

BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARIES AND SOCIAL HISTORY OF AL-ANDALUS: Trade and Scholarship

1. *Biographical dictionaries and social history*

Biographical dictionaries are one of the most distinct and original literary contributions of Islamic culture. Written by ‘*ulamā*’ and for an audience of ‘*ulamā*’, biographical dictionaries are the depository of scholars’ collective memory, transmitting for future generations the names and deeds of thousands of individuals.¹ They constitute, therefore, a source of primary importance for the knowledge of the urban elites in pre-modern Islamic societies and in some cases, they are almost the only available written source for the study of intellectual and social life in these societies.

This is particularly true for the history of Islam in the Iberian peninsula. As in other medieval Islamic societies, no archival documents from al-Andalus have been preserved. Historical chronicles, geographical accounts and literary compilations have all contributed to the establishment of a long-standing historiographical tradition that has aimed, mainly, at the reconstruction of “political” history. New perspectives for the study of al-Andalus have appeared in the last decades from the renewed exploitation of long-known sources to which new methodologies have been applied. These sources are basically archaeological or literary (juridical texts and biographical dictionaries) in character. Whereas the former have benefited from new approaches and extensive field work throughout Spain and Portugal,² for the latter, the increasing number of editions of *fatāwā* compilations published since the beginning of the eighties, has opened the door to a new and fascinating field of enquiry in which the combination of legal theory and practice provides a unique view of some aspects of social life.

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¹See one of the most recent appraisals of biographical dictionaries in W. Al-Qadi, “Biographical Dictionaries: Inner Structure and Cultural Significance,” In *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, ed. G. N. Atiyeh, (New York, 1995): 93-122.

²See a detailed account of this work in T. F. Glick, *From Muslim Fortress to Christian Castle: Social and Cultural Change in Medieval Spain*, (Manchester, 1995).

Biographical dictionaries began to be edited in the last decades of the nineteenth century, when Francisco Codera (the founder of the modern Spanish school of Arabic studies) initiated the publication of the *Bibliotheca Arabico-Hispana*, a pioneering enterprise for his time. Codera, with the help of a younger scholar, Julián Ribera, edited the biographical dictionaries of Ibn al-Faraḍī (d. 403/1013; *Taʾrīkh ʿulamāʾ al-Andalus*), Ibn Bashkuwāl (d. 578/1183; *Kitābal-Ṣila*), al-Dabbī (d. 599/1203; *Bughyat al-multamis*), Ibn al-Abbār (d. 658/1260; *Kitāb al-Takmila*) and the bio-bibliographical works of Ibn Khayr (d. 575/1180; *Fahrasa*) and Ibn al-Abbār (*Al-Muʿam li-asṣḥāb Abī ʿAlī al-Ṣadafī*).³ Working under very difficult conditions, Codera and Ribera were nevertheless able to put the bulk of the biographical legacy from al-Andalus at the disposal of future scholars. Subsequently, the works of al-Ḥumaydī (d. 488/1095; *Jadhwat al-muqtabis*), al-Qāḍī ʿIyād (d. 544/1149; *Tartīb al-madārik*), Ibn ʿAbd al-Malik al-Marrākushī (d. 703/1303-1304; *al-Dhayl wa-l-takmila*) and Ibn al-Zubayr (d. 708/1308; *Kitāb Ṣilat al-ṣila*) were edited in Morocco, Lebanon and Egypt, thus completing the establishment of a series of texts covering the joint North African and Andalusī biographical memory of Islamic scholarship. The last contribution to this century-old enterprise has been, paradoxically, the edition of the oldest biographical dictionary still preserved: the *Akhbār al-fuqahāʾ wa-l-muḥaddithīn* written by the Qayrawānī scholar Ibn Ḥārith al-Khushanī (d. 361/971),⁴ on his colleagues from al-Andalus, where he lived and died.

Biographical dictionaries relating to al-Andalus are plentiful, as can be seen from the above-mentioned list, and they cover nearly the whole period of the country's existence as an Islamic society.⁵ This abundance contrasts sharply with neighbouring countries such as Morocco, where the biographical tradition appeared much later in history. In al-Andalus, the first biographical compilations can be dated already in the 3rd/9th century. Although texts from this period are no longer extant, they are reproduced, fragmentarily, in the works of authors from the 4th/10th century.⁶ It would seem that early on Andalusī

³All of these works were published between 1882 and 1895.

⁴Published in Madrid, 1992, as Volume 3 of the series *Fuentes Arábico-Hispanas*. Other biographical texts still in manuscript form are those by Ibn ʿAskar (ʿUdabāʾ Mālaqa) and al-Sāhili (*Bughyat al-sālik*). See both M. I. Calero Secall and V. Martínez Enamorado, *Málaga, ciudad de al-Andalus*, (Málaga, 1995), p. 38 and 47.

⁵Other works containing valuable biographical data are those of Ibn Saʿīd (*al-Mughrib fī ḥulā al-Maghrib*) and Ibn al-Khaṭīb (*al-Iḥāta fī akhbār Gharnāta*).

⁶See M. L. Ávila, *La sociedad hispanomusulmana al final del califato: aproximación a un estudio demográfico*, (Madrid, 1997).

'*ulamā*' had a strong consciousness of their own role in society and wished to transmit and perpetuate their self-image in a long chain of biographical dictionaries. Authors of this kind of work were also aware of the fact that each of them was contributing to a centuries-old written tradition, as the titles of many dictionaries attest: *sila* ("connection," "link"), *takmila* ("complement"), *dhayl* ("supplement"), and so on.

However, the richness and abundance of Andalusī biographical dictionaries did not attract the attention of scholars until recent times. The repetitive character of much of the documentary material offered by dictionaries, and its apparent dryness (unending lists of names of masters and disciples constitute a great part of the information found therein) may explain why researchers have generally viewed Andalusī dictionaries as work tools, useful to locate and date Andalusī scholars, and little else. Exceptions to this paradigm can, of course, be mentioned, and Francisco Codera was the first to note the potential value of the information contained in dictionaries. One of Codera's main scholarly concerns was the interaction between Islamic and Christian cultures in al-Andalus and he collected onomastic data from biographical dictionaries. Thus he was able to show how Andalusī scholars had used surnames of Latin and Romance origins.⁷ Moreover, he began the titanic task of card-indexing the biographical information contained in the dictionaries he had edited. The results of this work were never published, although Codera and his disciples used it for their research on the history of al-Andalus.

It was not until the seventies of this century that the possibilities offered by "quantitative history" began to be applied to the Islamic biographical tradition. As Richard Bulliet put it in the introduction to his trail-blazing *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* :

Muslim biographical dictionaries [... hold] the promise of greatly revising our notions about Middle Eastern history. Utilising the data contained in these compilations is not an easy task, however. Several approaches, both quantitative and non-quantitative, have been advanced by myself and others in earlier publications.⁸

In Spain, the work of María Luisa Ávila (*La sociedad hispanomusulmana al final del califato: aproximación a un estudio demográfico*,

⁷See F. Codera, "Apodos o sobrenombres de moros españoles" In *Mélanges H. Derenbourg*, (Paris, 1909): 322-334.

⁸R. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period. An Essay in Quantitative History*, (Cambridge MA, 1979), p. 5.

Madrid, 1985), brought a renewed approach to the biographical materials. Using the methodology of "quantitative history," Ávila opened a new field of work, in which individual biographies of 'ulamā' were taken as samples of a social group living in Andalusian cities. Going beyond their character as Muslim scholars, Ávila took data from biographies of 'ulamā' that related them to a more general social landscape. This approach allowed her to offer new conclusions in subjects such as the average age of death of Andalusian scholars.⁹

In 1989, the first volume of the series *Estudios Onomástico-Biográficos de al-Andalus* (E.O.B.A.) was published in Madrid. The aim of the collective work then initiated was precisely to use biographical dictionaries as a new source for the intellectual and social history of al-Andalus. Following, in a certain sense, the pioneering work of Francisco Codera, one of the aims of the collective work behind this series was the establishment of a *Dictionary of Andalusian 'Ulamā'*.¹⁰ Partial lists of this kind of materials have appeared in different E.O.B.A. volumes and elsewhere, thus laying the foundation for an indispensable work that is now drawing to completion in the *School of Arabic Studies* (C.S.I.C., Granada, Spain). Computerisation has undoubtedly helped to implement what was in Codera's time a nearly impossible task: to put together, after a careful comparison and cross-reference work, the wealth of data found in the rich tradition of Andalusian biographical literature.

The eighth volumes of E.O.B.A. published to date, however, contain much else besides prosopographic lists of 'ulamā'. They reflect a collective effort in the field of "quantitative and non-quantitative history," and deal with the historiography and sources of biographical dictionaries, as well as with their use as sources for the knowledge of urban topography, the ethnic origins of 'ulamā' and the patterns of their travels to the Islamic East. A significant number of studies published in E.O.B.A. relate to the study of individual and outstanding figures (such as Mu'āwiya b. Ṣāliḥ, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Salām al-Khushanī or Yaḥyāb. al-Ḥadīdī). But the subject which has perhaps attracted more attention has been that of families and family networks in the world of 'ulamā'. Information about kinship relationships is not always evident in biographical dictionaries, which are, by definition, compilations of isolated biographies. By carefully linking genealogical

⁹Ávila's conclusions in this respect should be compared with those reached by J. Zanón, "Demografía y sociedad: la edad de fallecimiento de los ulemas andalusíes," in *Saber religioso y poder político en el Islam*, (Madrid, 1994): 333-35.

¹⁰In what follows, I am giving an abstract of the introduction to the eighth volume of *Estudios Onomástico-Biográficos de al-Andalus* [E.O.B.A.] (Madrid, 1997).

chains, however, it is possible to reconstruct lineages which, in many cases, cover several centuries of Andalusí history. Once this primary work is completed, it is easy to see how, in several Andalusí cities, administrative and/or judicial positions were controlled by a family or a group of families. In this light urban elites acquire a new significance for the history of al-Andalus. Moreover, analysing individual biographical information in the context of its inclusion into a family network provides a new and different understanding of family structure, ethnic affiliation, and last but not least, the curve of conversion to Islam in al-Andalus.¹¹

Using biographical dictionaries as a source for the social history of al-Andalus should not lead the researcher to forget that these works were written without such an intended use. In other words, authors of dictionaries did not wish to convey a picture of the society in which *'ulamā'* lived and died. Their aim, as is well-known, was to retrace the chain of transmission of Islamic knowledge. To complete such a task, it was necessary to establish the "cartography" of this transmission, made up of the infinite networks of scholarship. As a consequence, what is of paramount importance for the biographer is the list of masters a scholar has studied with, and, secondarily, the list of his disciples. Data about times and places and, occasionally, other biographical notes are only offered in order to establish the chronological map of transmission.

The social historian of today may find useful data in the "extensive list of first names extending over a long period of time,"¹² or, as has already been noted, in the comparative study of scholars' dates of birth and death. The quantitative approach benefits from the accumulation of biographical information of a "neutral" nature: that is to say, everything that is included in a biography without bearing any relation to the scholarly character of its subject. As for the non-quantitative approach, it has to rely on the scraps of information provided by the biographer only when he felt it necessary to underline or emphasise some aspects of the activity of a given *'ālim*. This kind of data normally appears either in the form of small narrative units, or as short explanatory comments. A well-known example of the latter appears in the last lines of many biographies, where information is given about

¹¹See Luis Molina, "El estudio de familias de ulemas como fuente para la historia social de al-Andalus," *Saber religioso y poder político en el Islam*, (Madrid, 1994): 160-173; M. Fierro, "Árabes, beréberes, muladíes y *mawālī*: algunas reflexiones sobre los datos de los diccionarios andalusíes," *E.O.B.A.* 7 (Madrid, 1995): 41-54; M. Marín, "Parentesco simbólico y matrimonio entre los ulemas andalusíes," *Al-Qanṭara*, 16 (1995): 335-356; H. de Felipe, *Identidad y onomástica de los beréberes de al-Andalus*, (Madrid, 1997).

¹²Bulliet, *Conversion*, p. 6.

the burial circumstances of scholars. There we find explanations about the whereabouts of cemeteries, the situation of tombs of famous scholars within the cemeteries, and the ritual followed during the burial ceremonies. While this kind of information has a "factual" character, and as such can be used as non-biased evidence, the narrative units pose a different set of problems.

The presence of anecdotes or short stories in biographies of *‘ulamā’* is never unjustified or gratuitous. The selection depends, obviously, on the compiler of the dictionary, who may even decide to suppress this kind of text or limit their number to a minimum. The last choice was preferred by Andalusī compilers of dictionaries, who followed the model established in the second half of the 4th/10th century by Ibn al-Faraḍī. The North African biographical tradition, however, tended to include in its biographical approach a substantial amount of narrative material. Ibn Ḥārith al-Khushanī, Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ and Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī are outstanding examples of this tradition.¹³ Why Andalusī authors chose to restrain the number of anecdotes in their dictionaries is still not clear, but it seems obvious that for them, quantity was more important than quality, as is shown by the fact that the later in time a dictionary is, the larger is the number of biographies it contains for the same chronological period.

Faced with the narrative material, the first reaction of the contemporary reader is one of delight. There, at last, one can see the *‘ulamā’* as real persons, dealing with each other and endowed with individual biographical traits. The weight of the collective archetype, so pervasive in the Islamic biographical tradition, seems to recede before the possibilities of individuation offered by anecdotes. These short narratives frequently include dialogues, through which it is possible to apprehend personal reactions and attitudes. Moreover, they may integrate in their portrayals persons and situations difficult to find in other written sources like historical chronicles. In this respect, it is interesting to note the occasional presence of women in anecdotes connected with *‘ulamā’*.¹⁴

This richness of information has to be put, however, in the context of the biographical dictionary's intended purposes. As has been noted above, the presence of anecdotal material is not casual. Whoever uses it for a qualitative approach has to bear in mind that, again, authors of biographical dictionaries were not concerned with daily life or with

¹³See Ávila, "El género biográfico en al-Andalus," *E.O.B.A.* 8 (Madrid, 1997): 33-51.

¹⁴I have presented some examples of the appearance of women in biographies of *‘ulamā’* in my article "Mujeres veladas: religión y sociedad en al-Andalus," *Arenal* 4 (1997): 23-38.

the description of social mores. Anecdotes were used to illustrate behaviour sanctioned by the collective body of *‘ulamā’*. Conversely, they may show how established rules are transgressed — and the dangers of doing so. It may be said, then, that anecdotes fulfil one of the expected roles of biographical dictionaries, in the sense that they underline, through individual situations, the collective image of Islamic scholarship.

Yet biographical literature, in all the complexity I hope to have shown, is one of the most fruitful sources at the disposal of researchers on the social history of al-Andalus. The biographies should be used with a clear consciousness of their limitations, but they offer insights difficult or impossible to find in other kinds of written or material evidence. In what follows, a case-study based upon biographical data may help to understand both their limits and perspectives.

2. Trade and scholarship

In two recently published studies,¹⁵ I have explored the potential of information contained in the onomastics of Andalusī *‘ulamā’* for the knowledge of their economic and, to some extent, social backgrounds.¹⁶ A scholar’s use of an occupational *laqab* not directly related to his scholarly activities may be taken as an indication that, apart from his interest in Islamic science, he earned his livelihood from a “secular” activity. Onomastic evidence shows that Andalusī *‘ulamā’*, could bear *laqabs* such as al-Dabbāgh (tanner), al-Ḥaddād (ironsmith) or al-Qazzāz (silk maker, weaver). More than a hundred different surnames of this kind were found in Andalusī biographical dictionaries.¹⁷ They appear in the biographies of two hundred fifty-six *‘ulamā’*, for a period going from the 3rd/9th century to the 7th/13th century.¹⁸ A quantitative analysis of this material shows that they are mostly related to two areas of activity: manufacturing and trade, with a preference for textiles

¹⁵M. Marín, “El oficio de la ciencia y otros oficios: en torno a la onomástica de los ulemas andalusíes,” *E.O.B.A.* 7 (Madrid, 1995): 377-436 and Idem, “Anthroponomy and Society: the Occupational *Laqab* of Andalusian *‘Ulamā’*,” in *Romania Arabica*, ed. J. Lüdtker, (Tübingen, 1996): 271-279.

¹⁶The first example of this type of work is that of Cohen, “The Economic Background and the Secular Occupations of Muslim Jurisprudents and Traditionists in the Classical Period of Islam (Until the Middle of the Eleventh Century),” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 13 (1970): 16-61.

¹⁷See Marín, “Oficio.”

¹⁸A greater number of *‘ulamā’* bear this type of *laqab* under the form “Ibn al-” (e.g.: Ibn al-Qazzāz, Ibn al-Bazzāz).

and drugs.¹⁹ For a similar period of time in the Islamic East, Cohen²⁰ found a number of ‘*ulamā*’ with secular occupations noticeably greater than in al-Andalus. The number of biographies he could include in his analysis was, however, much larger, because the population of scholars in the East was larger than it was in al-Andalus.

It is difficult to push the quantitative approach beyond these first assertions. The number of biographies with an occupational *laqab* is relatively small and they are too dispersed through the history of al-Andalus to allow us to reach a more than two basic conclusions. First, there was a connection between the world of scholarship and the professional spheres of trade and manufacturing. Second, this connection was steadily maintained from the 4th/10th century to the 6th/12th century. The very small number of scholars with this kind of *laqab* during the 3rd/9th century reflect the characteristics of what was the formative period of the world of Andalusī scholarship, and of the state of the biographical tradition at the time. At the other end of the chronological span, a similar phenomenon can be observed. But the diminished number of occupational *laqabs* in the 7th/13th century may be explained, too, by the general recession of Andalusī society, the territory of which was drastically reduced in this century.

To enlarge the picture obtained through the analysis of onomastic data, it is necessary to resort to other information provided by biographers, that is, anecdotes or short explanations about the personal character and activities of ‘*ulamā*’. Bearing in mind the previously stated considerations on the exemplary nature of many of these anecdotes, it may be useful to explore the image biographical dictionaries present of scholars who worked as traders or as craftsmen and merchants in the market. In the cases which follow, biographical material of this kind will be examined, for the period going from the beginning of the history of al-Andalus (2nd/8th century) until the end of the 4th/10th century.

Two portraits of ‘*ulamā*’ with very different social background may serve as an introduction to the general question of what was held to be the ideal occupation for a scholar. Of these two biographies, the first concerns a man called ‘*Arif*,²¹ who was a captive of war of Christian origins.²² Having been carried off when he was a child, ‘*Arif* was

¹⁹See Marín, “Anthroponomy.”

²⁰See note 16.

²¹Ibn Hārith al-Kushanī, “*Akhbār al-fuqahā*” *Fuentes Árabe-Hispanas*, vol. 3, (Madrid, 1992), nr. 392.

²²In the Arabic text, *ifranj*, used for people living to the north of al-Andalus, either in the Iberian Peninsula or in other European countries. See E. Lapidra *Cómo los musulmanes*

taught how to read and write by his master, Layth b. Fuḍayl al-Bajjānī,²³ who noticed that the boy was bright and intelligent. ‘Arīf learnt the Qur’ān in a short time and showed such aptitude for science that his master helped him to pursue this profession, abandoning his first intention of making his slave work as a trader or a craftsman. It was thanks to his natural qualities that ‘Arīf could become a member of the world of ‘*ulamā’*, following the usual steps of learning locally with masters from Bajjāna (Pechina) and later going to Egypt. On his return to al-Andalus, ‘Arīf established himself in Bajjāna, and later in Majorca, where he died in 336/947-48.

The short biography of ‘Arīf exemplifies several possible ways of incorporating outsiders into an Islamic society such as al-Andalus. Being a slave and intelligent, ‘Arīf was destined by his master to become a craftsman or a trader. Instead, he entered the world of scholarship and followed the necessary steps in the career of an ‘*ālim*. He became an expert in Islamic law and excelled in matters such as juridical questions (*masā’il*). His integration into Islamic scholarship was complete when his biography was recorded in written form and his name added to those selected by the compiler of a biographical dictionary. The implicit message in ‘Arīf’s biography is that his position in society, as a scholar, was much better than it could have been as a trader or a craftsman.

Another earlier biography presents similar implications. The social background, however, is very different. Instead of a slave, the hero (‘Ubayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā) is a member of one of the most illustrious families of Cordoba: the Banū Abī ‘Īsā.²⁴ Of Berber origins, this family reached a high degree of Arabisation and Islamisation, and in the reign of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II (206-238/822-852) ‘Ubayd Allāh’s father, Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā (d. 234/848) was one of the dominant figures in the

llamaban a los cristianos hispánicos (Alicante, 1997) on this and other terms used by Andalusis for their Christian neighbours.

²³ Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Ta’rīkh ‘ulamā al-Andalus*, ed. F. Codera, (Madrid, 1891-1892), nr. 1003 and Qāḍī ‘Iyād. *Tartīb al-madārik*, (Rabat: no date — 1983), vol. 6, p. 168, give a very different account of ‘Arīf’s life. Their common points with Ibn Ḥarīth’s biography are ‘Arīf’s name, his relationship of walā’ (of which no explanation is offered) to Layth b. Fuḍayl and the place of his death. According to Ibn al-Faraḍī (who is followed closely by ‘Iyād), ‘Arīf was from Lorca and he studied in Bajjāna and Ilbira. He became a well known jurisprudent in Lorca and died at an early age, struck by lightning in 328/939-40.

²⁴ See Marín, “Una familia de ulemas cordobeses: los Banū Abū ‘Īsā,” *Al-Qanṭara* 6 (1985): 291-320.

field of Islamic scholarship.²⁵ It was said that Yahyā was a soldier and a trader at the beginning of his career,²⁶ although he devoted himself to scholarship after his trip to the East. ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Yahyā made this journey in the double capacity of pilgrim and trader,²⁷ but his introduction into the world of scholarship met with some difficulties, as recorded by Ibn Ḥārith al-Khushanī, who heard the following account:

Abū Muḥammad Yahyā b. Yahyā dissuaded his son ‘Ubayd Allāh from taking the way of learning and did not show it to his son. On the contrary, he encouraged him to become a trader. Yahyā was blamed for this reason, but he answered to his critics: “How can I desire for my son an activity to which I have dedicated myself to the destruction of my rank (*jāh*)?”

Nevertheless, ‘Ubayd Allāh followed in his father’s path after his death.”²⁸

‘Ubayd Allāh b. Yahyā was a young man when his father died, and at the end of his long life (he died in 297/909) he was acknowledged as the most important transmitter of his father’s legacy, that is, his recension of the *Muwaṭṭā’* of Mālik b. Anas. The anecdote recorded by Ibn Ḥārith is the only indication of Yahyā b. Yahyā’s opposition to his son’s scholarly interests, and it is not easy to interpret. Yahyā b. Yahyā had suffered for his involvement in the jurists’ activities against the emir al-Ḥakam I, to the point that he was obliged to escape from Cordoba and lived as an exile in Toledo. But by the time his son was of the age to choose a career, he had regained a position of privilege in the Andalusī capital, and he was the paradigm of a successful scholar, both in social and in intellectual terms.²⁹ So, why should he complain of a loss of rank because of his dedication to learning? A possible explanation of this puzzling statement lies in the history of the family of the Banū Abī ‘Īsā. Yahyā’s ancestors were military men, linked to the Umayyad ruling family since the time of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I, and held high positions in the administrative apparatus of the state. The specialisation of the family changed, precisely, with Yahyā’s generation. He was the first to abandon trade and military service for the world of

²⁵See Fierro, “El alfaquí beréber Yahyā b. Yahyā al-Layqā (m. 234/ 848), “el inteligente de al-Andalus,” in *Biografías y género biográfico en el Occidente islámico E.O.B.A. 8*, Madrid (1997): 269-344.

²⁶See Fierro, “Alfaquí,” p. 281, quoting the text by Ibn Ḥayyān about the commercial activities of Yahyā b. Yahyā in the region of Ilbra.

²⁷al-Kushanī, p. 229; Ibn al-Faraḍī nr. 762 and Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, *Tartīb bi’-madārik*, vol. 4, p. 421.

²⁸al-Kushanī, p. 230.

²⁹See below, the anecdote concerning ‘Abd al-A‘lā b. Wahb.

scholarship,³⁰ a decision that he may have eventually regretted, if the anecdote found in the *Akhbār* by Ibn Ḥārith truly reflects his own feelings.

Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā's activity was in fact instrumental, as M. Fierro has shown, in building a new image of the scholar and his role in Andalusī society.³¹ His efforts in this direction were not in vain, and the biographical literature is one of the proofs of Yaḥyā's success. The archetype of the "good scholar," as established by Yaḥyā, dominates biographies of 'ulamā' such as that of 'Arīf. It is not by accident that the anecdote showing Yaḥyā's ambivalent attitude to learning is preserved only in the oldest biography of his son 'Ubayd Allāh. Later compilers, like Ibn al-Faraḍī (d. 403/1013), ignored it, and they only noted that 'Ubayd Allāh travelled to the East as a pilgrim and a trader. By the time Ibn al-Faraxdī wrote his dictionary, portraits of 'ulamā' were much more stereotyped than they had been before and, as was clear in 'Arīf's biography, if a choice has to be made between trade and scholarship, the later would be preferred.

Trading, however, was not uncommon among Andalusī 'ulamā'. Besides the onomastic evidence mentioned above, biographies of scholars who combined their interest in science with the practice of commerce are registered in dictionaries since the 3rd/9th century. The oldest mentioned case is that of Bakr b. al-^cAyn, from Cordoba, who travelled as a trader to Iraq, where he became a disciple of 'Abbās b. Muhammad b. Ḥātim al-Durī (d. 271/884-85).³²

It is not surprising to find a small group of scholars/traders native of Bajjāna, a seaport and commercial city in the south-eastern corner of the peninsula.³³ Mas'ūd b. 'Alī b. Marwān, a disciple of the famous Cordovan master Ibn Waḍḍāḥ (d. 287/900), travelled to the East as a pilgrim and a trader, and studied in Egypt. After his return to al-Andalus, he taught in the mosque of Bajjāna.³⁴ Another Bajjānī trader was Qāsim b. 'Aṣim b. Khayrūn b. Sa'īd al-Murādī, who studied in Baghdad. His (unnamed) son developed an interest in scholarship and be-

³⁰See M. Fierro, "Alfaquí," p. 272-277.

³¹Ibid., p. 322-324.

³²Ibn al-Faraḍī nr. 285. On al-Durī see M. Marín, "Los ulemas de al-Andalus y sus maestros orientales," *E.O.B.A.* 3 (Granada, 1990): nr. 3.

³³On the 'ulamā' of Bajjāna, see M. Fierro and M. Marín, "La islamización de las ciudades andalusíes a través de sus ulemas (ss. II/VIII-comienzos s. IV/X)," In *Las ciudades islámicas en la Alta Edad Media*, (Madrid: at press), where the authors underline the relationship between Bajjāna and al-Qayrawān.

³⁴Ibn al-Faraḍī i, nr. 1424.

came an expert on *masā'il*. Qāsim b. ʿAṣim died in 300/912-13.³⁵ Aḥmad b. Wāḍiḥ (d. probably before 347/958-59) travelled frequently from Bajjāna to the East, both as a pilgrim and as a trader and student of science.³⁶ Finally, Masʿūd b. Khayrān (d. 371/981-82) was a trader from Bajjāna who, after his return from the East, established himself in Córdoba. His biographer, Ibn al-Faraḍī, went to see him, but he did not greatly appreciate his learning. "I noticed," he wrote, "that he had many books, but he was not a man of science, but a trader."³⁷

The last remark by Ibn al-Faraḍī appears under different forms in other biographies of traders who had an interest in scholarship. Such are the cases of Qāsim b. Asbagh al-Ḥajārī, from Seville,³⁸ of Aḥmad b. Khālid b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Judhāmī al-Tājir (d. 378/988-89), a man of little understanding, who nevertheless brought to al-Andalus many interesting books,³⁹ and of Iṣḥāq b. Ghālib b. Tammām al-ʿUṣfurī (d. 389/998-99), who traded in Egypt and Aden, but was a weak transmitter of *ḥadīth*.⁴⁰ For other scholars living in al-Andalus, traders' interest in scholarship, however superficial, had value by way of their access to books written in the East and their personal contacts with leading Eastern scholars. Thus, the very short biography of the trader Muḥammad b. Muflit contains only two pieces of information, namely, that he had encountered Muḥammad b. Zakarīyyā' al-Rāzī in 307/919-20 and that Caliph al-Ḥakam II received learning from him (probably when he was still the heir to his father al-Nāṣir).⁴¹ The future Caliph's passion for books and intellectual novelties is well known,⁴² and this contact with somebody who had met al-Rāzī was not a unique event in his life. Al-Ḥakam had great esteem for another trader, Muḥammad b. Marwān b. Ruzayq Ibn al-Ghashshā, from Badajoz (d.

³⁵Ibid., nr. 1053. Cf. M. Marín, "Nómina de sabios de al-Andalus (93-350/711-961)," *E.O.B.A.* 1 (Madrid, 1988): nr. 202.

³⁶Ibid., nr. 132; Qāḍī Iyāq; vol. 6, p. 156.

³⁷Ibn al-Faraḍī, nr. 1425.

³⁸He lived in the first part of the 4th/10th century (Ibn al-Faraḍī, nr. 1064).

³⁹Ibid., nr. 184.

⁴⁰Ibid., nr. 235.

⁴¹Ibn al-Abbār, *al-Takmila li-Kitāb al-Šila*, ed. al-Ḥusaynī, (Cairo, 1955), nr. 972. On the transmission of al-Rāzī's works through Ibn Muflit, see J. Vernet, *La cultura hispanoárabe en Oriente y Occidente*, (Barcelona, 1978), pp. 21, 81.

⁴²See D. Wasserstein, "The Library of al-Ḥakam II al-Mustansir and the Culture of Islamic Spain," *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 5, (1990-91): 99-105.

339/950-51), who travelled to the East in 309/921-22 and studied in Egypt and Iraq.⁴³

All of these merchant/scholars worked in the international trade circuit linking al-Andalus to North Africa and the Eastern lands of Islam.⁴⁴ Most of them travelled to Egypt and Iraq, but some reached far-away places like Kirmān, Biṣṭām, Nisābūr, Jurjān and Khurāsān.⁴⁵ Trade contacts with India are also documented through scholars' biographies.⁴⁶ On the other hand, merchants working in Andalusian territory are not specifically mentioned as such in biographical dictionaries, unless they worked in the *sūq*, as will be shown below. Traders in the international circuit belonged to the category of wealthy men, with good social connections or related to highly placed families. Muḥammad b. Mu'āwiya Ibn al-Aḥmar was a scholar of good reputation; he reached India as a trader and he was also a member of the ruling Umayyad family.⁴⁷ Ibn al-Aḥmar, then, was in a better position than Ṣāliḥ b. Muḥammad al-Murādī (d. 302/914-15), from Huesca, whose merchandise was stolen in al-Qayrawān, where he studied with Yaḥyā b. 'Umar (d. 285/898 or 289/901-902). After this event he was forced to return to al-Andalus.⁴⁸ International trade required the disposal of large sums of money, as it is clearly explained in the biography of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ziyād b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥabīb, the judge of Cordoba (d. 312/924-25), who was a rich man and who owed his wealth to the judge Ibn Aswad.⁴⁹ When Ibn Aswad encouraged al-Ḥabīb to seek wealth (*rizq*) and suggested to him that he become a trader, al-Ḥabīb complained of his lack of capital, necessary in trade to obtain gains. The judge lent him a huge sum, taken from the *awqāf*

⁴³Ibn al-Faraḍī, nr. 1249.

⁴⁴See on this respect O. R. Constable, *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain: The Commercial Realignment of the Iberian Peninsula 900-1500*, (Cambridge MA, 1994).

⁴⁵Muḥammad b. 'Isā al-Bayyānī (d. 338/949-950); Ibn al-Faraḍī nr. 1241. (See also nr. 755).

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, nr. 1287. See another example in M. Marín, "Riḥla y biografías de Ibn al-Qallās (m. 337/948)," *Homenaje al Profesor José María Fórneas Besteiro*, vol. 1, (Granada:1995): 581-591.

⁴⁷See M. Marín, *Individuo y sociedad en al-Andalus*, (Madrid, 1992): 160-161.

⁴⁸Qaḍī 'Iyāḍ, vol. 5, p. 251. Cf. M. Marín, "Nómina," nr. 632 and Constable, p. 81.

⁴⁹See his biography in M. Fierro, "Tres familias andalusíes de época omeya apodadas «Banū Ziyād»," *E.O.B.A.* 5 (Madrid, 1992):119-128,129 on the possible non-Arab origins of his family.

("pious foundations"), and he offered him the free use of the gains derived from his investments in trade.⁵⁰

Summing up, biographical materials related to scholars who were also traders allow different levels of interpretation. A certain mistrust towards traders can be detected in some biographies, mainly those recorded by Ibn al-Faraḍī. This attitude may be explained, in some cases, because of the low standard of scholarship found in some of these 'ulamā', whose interest in learning was secondary to their professional activity in trade. More generally, the establishment of an ideal image of scholarship and scholars, from the 4th/10th century onward, would explain the priority given to science as the best choice for an intelligent and pious Muslim. Correlatively, ascetic trends would emphasise the value of abandoning worldly concerns, the pursuit of gain and the acquisition of high rank and wealth.

Notwithstanding this evolution in biographical literature, compilers of biographies recorded a series of objective facts. Among them was the continuous presence of scholars who earned their livelihood from practising trade and crafts. Some of these biographies have already been quoted in this paper, namely those of men who travelled to the Islamic East. Others, however, practised their trade in the local marketplaces. Onomastic evidence, as has been noted, points to a consistent number of 'ulamā' working as vendors or manufacturers of goods in the *sūqs*. Biographical data for the period in question is not plentiful, but it confirms the link between the world of learning and the world of the *sūq*.

Four of the six biographies in which trade in the market-place is mentioned refer to men of *mawlā* origins. They were, most probably, descendants of Christian converts to Islam or *muwalladūn* (the case of 'Arīf, recorded above, is that of a *mawlā* who was a slave freed by his master).⁵¹ Sa'īd b. Khumayr b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ru'aynī (d. 301/913), a *mawlā* from Cordoba, was a goldsmith (*sā'igh*) by trade who also pursued a scholarly career and travelled to the East in search of knowledge.⁵² In other cases, the link between trade in the *sūq* and learning is emphasised by biographers, who pinpoint the fact that learned craftsmen used to give juridical advice to other "people of the *sūq*." It may be supposed that most of this advice would be related to

⁵⁰Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, vol. 5, p. 189-90. The text quoted by Constable, p. 74, is that of Ibn Hārith al-Khushanī, *Quḍāt Quruba*, ed. and trans. J. Ribera, (Madrid, 1914), pp. 175-6/216-7, where no mention is made of the awqā f.

⁵¹See Fierro, "Árabes, beréberes."

⁵²Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, vol. 5, p. 162. Cf. M. Marín, "Nómima," nr. 632.

commercial matters, although it may have covered other areas of social and family life. Biographical dictionaries mention the names of Muḥammad b. Fayṣal (or Fuḍayl) b. Hudhayl al-Ḥaddād (d. 327/938-939), a trader in the *sūq* of the ironmongers, who gave *fatāwā* to the "people of the *sūq*" in Cordoba, and of Yūsuf b. Samaw'al al-Zayyāt, who fulfilled the same function.⁵³ Learned craftsmen, such as these two, (one an ironmonger, the other a seller of oil) probably used their knowledge in very practical ways, helping people around them to understand the intricacies of Islamic law. A similar and sensible approach can be appreciated in the biography of 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Ṣābūnī (d. 378/988-989), known as Ibn Baraka (from the name of his mother), a juridical counsellor (*mushāwar*) in Cordoba, very apt in reaching agreements between litigants. He was not, according to Ibn al-Faraḍī⁵⁴, a very learned man. His livelihood came from two shops (*dukkān*) where his servants produced soap, hence his surname "al-Ṣābūnī."⁵⁵

These biographies, in their brevity and similarity, offer a view of daily life and dealings in the market of the capital city of Cordoba. Conflicts and problems in commercial relationships, as in other areas of social life, could be dealt with inside the circle of professional men, some of whom had acquired enough knowledge in the field of Islamic law. Reaching an agreement between contesting parties could be easier if the juridical counsellor was a man with personal experience in trade. Thus, the theoretical requirements of the law could adapt themselves to new situations, and conversely, daily transactions would be expected to follow rules endorsed by the authority of scholars who were also, if not mainly, experts in trade and crafts.

The shift between the two worlds of trade and scholarship is exemplified in the biographies of two outstanding scholars who lived in the 4th/10th century. Both of them began their careers in the *sūq*, a place they left to acquire fame and renown as 'ulamā'. For the compiler of their biographies, the stories in which their commercial activity is recorded are used to underline the high rank they later acquired in the world of knowledge. For the contemporary reader, however, these stories show how social boundaries could be crossed. If traders would become scholars, as we have seen, and maintain their position in both

⁵³Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, vol. 6, pp. 118,148; cf. M. Marín, "Nómina," nrs. 1305 and 1594. For other 'ulamā' who specialised in giving *fatwās* for the people of the *sūq*, see M. Marín, "Oficio," p. 380.

⁵⁴Ta'rikh, nr. 741. Cf. M. L. Ávila, "Sociedad hispanomusulmana," nr. 51.

⁵⁵Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, vol. 6, p. 302 and vol. 7, p. 202.

scholarship and trade, others would choose to abandon the latter. In doing so, biographical dictionaries imply that they were attaining a higher situation in the ideal social hierarchy. For one of these two scholars, this choice involved an upward social movement. For the second, however, it meant an economic loss and a difficult decision to be made.

The first of these two *‘ulamā’* was Abū Ibrāhīm Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Masarra (d. 352/963), a well known ascetic man from Toledo who held the post of juridical counsellor in Cordoba, where he had lived since his youth.⁵⁶ Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm’s life is presented by his biographer as an example of asceticism and renunciation of worldly concerns.⁵⁷ He came from a humble family, and his career began in the *sūq* of flax. A story recorded by Qāḍī ‘Iyād shows Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm as a small shop-owner who did not earn much from his trade. In fact, according to anecdote, his daily income was barely enough to buy food for himself and his mother with whom he lived.⁵⁸ By this time he was already a learned man (his brother, who complained to their mother about Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm’s lack of response to this demand of help, called him a *faqīh*). Although Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm’s biographer does not explain the circumstances by which he attained his later position, it seems obvious that at some point he was able to abandon his shop in the market and devoted himself to scholarship. He became a man of high standing in juridical and learned circles⁵⁹ and attended scientific gatherings presided over by Caliph al-Ḥakam II. It may be supposed, then, that Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm was able to support himself and his family (a son of his, Aḥmad, is mentioned in his biography) thanks to his knowledge and learning.

The second scholar whose case illustrates the shifting boundaries between trade and scholarship was a disciple of Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm, and who was encouraged by the latter to carry on with his studies. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Hāshim, known as Ibn al-Makwī (d. 401/1010),⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid., vol. 6, pp. 126-134.

⁵⁷ On his dealings with Caliph al-Ḥakam II, see M. Marín, “Inqibād ‘an al-sultān: ‘ulamā’ and political power in al-Andalus,” In *Saber religioso y poder político en el Islam*, (Madrid 1994): 134-135.

⁵⁸ A quarter of flour and one-eighth of oil” was all he could buy at the end of a day of work (Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, vol. 6, p. 130).

⁵⁹ See Fierro, “Los mālikíes de al-Andalus y los dos árbitros (*al-‘akamān*),” *Al-Qanṭara* 6 (1987): 79-102 and *La heterodoxia en al-Andalus durante el periodo omeya*, (Madrid, 1987), pp. 152-153.

⁶⁰ Ibn al-Makwī’s biography has been the object of some recent studies (cf. S. Peña, “Ibn al-Makwī,” *E.O.B.A.* 6 [Madrid, 1994]: 353-383). The longest biography of Ibn al-Makwī is found in Qāḍī ‘Iyād, vol. 7, pp. 123-135.

earned his living as a trader of silk in the *sūq* while he completed his studies. When he became known for his extensive learning and his intelligence, he was appointed as juridical counsellor in 365/975, on the recommendation of the judge Ibn al-Salīm. He then abandoned his trade in the *sūq*. As a consequence, his earnings diminished greatly. Ibn al-Salīm informed the Caliph al-Ḥakam of his situation, but when the Caliph offered Ibn al-Makwī a gift of one thousand dīnārs, the erudite refused it.

Ibn al-Makwī found himself in an ethical quandary which occurred again in other moments of his life: whether to accept a monetary offer from the *sultān* in exchange for or as a compensation for his learned services or whether to refuse it on the moral grounds of the inherent "evil" of such compensation.⁶¹ Ibn al-Salīm, the judge who tried to help Ibn al-Makwī,⁶² is another example of the dilemma in which some scholars found themselves: how to earn a livelihood out of their knowledge without receiving a financial compensation from the political power of the day. Having abandoned his professional activity in the *sūq*, the offers made to Ibn al-Makwī were generous, and many others before and after him accepted such favours. Ibn al-Makwī's ethical scruples illuminate the difficulties felt by some learned men, who did not find any problem, however, in linking trade and scholarship.

These scruples were not felt by a famous contemporary scholar of Ibn al-Makwī, Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh b. Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Aṣīlī (d. 392/1002).⁶³ Abū Muḥammad al-Aṣīlī spent thirteen years in the East, where he acquired great knowledge. Having heard of the man, the Caliph al-Ḥakam invited al-Aṣīlī to return to al-Andalus. But al-Ḥakam died by the time that al-Aṣīlī had reached Almería. His hopes were consequently destroyed, and he stayed for a while in Almería, baffled and confused. Afterwards he went to Cordoba, where he gave lessons but felt lost, to the point that he decided to return to the East. Fortunately for him, news of his learning had reached the *hājib* al-Mansur,⁶⁴ who ordered a salary to be given to him. After that, al-Aṣīlī's situation improved, and he was later appointed *mushāwar* and enjoyed a successful career.

⁶¹See S. Peña, p. 358-359.

⁶²Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ vol. 6, pp. 280-289.

⁶³Ibid., vol. 7, pp. 135-145.

⁶⁴See on al-Mansūr the recent study by C. de la Puente, "La caracterización de Almanzor," In *Biografías y género biográfico en el Occidente islámico*, E.O.B.A. 8 (Madrid, 1997): 367-402, and the bibliography presented therein.

These kinds of anecdotes, as they have been preserved in biographical dictionaries, seem to point in different directions. As scholars, compilers of these dictionaries tend to promote a view of scholarship as the best possible occupation for a Muslim. But, leaving aside the cases of scholars from wealthy families, others needed to sustain themselves through a salary. Their income could only originate either in their integration into the juridical and administrative apparatus or in practising a trade not related to learning. The ascetic tendency that disapproved of accepting salaries from the *sulṭān* was acclaimed as an “ideal” position, but few would be prepared to follow it. Biographical anecdotes to this effect abound, and they show mainly scholars renouncing their inherited wealth or their earnings from trade, and embracing an ascetic way of life. This abundance, however, should not obscure the presence of another set of stories, in which the prestige and high social standing of the scholar is directly linked to his personal merits and the consideration he enjoys in the circles of power. One of the most revealing texts of this type is found precisely in the biography of a man widely known for his asceticism, ‘Abd al-A‘lā b. Wahb (d. 261/874 or 262/875).⁶⁵

As ‘Abd al-A‘lā himself put it,⁶⁶ when he was a young man living in Cordoba he had a neighbour called Ghayth. This Ghayth worked as a gate-keeper in the royal palace (in Bāb al-Jinān), and was a freed slave of the Caliph⁶⁷ al-Ḥakam and could not speak Arabic properly⁶⁸. Ghayth used to watch ‘Abd al-A‘lā while he was studying and working to become a scholar, and he commiserated with him, saying: “You poor one, it would be more useful for you to work in trade for your livelihood. I wish you to mount a mule like that of Yaḥyā [b. Yaḥyā], and to wear silk dresses like he does, and to be asked to the palace to visit the emir.” Ghayth’s comments, repeated again and again, irritated ‘Abd al-A‘lā, but he was able to take his revenge on Ghayth some years later. By then, he had been in the East, and on his return to al-Andalus, the emir commissioned him to his council and sent for him. On

⁶⁵See M. Marín, “*Inqibād ‘an al-sulṭān*,” p. 133.

⁶⁶The story is transmitted from ‘Abd al-A‘lā to Muḥammad b. Waddāḥ to Aḥmad b. Khālid to Ibn Ḥārith al-Khushanī (*Akhbār al-fuqahā*, p. 263).

⁶⁷*Sic.* The text alludes to the emir al-Ḥakam I (r. 190-206/796-822). Writing under the reign of an Umayyad Caliph, Ibn Ḥārith al-Khushanī dispensed this same title to his predecessors, who were emirs of al-Andalus.

⁶⁸Al-Ḥakam I used as personal guards war captives and slaves from Christian lands. As they could not speak Arabic properly, they were called *akhrās/khurs* (“dumb”). See E. Lévi-Provençal, *España musulmana hasta la caída del califato de Córdoba*, (Madrid, 1950), pp. 121-122.

this occasion ‘Abd al-A‘lā dressed exactly like Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā, wore a *qalansuwa* like his, and mounted a mule like Yaḥyā’s, and waited until the latter came along to accompany him to the palace. There ‘Abd al-A‘lā asked Ghayth, who was at the gate, what his opinion was of his appearance. Quite naturally, Ghayth was reduced to saying that he would make no more comments in the future on the career chosen by ‘Abd al-A‘lā.

This last story brings the argument of the second part of this paper back to its initial steps. Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā had worked throughout his life to impose a model of behaviour for ‘ulamā’, and this was a model which implied an acknowledgement of the social rank and prestige of scholars. Their visual appearance, as established by Yaḥyā, included wearing specific dress and headgear, and riding a mule. All these were marks of a position that could be appreciated by common people, as well as by other social groups competing for upward mobility. Through these external marks, ‘Abd al-A‘lā showed his former neighbour that his preference for scholarship above trade was rewarded by social success. The story is therefore recorded for future generations of ‘ulamā. Those who were lured into the practice of trade should know that science was, in the long run, more rewarding in terms of social prestige, if not of economic gains.

Biographical anecdotes, like those presented here, may seem to reflect contradictory attitudes. But, in fact, this material serves to underline the evolution of social practices, the variety of attitudes inside the world of scholarship and the construction of ideals of behaviour. Biographical anecdotes document the conflict between personal ambition and ethical exigency fairly extensively, a conflict conditioned to some extent by the different social origins and economic position of scholars. Finally, concepts like rank, prestige and fame have to be taken into account for the analysis of how ‘ulamā’ accepted social and intellectual constraints or reacted against them.