khaldūn's chapter 22 was enacted in real time. When Ferdinand and Isabella placed their Castilian heraldic devices above those Arabic words after January 2, 1492, they

33 *Puerta Vélchez, Leer la Alhambra*, 85–90.

were not simply asserting Christian triumph over Islam; they were enacting, with precise though unwitting clarity, the Khaldūnian logic of civilizational succession: the group whose *ʿaṣabiyyah* had endured assumed the royal authority of the group whose *ʿaṣabiyyah* had dissolved. The Arabic inscription *Wa-lā ghāliba illā Allāh* survived beneath the Catholic Monarchs' devices because its meaning was no longer politically legible to those who now commanded the gate – a cultural achievement repurposed, drained of political content, preserved as ornament. Ibn Khaldūn's *al-ummah al-maghlūbah* predicts exactly this outcome: the monuments of conquered nations are preserved by the conqueror as spectacle, stripped of the *ʿaṣabiyyah* that gave them meaning.

The Mawlid of 764/1362, Ibn al-Khaṭīb, and the Pen's Fatal Ascendancy

The most concentrated demonstration of the pen's triumph – and its structural fragility – is the Mawlid celebration of 764/1362 at the newly renovated Mexuar (*Sala de la Mexuar*) of the Alhambra. When Muḥammad V recovered his throne after three years of exile in Pedro I's Seville, his first public act was to stage a spectacular celebration of the Prophet's Birthday (*Mawlid al-Nabī*) within the newly completed Mexuar complex, which his craftsmen had worked for nine months to rebuild. Ibn al-Khaṭīb documented this event in the text translated and studied by García Gómez and confirmed architecturally by López López and Orihuela Uzal: guests entered through the newly constructed arcaded patio, ascended to the throne room with its four marble columns and muqarnas dome, and heard panegyric recitations, music, and proclamations of dynastic legitimacy.³⁴

The celebration – marked by the same features Boloix-Gallardo identifies in the earlier Mawlid traditions of al-Andalus: communal feasting, Sufi ritual, and the display of the sovereign's generosity – constituted, in Khaldūnian terms, *ṭaraf* performing what military force could no longer guarantee.³⁵

34 Emilio García Gómez, *Foco de antigua luz sobre la Alhambra* (Madrid: Instituto Egipcio de Estudios Islámicos, 1988), 68–71; Ángel López López and Antonio Orihuela Uzal, “Una nueva interpretación del Mexuar de la Alhambra,” *Cuadernos de la Alhambra* 26 (1990): 121–127.

35 Bárbara Boloix Gallardo, “Las primeras celebraciones del Mawlid en al-Andalus y el norte de África,” *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos. Sección Árabe-Islam* 65 (2016): 88–96.

Ibn al-Khaṭīb's central role in the 1362 Mawlid – as its literary architect, chief panegyrist, and the vizier who coordinated its diplomatic significance – places the event squarely within chapter 25's prediction. The same vizier who inscribed the palace walls with verse asserting divine mandate, who wrote on the sultan's behalf to Ibn Khaldūn himself, was the most powerful man in the Nasrid state after the sultan. Yet the pen-man's vulnerability is also built into the theory. Ibn al-Khaṭīb fled Granada in 773/1371, denounced to the Sultan by his own disciple Ibn Zamrak. He was then murdered in his prison cell in Fez in 776/1374 – strangled, according to some sources, before his body could be brought to trial. His disciple, Ibn Zamrak, who betrayed him, occupied his position and continued to inscribe the Alhambra's walls with verse celebrating the same sultan whose favor had been turned against his master.³⁶ The career arc of Ibn al-Khaṭīb – from master of the 1362 Mawlid at the apex of the pen's power to a prisoner murdered in Fez – is itself a Khaldūnian text: “when the people of the pen multiply in a state and their influence grows, this signals the luxury and stabilization of royal authority – and the marginalization of the sword.”³⁷ The sword's marginalization cannot be permanent; it reasserts itself through the very men of the pen it has temporarily elevated.

Taraf: Luxury as Deterrence, Luxury as Poison

«إذا تحكمت طبيعة الملك من الانفراد بالمجد وحصول الترف والدعة أقبلت الدولة على الهرم»³⁸

Chapter 13 of the *Muqaddima* identifies *ṭaraf* – the cultural habituation to ease and refinement that corrodes *ʿaṣabiyya* – as the defining symptom of dynastic over-ripeness. The tension between luxury as political instrument and luxury as civilizational poison had deep roots in Islamic political thought. When the Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb arrived in Syria and encountered Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān accompanied by magnificent retinues morning and evening, he questioned him. Muʿāwiya's response articulated a theory of power that would resonate across centuries: “We are in a land where the spies of the enemy are many. It is necessary that we display the might of the Sultan (ʿizz al-sulṭān) by which we deter them.” ʿUmar offered no objection to this. Al-Ṭabarī's version³⁹ specifies the strategic context: Muʿāwiya wished for the

36 Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Taʿrīf*, 247–249; Puerta Vilchez, *Leer la Alhambra*, 58.

37 Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima*, ch. 25.

38 Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima*, 88.

39 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 5, 2715.

Byzantine frontier observers “to see the might (‘izz) of Islam” Luxury, in Mu‘āwiya’s logic, was not an indulgence but a deterrence: a calculated political message directed at a watching enemy.⁴⁰

The structural parallel with 14th-century Granada is striking. Just as Mu‘āwiya deployed court spectacle as a calculated message directed at Byzantine frontier observers, Muḥammad V faced an analogous predicament: the Catholic kingdoms of Castile and Aragon occupied precisely the role of the watching, hostile power. The Alhambra’s splendour was, in this reading, a deliberate political message – an assertion that Granada endured, that its sultan commanded resources and refinement worthy of a sovereign state. Yet where Mu‘āwiya governed a nascent state on the threshold of world dominion, Muḥammad V ruled from a position of profound structural weakness: reduced to a tributary paying annual *parias* to Castile, his legitimacy so contested that he had required Christian military support to recover his own throne.⁴¹ This is precisely the condition Ibn Khaldūn identifies as the terminal phase of a dynasty’s civilizational arc: the logic of magnificent deterrence deployed from a position of irreversible decline.

The material conditions enabling this level of splendour were rooted in the Nasrid emirate’s extraordinary commercial vitality. Raw silk from the Alpujarras, refined cane sugar from the coastal *vegas*, and dried fruits dominated by the Genoese merchant network – treaties from 1279 to 1479 made Genoese bankers direct financial intermediaries for the crown. By the reign of Muḥammad V, the ports of Málaga and Almería had become convergence points for Genoese, Venetian, and Florentine merchants; Venetian galleys were still being intercepted supplying besieged Nasrid ports in 1484–1485.⁴² This commercial wealth financed the Alhambra’s construction – and Ibn Khaldūn’s framework identifies precisely this commercial integration as the

40 Mu‘āwiya’s anecdote is cited in Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima*, ch. 17. A fuller version of the anecdote, specifying that Mu‘āwiya’s aim was for the Byzantine enemies to “see the might (‘izz) of Islam,” is preserved in al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 5, 331; trans. from Arabic. A parallel version is preserved in Abu Bakr ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad Ibn Abi al-Dunya, *Kitab Hilm Mu‘āwiya*, ed. Ibrahim Salih (Damascus: Dar al-Sha‘m, 2002), 20; trans. from Arabic. The political message of Mu‘āwiya’s luxury to his Roman enemies finds a structural parallel in Muhammad V’s deployment of the Alhambra’s splendour as a political message to the Catholic monarchs and their Reconquista campaigns.

41 Adela Fábregas García, *Un mercado en formación: el emirato nazarí de Granada en el sistema comercial genovés (siglos XIII–XV)* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2006), 87–112.

42 Ibid., 142–165.

harbinger of *ṭaraf*: the dynasty that exports silk and imports Mudéjar painters has already crossed the threshold from martial *ʿaṣabiyyah* to sedentary refinement.

ʿAṣabiyyat al-Ghālib: The Solidarity of the Conqueror

أن الملك إذا ذهب عن بعض الشعوب من أمة فلا بد من عودته إلى شعب آخر منها ما دامت لهم العصبية.⁴³

In chapter 22, Ibn Khaldūn extends the logic of *ʿaṣabiyyah* into its most far-reaching proposition: “*If kingship departs from some clans of a nation, it must return to another clan of that same nation, as long as they retain their Solidarity.*”⁴⁴ Applied to al-Andalus, this identifies the Catholic kingdoms not as an external force arriving from outside the civilizational continuum, but as the group that had maintained its *ʿaṣabiyyah* across centuries of warfare – given permanent institutional form through the military orders of Alcántara, Calatrava, and Santiago, binding warriors to the enterprise of reconquest across generations and giving the Reconquista ideology institutional durability across dynastic quarrels.

The Nasrid emirate survived for 260 years through diplomatic manoeuvre and Castilian internal weakness rather than through any renewal of its own *ʿaṣabiyyah*. The Battle of Río Salado (1340) severed Granada’s primary external support by expelling the Marinids, while the marriage of Fernando and Isabella (1469) resolved the cross-dynastic rivalry that Nasrid diplomacy had exploited for two centuries. The three-way civil conflict of the 1480s among Abū’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī, his son Muḥammad XII (Boabdil), and his brother Muḥammad XIII (al-Zaghāl) exemplifies Ibn Khaldūn’s account of ruling-group solidarity dissolving through the monopolization of glory and the corrosive effects of *ṭaraf*. Boabdil opened secret negotiations with the Catholic monarchs to secure the best possible personal outcome, unbeknownst to his own court. The dynasty’s *ʿaṣabiyyah* had collapsed so thoroughly that it could sustain itself only through the borrowed cohesion of its conqueror.⁴⁵

43 Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima*, 76.

44 Ibid., 76.

45 Francisco García Fitz and João Gouveia Monteiro, eds., *War in the Iberian Peninsula, 700–1600* (London: Routledge, 2018), 210–245.

Iqtidā' and Figurative Painting of Alhambra as Khaldūnian Text

« إن المغلوب مولع أبداً بالاعتداء بالغالب في شعاره وزيه ونحلته وسائر أحواله وعوائده... كما هو في الأندلس لهذا العهد مع أمة الجلالقة، فإنك تجدهم يتشبهون بهم في ملبسهم وشاراتهم والكثير من عوائدهم وأحوالهم، حتى في رسم التماثيل في الجدران والمصانع والبيوت، حتى لقد يستشعر من ذلك الناظر بعين الحكمة أنه من علامات الاستيلاء والأمر فيه. »

*“The defeated is perpetually inclined to imitate the conqueror in his emblem, his attire, his sect, and all his circumstances and customs... As is the case in al-Andalus in this era with the nations of Galicia (the Christians), for you find them imitating them in their clothing, their emblems, and many of their customs and circumstances, even in the depiction of figures on walls, in buildings, and in houses. Indeed, one who observes this with the eye of wisdom perceives that it is among the signs of subjugation – and the matter rests with God.”*⁴⁶

The Alhambra preserves two exceptional examples of figurative mural painting. The earliest is in the upper chamber of the Casitas del Partal, where a tempera mural on gypsum ground – dated to circa 1319 during the reign of Ismā‘īl I – depicts a narrative cycle of chivalric exercises, military triumph, and courtly celebration across three horizontal registers (Fig.13). Walid Akef posits that this work was executed by artists of a local Nasrid school – possibly manuscript illuminators working in a pan-Mediterranean visual idiom shared with Mamluk and Aragonese courts – interpreting the iconographic programme as a memorialization of the Nasrid victory at the Battle of the Vega (1319).⁴⁷

46 Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima*, 77.

47 Walid Akef, “Architecture of Triumph, Jihad, and Mediterranean Dialogue in the Alhambra: The House of Paintings and Its Mural, Part I,” *Muqarnas* 40 (2023): 69–102; Walid Akef, “Architecture of Triumph, Jihad, and Mediterranean Dialogue in the Alhambra: An Analytical Study of the House of Paintings and Its Mural, Part II,” *Muqarnas* 41 (2025): 1–75.



Figure 13. Mural painting House of paintings (*Casitas del Partal*).

Photograph by the author, February 2022

The Khaldūnian case is made most fully by the three vaulted leather-covered alcoves of the *Sala de Los Reyes* (Hall of the Kings) within the Palace of the Lions, executed during Muḥammad V's second reign (763–93/1362–91). The commission of this programme cannot be understood without two biographical factors. The first is the influence of Muḥammad V's mother, Butayna (*Dhāt al-Yamīn*) – a Christian slave whose cultural identity remained a living presence at court, shaping the sultan's ease with Christian aesthetic modes. As Boloix-Gallardo's research establishes, Butayna participated actively in court decisions and Nasrid diplomacy, meaning that Muḥammad V grew into sovereignty within a court where Islamic and Christian aesthetic sensibilities were more permeable than dynastic convention might suggest.⁴⁸ The second is the three years (1359–62) spent in exile at the court of Pedro I, where Nasrid scientists, poets, and senior courtiers lived alongside Castilian nobles; Mudéjar artisans trained in the Nasrid tradition worked in Sevillian workshops and returned to Granada carrying Castilian aesthetic fashions – as confirmed by Pavón-Maldonado's

48 Bárbara Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra: Las grandes desconocidas del reino nazarí de Granada (siglos XIII–XV)* (Granada: Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, 2013), 112–134.

documentation that Pedro's Mudéjar artists were lent to Muḥammad V at the sultan's own request.⁴⁹ In Khaldūnian terms, the sultan's formation was itself a form of *iqtidāʿ*: not the unwitting imitation of the structurally defeated, but the consciously cultivated openness of a ruler whose identity had been shaped, from the beginning, by the conqueror's culture as much as by his own.

The central vault of the *Sala de los Reyes* depicts ten opulently dressed figures seated on cushions against a solid gold ground – identified by Gallego y Burín as a dynastic portrait of the ten Nasrid kings from Muḥammad I to Muḥammad V, executed after the restoration of 1362 to assert dynastic continuity at the very moment when both had been most acutely contested (Fig.14). The two lateral vaults present hunting scenes and chivalric encounters between Muslim and Christian protagonists – but their iconographic sources, traced by Dodds to French 14th-century ivory caskets depicting Arthurian and Tristan episodes circulating in the courts of Castile and Aragon, are unambiguously Western (Figs.15-16). The technique – animal skin prepared with gesso, egg-yolk-based pigments, gold-leaf grounds – demands extraordinary expense and specialised artisanal knowledge, whose costliness makes the paintings a direct embodiment of *ṭaraf* in Khaldūnian terms.⁵⁰



Figure 14. Mural painting, Hall of the Kings (*Sala de Los Reyes*),
Photograph by the author, February 2022

49 Pavón-Maldonado, Basilio. *Arte toledano: islámico y mudéjar*. Madrid, 1973: 249–266

50 DJerrilynn D. Dodds, “The Paintings in the Sala de Justicia of the Alhambra: Iconography and Iconology,” *The Art Bulletin* 61, no. 2 (1979): 186–197.



*Figure 15. Mural painting, Hall of the Kings (Sala de Los Reyes),
Photograph by the author, February 2022*



*Figure 16. Mural painting, Hall of the Kings (Sala de Los Reyes),
Photograph by the author, February 2022*

he paintings operate simultaneously on three Khaldūnian registers. As *iqtidāʿ*: the deployment of French chivalric iconography in the innermost sanctuary of the premier Islamic palace of the West is the most literal possible enactment of Ibn Khaldūn's principle – “*even in the depiction of figures on walls, in buildings, and in houses*” As *ṭaraf*: the private character of the paintings, accessible only to the sultan and his closest companions in the most secluded alcoves of the most private palace, is precisely the “*immersion in bliss*” Ibn Khaldūn identifies as luxury no longer serving public propaganda but operating as private sensory refinement – the stage at which dynastic vitality has been irreversibly undermined. And as contested legitimacy: the two lateral scenes in which the Arab unambiguously dominates the Christian – the erect hunter, the victorious jousting – are not a refutation of *iqtidāʿ* but its confirmation. Ibn Khaldūn frames imitation as a structural condition that produces self-consciousness and compensatory assertion alongside the imitation itself. Both the chivalric borrowings and the triumphalist reversals belong to the same psychological stage; the *Sala de los Reyes* holds them in the same vaulted space because Muḥammad V's reign held them in the same political reality.⁵¹

Conclusion: The Splendour and the Ruin

This study began with a chain: from the assassination of ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān in Medina, to the flight of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I across North Africa, to the establishment of an Umayyad emirate on the Guadalquivir, to the last Nasrid sultan handing the keys of the Alhambra to Ferdinand and Isabella in January 1492. Ibn Khaldūn's *al-Muqaddima* provides the theoretical structure that links these moments as stages in a single intelligible process: the *ʿaṣabiyyah* forged in persecution produces the dynasty, the dynasty produces luxury, luxury dissolves the *ʿaṣabiyyah*, and the dynasty becomes the conquered nation it once overthrew.

The biographical dimension is not ornamental. Ibn Khaldūn was personally present at the specific moment the theory describes. His correspondence with Ibn al-Khaṭīb and Ibn Zamrak placed him in intimate contact with the architects of the pen's supreme ascendancy. His diplomatic mission to Pedro I brought him face to face with both sides of the *ʿaṣabiyyat al-ghālib* dynamic: the conquering Christian kingdoms whose group cohesion had never faltered,

51 Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima*, ch. 23; Dodds, “The Paintings in the Sala de Justicia,” 193–197.

and the Nasrid sultan whose legitimacy was so contested that he required Christian military support to recover his own throne. Gómez-Moreno’s suggestion – that Ibn Khaldūn’s remark about Andalusian Muslims imitating Christians “*even in the depiction of figures on walls*” may refer to paintings he saw during his stay in Granada – transforms the theoretical passage from sociological observation into the earliest surviving art-critical commentary on the *Sala de los Reyes*.⁵²

The Nasrid motto – *Wa lā ghāliba illā Allāh*, “and there is no conqueror except God” – is repeated on virtually every surface of the Alhambra. Ibn Khaldūn, who knew this palace and the men who inscribed its walls, would have recognized in this motto not merely a profession of faith but a historical prediction. The Alhambra was built to proclaim this truth; it was also, without intending it, built to embody it. That it still stands – stripped of the dynasty that made it, re-inscribed with Christian symbols where the Arabic motto once ran alone, repurposed precisely as Ibn Khaldūn’s theory of *al-ummah al-maghlūbah* predicts the monuments of conquered nations will be repurposed – is the most powerful evidence this study can offer for the framework it has advanced.

52 Manuel Gómez-Moreno, “Pinturas de Moros en el Partal (Alhambra),” in *Textos de Gómez-Moreno sobre la Alhambra Musulmana* (Granada: Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, 1916), 162.

Appendix

Appendix I. The kings discussed by Ibn Khaldūn ⁵³

Christian Rulers	<i>Kitāb al-'Ibar (al-Muqaddimah)</i>
Felayo	d. 133/750-1
Faḫla	d. 135/752-3
Alfonso I	d. 142/759-60
Fruela	d. 152/769-70
Aurelio	d. 158/774-5
Silon	d. 168/784-5
Maurecat	d. 175/791-2
Alfonso II	d. 227/841-2
Ordoño I	-
Alfonso III	-
Garcia I	-
Ramiro II	d. 339/950-1
Ordoño III	-
Fernán González	-
Vermudo II	-
Sancho III	d. 406/1015-16
Alfonso VI	d. 501/1107-8
Sancho	-
Alfonso VIII	-
Fernando III	-
Alfonso X	d. 683/1284
Sancho IV	d. 693/1294
Ferdinand IV	d. 712/1312
Alfonso XI	d. 751/1350
Pedro the Cruel	d. 772/1370-1
Enrique II	d. 781/1379
Enrique III	1390–1406 (reigning when Ibn Khaldūn was writing)

⁵³ Justin Stearns, "Two Passages in Ibn al-Khatib's Account of the Kings of Christian Iberia," *Al-Qanṭara* 25 (2004): 180–181.

*Appendix II. Some of the notable sultans who ruled the Alhambra*⁵⁴

<i>Muḥammad I Ibn al-Ahmar</i>	1238-1273
<i>Muḥammad II (Muḥammad II al-Faqih)</i>	1273-1302
<i>Muḥammad III (Muḥammad III al-Makhlu)</i>	1302-1309
<i>Nasr (Nasr ibn Muḥammad)</i>	(1309-1314)
<i>Isma'il I (Isma'il I al-Muzaffar)</i>	(1314-1325)
<i>Muḥammad IV (Muḥammad IV al-Ghalib)</i>	(1325-1333)
<i>Yusuf I (Yusuf I al-Mustaghni)</i>	(1333-1354)
<i>Muḥammad V (Muḥammad V al-Ghani bi'llah)</i>	(1354-1359) (1362-1391)
<i>Muḥammad VII (Muḥammad VII al-Mustain)</i>	1392-1408
<i>Muḥammad XII (Boabdil/ El Rey chico)</i>	1482-1492

Appendix III. Ibn Khaldūn's Al-Muqaddimah: Core Concepts and Their Nasrid Application

Concept (Arabic / Transliteration)	English trans.	Al-Muqaddima Reference	Nasrid Application
الأمة المغلوبة (<i>Al-Ummah al-Maghlūbah</i>)	The Con- quered Nation	When a nation is subjugated, its people become instruments of the conqueror. Hopes dimin- ish, procreation weakens, and decline acceler- ates.	After 1492, the Alhambra's Ara- bic inscriptions were emptied of authority – reduced to ornament under Christian governance. Mosques were consecrated as churches; the Nasrid court be- came, in Khaldūn's terms, " <i>tools for others</i> " (<i>ālāh li-siwāhum</i>). The surrender of the Alhambra keys by <i>Boabdīl</i> literalises the concept: <i>a nation once sovereign now serves another's imperial image.</i>

54 Francisco Bueno García, *The Kings of the Alhambra: Between History and Legend*, originally published as *Los Reyes de la Alhambra* (Granada: Ediciones Miguel Sánchez, 2004).

Concept (Arabic / Transliteration)	English trans.	Al-Muqaddima Reference	Nasrid Application
عصية الغالب (<i>ʿAṣabiyyat al-Ghālib</i>) ⁵⁵	The Con- queror's Group Co- hesion	Group cohesion (<i>ʿaṣabiyyah</i>) is the engine of royal authority. When it erodes within a dynasty, kingship passes to whichever group preserves it. ⁵⁶	The Alhambra's construction arc mirrors <i>ʿaṣabiyyah</i> 's rise and fall. Early Nasrid buildings – the <i>Alcazaba</i> fortress, the <i>Torre de la Vela</i> – express martial cohesion. Later palatial additions (Court of the Lions, Hall of the Two Sisters) signal its dissipation into luxury. By the 1480s, civil war between <i>Abū ʿI-Ḥasan ʿalī</i> and <i>Boabdīl</i> had fractured Nasrid <i>ʿaṣabiyyah</i> entirely, while Ferdinand and Isabella consolidated theirs through dynastic union – the structural precondition, in Khaldūn's model, for the 1492 transfer of kingship.

55 A different application of *ʿaṣabiyyah*: While the Nasrids experienced the erosion of their group cohesion, the Catholic kingdoms of northern Iberia exemplify *ʿaṣabiyyah* in its ascendant phase. Their shared religious identity as Catholics, reinforced by centuries of Reconquista warfare, provided an ideological foundation for group cohesion that transcended individual dynasties. Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile united the two strongest Christian kingdoms through marriage (1469), consolidating their *ʿaṣabiyyah* at the precise moment the Nasrid court fragmented. Their belief in reclaiming *al-Andalus* for Christendom functioned as a bond stronger than tribe fulfilling Ibn Khaldūn's principle that kingship passes to the group that preserves its cohesion while the previous rulers dissolve in luxury (see *al-Muqaddimah*, ch. 22; Amman 2009, 73–76).

56 Ibid., 73–76.

Concept (Arabic / Transliteration)	English trans.	Al-Muqaddima Reference	Nasrid Application
الترف (<i>taraf</i>)	Luxury / opulence	Luxury is both the natural fruit of royal author- ity and its slow poison. Succes- sive generations raised in palatial comfort lose martial instinct; the dynasty ap- proaches senility. Ch. 11, 12, 13	The Nasrid building programme under Muḥammad V (1362–1391) is the material biography of <i>taraf</i>. The Court of the Lions, the <i>Comares</i> façade, and the Hall of the Two Sisters were conceived not for defence but for prestige – Ibn Zamrak’s inscribed poems proclaiming “<i>I am a garden adorned with beauty</i>” enact Khaldūn’s observation that luxury dynasties “make refined buildings.”⁵⁷ The <i>Sala de Los Reyes</i> takes this further: gold-leaf murals, possibly executed by Italian masters, deployed in the most private chambers for private delight – the precise “immersion in bliss” that, for Khaldūn, signals terminal decline. Later Nasrids, born into the Alhambra’s opulence, produced poets and administrators rather than soldiers, fulfilling his prediction that “the character of ruggedness is transformed.”

57 Ibn Zamrak’s poetry is inscribed across the Court of the Lions and the Hall of the Two Sisters; for a critical edition and translation, see Emilio García Gómez, *Ibn Zamrak, el poeta de la Alhambra* (Madrid: Publicaciones de la Escuela de Estudios Árabes, 1943).

Concept (Arabic / Transliteration)	English trans.	Al-Muqaddima Reference	Nasrid Application
اقتداء (<i>iqtidāʾ</i>)	Imitation / emulation	The defeated is perpetually inclined to imitate the conqueror in his emblem, his attire, his sect, and all his circumstances and customs... As is the case in <i>al-Andalus</i> in this era with the nations of Galicia (the Christians), for you find them imitating them in their clothing, their emblems, and many of their customs and circumstances, even in the depiction of figures on walls, in buildings, and in houses. Indeed, one who observes this with the eye of wisdom perceives that it is among the signs of subjugation – and the matter rests with God.”	The <i>Sala de Los Reyes</i> ceiling paintings – chivalric Christian scenes rendered inside an Islamic palace – are Khaldūn’s theory made visible. A Nasrid dynasty secure enough to commission figurative art, yet politically dependent enough to adopt a Christian pictorial vocabulary, occupies the ambiguous cultural position Khaldūn describes. The reverse dynamic is equally telling: Pedro I of Castile’s Alcázar in Seville (c. 1364) incorporates the Nasrid motto <i>Wā lā ghāliba illā Allāh</i> and Arabic praise-inscriptions for “Sultān Badr” Conqueror and conquered mirror one another – a bi-directional <i>iqtidāʾ</i> that Khaldūn’s framework anticipates but does not fully resolve.

Concept (Arabic / Transliteration)	English trans.	Al-Muqaddima Reference	Nasrid Application
أهل القلم (‘Ahl al-Qalam)	People of the pen (scribes, poets, administra- tors)	The disparity between the ranks of the sword and the pen in states (<i>Fī at-tafāwut bayna marātib as-sayf wa al-qalam fī ad-duwal</i>) In early dynasties the sword dominates; as the state matures, the pen rises. When scribes and poets eclipse warriors, military decline follows.⁵⁸ Ch. 35	The Alhambra’s epigraphic programme maps Khaldūn’s trajectory onto stone. Early inscriptions are <i>Qur’ānic</i> and juridical – the pen serves the sword. Under Yūsuf I and Muḥammad V, the Royal Chancellery (<i>Dīwān al-Inshā</i>) produces three poet-ministers: Ibn al-Jayyāb, Ibn al-Khaṭīb, and Ibn Zamrak. Their verses cover the vaults of the Court of the Lions and the Hall of the Two Sisters – the pen now inscribed into architecture itself. Yet this literary apogee coincides with military contraction. The assassination of Ibn al-Khaṭīb (1375) and the dynastic civil war of 1482–1492 are products of a court where eloquence had displaced martial capacity. Khaldūn’s warning that “the pen in that situation is merely a servant” inverts: by the late Nasrid period, the pen had become master, and there was no sword left to defend the palace whose walls it adorned.

58 Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima*, 129.

The Rise and Fall of al-Andalus: A Khaldūnian Cartography

These four maps trace the full civilizational arc of Islamic Iberia as theorized by Ibn Khaldūn – from the Umayyad *ʿaṣabiyyah* forged in exile (Map 1), through the fragmentation and precocious luxury of the *ṭawāʾif* period (Map 2), to the mature Nasrid emirate where the pen supplants the sword and *iqtidāʾ* (imitation of the conqueror) appears on palace walls (Map 3), and finally to the terminal stage of *al-ummah al-maghlūbah* (the conquered nation), encircled and awaiting the transfer of royal authority to the Christian north (Map 4). Together, they visualize the revolution – not of rebellion, but of dynastic destiny – that Ibn Khaldūn observed from within the Alhambra itself.



Map 1. The Emirate and Caliphal Period (711–1031).

Digital illustration by the author, based on Jerrilynn D. Dodds, ed., *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992).



Map 2. The Taifa Kingdoms (1065).

Digital illustration by the author, based on Jerrilynn D. Dodds, ed., *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992).



Map 3. The Almohad Dominion (1212)

Digital illustration by the author, based on Jerrilynn D. Dodds, ed., *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992).



Map 4. The Nasrid Dominion (before 1492)

Digital illustration by the author, based on Jerrilynn D. Dodds, ed., *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992).

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