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UBI SUNT: MEMORY AND NOSTALGIA IN TAIFA COURT CULTURE

There is no loved one to be found among the ruins;
Who can inform me of their whereabouts?
I have only cruel absence to ask, for he has dispersed them,
[I know not] if to the mountains or to the plain.
Time has worked its tyranny on them, and they were dispersed
to all ends of the earth; most of them have died.
Destiny has invaded their dwellings: they have changed,
and their former inhabitants are not what they were.
Time has refused to [again] create light in its
courtyards, which [before] almost set hearts ablaze.
For such as Cordoba, the wails of he who weeps with only
one eye are but little, for her tears flow unceasingly.
I am afflicted by the memory of that springtime house
where fresh gazelles wandered about a spacious courtyard,
and the gazes when the gazes of all nobility turned toward
her from everywhere, and the days of unified power,
in the hands of its Amir and the Amir delegated by him,
And the days in which every peaceful hand was raised in
salute, hurrying anxiously toward her.
My sadness is renewed for her chiefs, narrators, people of
confidence, and defenders.
My soul sobs for her rectitude, grace, splendor,
and grandeur.
My entrails are split for her benevolent wisemen,
her poets and her elegant men.¹

Ibn Shuhaid (992–1035)

Ibn Shuhaid's lament for "Cordoba the Lost" is one of the most frequently cited examples of Andalusian "Ubi Sunt" poetry, a poetic genre that can be broadly defined as centering on the theme of the inexorable passing of youth, empires, and even entire civilizations. These expressions of grief over the passing of Cordoban splendor, along with other "Ubi Sunt" compositions dating to the Taifa period, are usually interpreted as expressing a genuine desire for the return of Umayyad hegemony to al-Andalus, although they use the traditional topoi found in all Islamic, and not just Andalusian, "Ubi Sunt" literature. Pérès, for instance, claims that, although earlier generations of poets had used nostalgia topoi to lament the disappearance of noble civilizations, Andalusian poets of

the eleventh century are particular, because their laments are more "real", inspired as they are by a yearning for an immediate, as opposed to a remote, past:² the civilization whose loss they mourned was one in which they in fact had lived.

Why these "Ubi Sunt" compositions should be regarded as more "real" or "sincere" in their nostalgia than those written by Umayyad or Abbasid poets, however, is unclear. This paper will examine several examples of "Ubi Sunt" literature produced during the Taifa period and will, through a consideration of this literature within the context of the particular moments and circumstances in which it was produced, challenge the literal manner in which it is generally interpreted. "Ubi Sunt" is a literary genre with conventions and topoi every bit as codified as those of the panegyric *qasida*, the *ghazal*, or the *khamriyya*. "Ubi Sunt" has, as does any other literary genre, a repertoire of themes and topoi by which it is recognized: nostalgia, comparison of past to present, a consciousness that the past evoked will never return. The signifying potential of these themes, however, is not unchangeable; rather, in addition to their participation in the poetics of the genre, the poems often serve to articulate the political, social, or personal concerns of the poet or of the culture.

The Taifa period lasted scarcely more than a century (roughly 1010–1118); nevertheless, it falls into two clearly distinguishable political periods. The first decades of the century — also classifiable as part of the *fitna*, or civil war — witnessed the disintegration of the Cordoban caliphate, as well as desperate attempts to maintain or gain control over it by factions of Sunni (e.g., Denia, Toledo, Zaragoza) and Shi'i (centered around Malaga) Taifa states.³ Not surprisingly, literary and visual cultures of the first half of the Taifa period directly engage those of Umayyad Cordoba: Sunni cultures, through emulation, attempt to associate themselves with their caliphal predecessors, while the Shi'i court at Malaga, in the literary realm,

self-consciously differentiates itself from Cordoban neoclassicism and, in that of visual culture, selectively appropriates and redefines Umayyad icons, thus challenging Umayyad legitimacy.⁴

The second half of the century (from roughly 1050) witnessed the eclipse of the state of Malaga by the ruling dynasty of Granada and the vanishing of the threat of an al-Andalus united under Shi'i rule. Sunni-Shi'i polemics thus lose their immediacy for Taifa culture, as Taifa society's growing anxiety over its ability to fend off Christian aggression from the north and Berber encroachment from the south begins to manifest itself in ways for which "Ubi Sunt" poetry is particularly well suited.

Arabic "Ubi Sunt" literature interprets the past in two principal ways as the poet/narrator adopts one of two personae. The first of these personae is that of the moralistic arbiter who sits in judgment on his culture and, when comparing it to the glory of past civilizations, finds it lacking.⁵ The ruins contemplated, evoked, or visited by the arbiter are characterized as "noble" through their associations with *qasd* (moderation), moral fortitude and *muruwwa* (a word which encompasses virtues particular to the tribal ethics for which the Jāhiliyya and early years of Islam were idealized). The arbiter rarely portrays himself as entering the ruins; rather, he contemplates them from afar, at times visited by visions of the palace's erstwhile occupants.

The second of these personae is that of the libertine, for whom the concept of nobility is represented by shunning the virtues espoused by the arbiter; for him the ruined palace becomes a place of remembered and, at times, reenacted orgy. The libertine does not venerate the crumbling vaults and walls because of their association with any particular dynasty or its empire, but because of their evocation of pleasurable moments belonging to his own past.

The following Taifa "Ubi Sunt" compositions will be considered in light of their employment of the two personae described above, as well as the additional significance which may be accorded them due to social or political circumstances. Cordoba, of course, exercised immense power over the imagination of Taifa society; its image, its icons and, during the second half of the period, its ghost are present in numerous aspects of Taifa culture. The thematic material of Taifa "Ubi Sunt" literature, however, is not limited to Cordoba or Madinat al-Zahra'. Taifa society also examines its nostalgia against the backdrop of a ruined Christian

monastery, or in lush but nameless gardens. The desires expressed are just as often for the eternity of present pleasures as for the return of the Umayyad dynasty to the caliphal throne. In fact, the changing significance accorded to Cordoba and its icons, their presence or absence, in Taifa "Ubi Sunt" literature allows us to trace the evolution of nostalgia in Taifa culture, and thus better to interpret it.

Ibn Shuhaid's lament for "Cordoba the Lost" is typical of the first political moment of the Taifa period, when Cordoba, in its incarnation as dynastic capital, had only recently ceased to be, or perhaps still was. It and its vanished inhabitants still existed in the memories of Ibn Shuhaid and his contemporaries — their relegation to the realm of myth would take place with the passing of his generation. In most "Ubi Sunt" pieces dating to the first decades of the Taifa period, the ruins and the civilization they represent are the true subjects of the poetic discourse. The poet does not actually enter the crumbling palace, but rather contemplates it from a distance: indeed, it would be impossible for him to enter it, for it represents a civilization with whose vanishing, along with its "fresh gazelles", "chiefs", "narrators", and "persons of confidence", its "splendor", "rectitude", and "grandeur", he is not reconciled.

Here, Ibn Shuhaid has adopted the persona of the moral arbiter, comparing his present to the palace's past (read: the days of Umayyad hegemony), and finding it inferior. The topoi which served in the particular political climate of the *fitna* as the marks of a noble place are characterized as belonging to an idealized past and are associated with the Banu Marwan. They are also irretrievably lost: Ibn Shuhaid uses such categorical phrases as "forever mutilated" to describe the various apartments of the palace, now empty, and to allude to the utter finality of his loss. The poet/narrator's decision not to enter the ruins (read: not to accept the palace's ruined state) establishes Madinat al-Zahra's status as memory; his entrance would have signified a reconciliation of past with present and thus of the palace's removal into the realm of myth. Contemplated from afar, the palace retains its status as a sign of Cordoban power, as representative of a vanished culture, but one whose memory is still intact.

Although the regrets expressed by Ibn Shuhaid were no doubt genuine, the poem contains indications that another agenda may also have dictated its composition. By composing in the "Ubi Sunt" genre, Ibn Shu-

haid achieved two goals. The first was a demonstration of his erudition: the poet's audience would have been aware of his composition's association with Umayyad and Abbasid precedents, and his successful manipulation of the "Ubi Sunt" genre, by casting places with which they were familiar into the roles of topoi, of objects of nostalgia, would have been appreciated.

The second goal was that of pleasing a patron from whom he desired some sort of reward, probably monetary. Ibn Shuhaid disconsolately evokes "the days of united power, in the hands of its Amir/and the Amir delegated by him, /and the days in which each peaceful hand/was raised in salute": his lament is not only for the elegant court formerly housed at Madinat al-Zahra', but for the days of "unified power", i.e., for the Umayyad dynasty itself. Although neither al-Maqqari nor his source, al-Fath ibn Khaqan, is informative regarding the circumstances of the poem's composition, it was probably written during the time the poet spent at the Cordoban court. Ibn Shuhaid was employed as functionary and court poet by at least two Umayyad pretenders to the caliphal throne, and the sentiments expressed in this selection would undoubtedly have been to their taste. It is possible, however, that there was more than a little of the rhetorical in his nostalgic protestations: at one point in his career, when things were not going to his liking in Cordoba, Ibn Shuhaid left in a huff and took refuge at the court of the Shi'i Berber Banu Hammud in Malaga.⁶ Although no examples of panegyric by Ibn Shuhaid written for Hammudi patrons have been preserved in the anthologies, we may be sure that he did his best to flatter them.

The following selection, also by Ibn Shuhaid, is in many ways characteristic of Hammudi literary tastes; it is probably not too far-fetched to suggest that it was written to satisfy a Hammudi rather than a loyalist patron. With its casting of the locus of nostalgia — in this case, a ruined Christian monastery — as a setting for licentious (decidedly immoderate, anti-religious, and even anarchistic) behavior, the anecdote cautions us against associating the "Ubi Sunt" genre too firmly with nostalgia for the Umayyads, even during the earliest decades of the Taifa epoch:

... And in this same anecdote, [it was told] that Aba Amir ibn Shuhaid spent the night in one of the churches of Cordoba. It was tapestried with sad branches and covered with joy, and the tolling of the bells was lovely to his hearing. The lightning of excitement [was] beauti-

ful. The priest⁷ had appeared⁸ in his Christian servitude, his waist circled by a belt of the most beautiful manufacture,⁹ and happiness had gone away, and pleasures had completely vanished.¹⁰ Nothing [was] sustaining the glass¹¹ except water. Is not only a spoonful, a puddle, left of the wine? And he stood up among them, making them ardent, as though they had sipped from their cups the last sip with red lips, blowing on it with a perfumed fragrance, words, incomplete phrases sipped by the sweetest sip, and then he improvised on the pleasures of the evening:

Oh, ruins in whose cloister I tarried,
inhaling deeply the wine of youth with the
purest of extracts,
Among noble companions who composed
happiness out of their hair,
losing themselves in its length.
And the priest, of what was willed by the
length of our gathering, calls for the
return to our previous condition
with his psalms.
He gives us the gift of wine with
blushes, like the one gifted with night
vision,¹² protected by the furtive
glances of his guard.
The *zurrafa'* commune amply in him; their
drink is a generous wine, their food
pork.¹³

This selection, in addition to belonging to the "Ubi Sunt" genre, is related to the "majlis anecdote,"¹⁴ and serves to point up the sharp distinction between the two poetic personae of moral arbiter and libertine, both of which Ibn Shuhaid adopted, with the intention, it is to be assumed, of pleasing different patrons with differing agendas. At a first reading, this piece appears to contain no political agenda in either setting or thematic content. The poet adopts the persona of the libertine, elegant and dissolute, who defies death and eternal damnation, stopping the inexorable flow of time with wine, the elixir which transports him into an altered state from which he can laugh at the cautious counsels of the moderate. The behavior presented as "noble", in other words, is the antithesis of that counseled by the first selection. The moments evoked are not connected to any dynasty; in his guise of libertine, the poet guards the preservation of youthful pleasures in the form of topoi associated with the Abbasid *khamriyya* (wine song). The young priest, "his waist circled by a belt of the most beautiful manufacture," evokes the gazelle-like cup-bearer (*saqi*), gifted with night vision and glances that

wound.¹⁵ Also evocative of the world of the *khamriyya* is the setting for these revels, a ruined Christian church.¹⁶ The ruins function, not as an embodiment of past civilizations, but as the setting for the poet's dallying and revelry in youthful pleasures with "noble companions" (possibly Christians) subjugated to the length of their pleasures.

In the prose passage preceding the poem, reference is made to the *isrā'*, or night journey, the spiritual voyage made by *majlis* participants, their travels speeded on by the heady fumes of vintage wine.¹⁷ References are also made, in the poetic selection, to the "inhaling ... of the purest of extracts," and to the "changed condition" of the companions resulting from this (as well as the wine), both topoi related to the interior, or *bātini*, significance of the *khamriyya*. The poet refers to those present as "*zurafā'*"; the *zurafā'*, or "elegants", of Baghdadi society were those most likely to engage in the pursuits enumerated here. From this class were chosen the king's *nudamā'* (boon companions); the use of this term also links Ibn Shuhaid's composition to this world. The *isrā'*, as well as the changing of condition through the ingestion of wine, were associated, in an Abbasid context, with non-Sunni schools of thought such as the *mu'tazili*, the Shi'i, and the mystic. Impious (i.e., drunken) or libertine behavior as a vehicle for mystical enlightenment, integral to the poetics of the *khamriyya*, was a preferred topos among poets who belonged to non-Sunni schools of thought, and its use often carried heterodox implications: Abu Nuwas, acknowledged Abbasid master of the wine song, made plentiful use of the themes enumerated here, and was known to have been a *mutakallim*, or a practitioner of *kalām* (dialectical logic), whose principles were espoused by members of several non-Sunni schools of thought.¹⁸

As suggested earlier, it is very possible that this selection was composed in order to please a member of the Malagan dynasty, the Shi'i Banu Hammud, rather than an Umayyad patron. Thematic material typical of the *khamriyya*, as well as of the *ghazal* (love song), began to appear in panegyric *qasā'id* at the Hammudi court during the 1040's, only a few years after Ibn Shuhaid's death.¹⁹ The densely metaphorical style viewed as most appropriate to compositions in the *ghazal* and *khamriyya* genres, known as *badi'*,²⁰ had also carried heretical implications when it was first used in an Abbasid context, and Hammudi patrons and poets were certainly conscious of these. Adoption of libertine topoi and the *badi'* style for use in such a public genre as the panegyric, moreover,

may be read as an anti-Umayyad statement on the part of the Malagan dynasty: while Sunni patrons were listening to compositions in the neoclassical style which had been used for panegyric at the caliphal courts of Cordoba, members of the Banu Hammud affirmed their non-orthodoxy (and their claims to the imamate) by preferring a poetics and a style firmly associated with *mu'tazili*, Shi'i, and mystic philosophies.

The selection of a ruined Christian church as the setting for Ibn Shuhaid's revelries thus acquires a more politically charged significance: first, associations with the Abbasid *khamriyya* would have been apparent to the piece's intended audience. Second, the poet is careful to specify that the church was located in Cordoba: the selection of a place in the former Umayyad capital which represented, in fact, the antithesis of Madinat al-Zahra' and its political connotations was significant, and this significance would certainly not have been lost on a Hammudi patron. By casting Cordoba (through its association with the church) as a setting for licentious revels, with Christian companions no less, the former capital is stripped of its Umayyad associations and appropriated by the Banu Hammud in association with their Shi'i "heterodoxy".

Perhaps the best known of the Taifa poets is Ibn Zaidun,²¹ author of the so-called Wallada qasidas, usually interpreted as grieving laments for a disastrous love affair which took place during the early decades of the poet's adult life, with the infamous Umayyad princess Wallada, also a libertine and herself a poetess. Wallada is often regarded as embodying the Umayyad dynasty; thus, Ibn Zaidun's oeuvre could be interpreted as a lament for a Cordoba evocative of its Umayyad past:

In al-Zahra' I remembered you with yearning before the
lovely landscape and the limpid face of the land.

The evening breeze languished,
as though it sympathized with my plight.

The garden smiled through its silvery water,
which seemed necklaces that kissed the firmness of
breasts.

It was a day like our sensual days of long ago,
when we robbed pleasures from the night while
Destiny slept.

My vision was delighted by a flower,
its stem bent by the weight of the dew,
as though its eyes, seeing my insomnia,
commiserated my plight.

A rose glittered in its sunny bed,

and the sun of midday shone for it.
 A waterlily, fragrant and sleepy, awakened
 by the dawn, perfumed the air.
 All this fills me with passion for you,
 with yearning in my tormented breast.
 If that day had united me to you,
 it would have been the most generous of days,
 Oh, that God not grant relief to the heart
 visited by memory, a heart that flies with the
 beating wings of ardor.
 If the Zephyr wished, he would bring to you a
 youth exhausted by his sad fate,
 not my most precious possessions, beloved of my
 soul, if indeed lovers may have possessions.
 For awhile, the harvest of our pure love was an
 intimate garden where we ran free and unfettered.
 Now I extol what we were, and although you have
 consoled yourself with forgetting, I remain your
 faithful lover.²²

This *qasida* was probably written during the reign of al-Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbad, and thus dates to the second half of the Taifa period. The Shi'i-Sunni conflict in which the Taifa kingdom of Malaga had figured as protagonist had been defused, and *topoi* which, two decades earlier, had been politically loaded were now used without politicizing intent. Although this and others of Ibn Zaidun's compositions utilize the palace of al-Zahra' as their setting, little or no reference following the initial mention of the structure is made either to the palace or to the Umayyad caliphs, and certainly no wishes, sincere or otherwise, are expressed for their return to the caliphal throne.

In Ibn Shuhaid's *qasida*, *Madinat al-Zahra'* represented the Umayyad dynasty itself and the entire civilization it had fostered; in the second example by the same poet, the weight of the palace's importance as icon of Umayyad dynastic power is felt precisely because of its absence. In Ibn Zaidun's *qasida*, *Madinat al-Zahra'* is also the poem's setting. The poet's trysts with the beloved are represented as having taken place in the palace's gardens; the Umayyad palace-city, however, was destroyed by Berber armies in 1013, when the poet would have been a ten-year-old boy. In other words, it seems unlikely that *Madinat al-Zahra'* actually served as the setting for his rendezvous with *Wal-lada*.

For what, exactly, does the Umayyad palace function as setting? The nostalgia expressed by Ibn Zaidun seems personal rather than political: what he mourns is not the devastation of a palace and the ruin

of a dynasty, but the happy days when he lived, in an unspecified past, with his beloved. Thus, the persona adopted by the poet here may be placed into the category of libertine, with the setting cast, again, as a locus of pleasure. It is not precisely the drunken pleasures of the *khamriyya*, however, which are evoked but, rather, those afforded by the company and the body of a beloved. In the first line of the *qasida*, as opposed to Ibn Shuhaid's observation of the ruins from afar, it is already clear that Ibn Zaidun has entered the palace's confines. A description of its gardens follows. The silvery water is compared to the smile of the object of his passion and then to a necklace which caresses breasts, represented by the rounded hillocks on its shores; the slender stem of a flower bowed under the weight of dew evokes a delicate waist.

These metaphors would have been readily recognized by the poet's audience as *topoi* referring to the body of a beloved (whether male or female). More importantly, given Abbasid precedents which would have been well known to an educated audience, they evoke the world of the *ghazal*: aiding, for example, in the audience's recognition of his intent is Ibn Zaidun's comparison of dew-covered flowers to eyes filled and overflowing with tears which commiserate his plight, a metaphor often used in an Abbasid context by the Mannerist poets, second generation of the Moderns. The particular wording of this example would probably have brought some lines of al-Sanawbari to mind.²³

Along with the *ghazal* itself, Ibn Zaidun's insistence on *topoi* particular to that genre would have evoked the entire social context of the world of "courtly love" revealed in by Baghdad *zurafa'*.²⁴ Taifa kings and courtiers of the later decades of the period were intensely Baghdadophile in their tastes and habits: I have argued elsewhere that the private, hermetic world of the Taifa *majlis* was a conscious re-creation of what eleventh-century Andalusian society perceived as having been characteristic of ninth-century Baghdad.²⁵ Entire treatises were devoted to instructing would-be Baghdad *zurafa'* in the form in which their love letters should be composed, the gifts considered appropriate, the dishes to be consumed on certain occasions, even the shoelaces to be chosen and the verses to be inscribed on them: being in love (unrequited if possible) was *de rigueur* for anyone aspiring to the classification of *zarif*.

"Courtly love" and the elaborate social etiquette it entailed achieved enormous popularity at the courts

of the Taifa princes during the later decades of the period, and *majlis* literature provides firm corroboration of this fact. Meisami has offered an interpretation of panegyric qasidas in which the patron is praised and, at times, admonished through discourse appropriated from love poetry.²⁶ According to her model, discourse and intimate forms of address peculiar to the *ghazal* (e.g., the poet's assumption of the persona of the lover to address the king, his beloved) were used to allow the poet, who often served as boon companion to the king, to criticize the king's behavior, the gentle words functioning as a sort of sugar coating for the difficult-to-swallow pill of criticism. While Meisami's theory is based on poetic production at the Persian court, her comments are also applicable to Taifa poetics. It is known that Ibn Zaidun served as court poet in Seville under the Banu 'Abbad; it is also known that, on two occasions, he found himself in prison as a result of disagreements with his patrons. Keeping in mind Meisami's proposed interpretation of the panegyric, let us reexamine Ibn Zaidun's qasida.

The name of the poet's beloved is not mentioned in this selection or, for that matter, in any of the Wallada qasidas. The garden metaphors used for the evocation of the beloved's body are tropes, and their conformity to the poetic norms for such evocations suggests the possibility that they do not refer to a specific object of passion — i.e., are not to be taken literally — but conform to certain expectations of the audience concerning the way in which poetry should be put together.²⁷ The evasive quality of these metaphors, their refusal to be pinned down to a specific referent, is typical of the poetics favored increasingly by Taifa patrons over the course of the epoch. The ambiguity of the metaphors employed in the first section is further underlined by the use, in the first line, of the feminine *kasra* in the second person and, later in the qasida, of the masculine *fatha*, suggesting a deliberate blurring of identity by the poet. The poet's implication that the audience was capable of supplying the necessary referents would have been perceived as a flattering nod towards their literary acumen.

One of the possible referents for the beloved is, in accordance with the model proposed by Meisami, the king himself. The patron would have appreciated Ibn Zaidun's adroit manipulation of the fashionable *badi'* style, and would have enjoyed supplying the several referents for the metaphors employed in the qasida's composition, recognizing himself as being directly

addressed by the lover-beloved discourse of the poem. The references to the anguish with which the poet remembers his beloved and the days in which they "robbed pleasures from the night while destiny slept" could refer to the moments he had spent in the company, not of Wallada, but of al-Mu'tamid, whose boon companion he had been.

Many of the lines which appear upon first examination to refer to a lovers' tryst might serve equally well to evoke the royal *majlis*. There are references to "sensual pleasures" which might easily include drunkenness, metaphor for the spiritual voyage on which the host and the *nudama'* embark within the hermetic context of the *majlis*, to sleep as a tiny death which robs the merrymakers of precious moments of pleasure, and the stopping of destiny, all of which are fundamental components of *majlis* literature. Through his reference to the *majlis* paradigm, the poet evokes, not the lovers' tryst, but the *majlis* itself, and those initiated into the rites of the secret *soirée* would have easily identified it as being a possible object of Ibn Zaidun's nostalgia.

By placing before the patron such a complicated and multivalent piece the poet would have intended, first, to flatter and, second, to incite the king's compassion for his plight as he languished in prison, to bring to the prince's mind the memory of pleasurable moments he had enjoyed in his friend's company, and to inspire him to relent. The final two lines of the qasida suggest that Ibn Zaidun harbored such hopes. Line 14 reads, "For awhile, the harvest of our pure love was an intimate garden where we ran free and unfettered." Lovers' trysts are most commonly portrayed as taking place in an "intimate garden"; the same, however, may be said for the *majalis* in which king and companions met in an equality of friendship often characterized in the same terms as relationships between lovers. Given this blurring of the lines between panegyric, *ghazal*, and *khamriyya*, the final line of the qasida in which Ibn Zaidun exalts "that which [they] were" and declares that, despite the fact that the beloved "consoled him-/herself in forgetfulness," he continues being a "faithful lover," might well constitute a discrete reproach directed, not to Wallada, but to a patron whose harsh treatment he wished to admonish without worsening his own circumstances.

The alternative interpretation proposed for this qasida suggests another purpose for the choice of the caliphal palace as its setting. It is well known that al-Mu'tamid had long cherished the ambition of adding

Cordoba to his royal possessions, an ambition fulfilled in 1070, just before Ibn Zaidun's death. Ibn Zaidun's choice of Madinat al-Zahra' as the setting for his qasida may have been another calculated move to flatter the vanity of his intended patron: by referring to the days they had spent together, happy and carefree, amidst the beauties of the palace's gardens, he implies that the ruler possessed it. The choice of Madinat al-Zahra', then, as the setting for his sugar-coated reprimand would have constituted the crowning touch to Ibn Zaidun's suit — by addressing him in the fashionable *badi'* style, 'by employing the courtly discourse of lover to beloved, and by erudite reference to classical poetry, the poet flattered his patron's intellect; by placing their erstwhile trysts amidst the gardens of Madinat al-Zahra', he flattered his vanity. It should be remarked that Ibn Zaidun's stays in prison were never very prolonged.

During the later decades of the period, ruins remain, as they are in the Wallada qasidas, signifiers of pleasure, loci of orgies. In Ibn Zaidun's qasida, however, as in all of the examples cited thus far, the nostalgia expressed has a dual, discernible politicizing purpose, and serves ultimately to refer to the past. In other compositions dating to the latter half of the Taifa period, the unmistakable nostalgia which permeates them, in addition to being completely depoliticized, becomes somehow self-referential. The past is of no concern: only the present now incites poets to employ the eulogizing voice of "Ubi Sunt". In the following example, the ruins are visited not only by the poet, but by an entire company of *zurafa'*. Divested of the associations of dynasty and power with which they had been charged during the first decades of the period, the transformation of the ruins into the paradisiac setting required by the *majlis* paradigm is complete.

For Ibn Shuhaid, the ruins had been hallowed precincts in whose confines only the ghosts of dead nobles were fit to wander; here, the ghostly cast of characters gives way to one of flesh and blood, indicative of a civilization fully convinced of its own nobility. Abu al-Siraj and his companions blithely and elegantly occupy the nooks and crannies of Madinat al-Zahra', acting out an impromptu *majlis* and subverting the palace's original meanings to those which served their own purposes. Melancholy plays a role in their courtly ritual, but a melancholy which reveals very little desire for the return of the good old days of Umayyad hegemony:

... Among that which is along the lines of the *akhbār* concerning al-Zahra' is that told by al-Fath concerning al-Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbad. He said: "I was told by the *wazir faqih* Abū al-Husn ibn Sirāj that he came with the *wuzarā'* to al-Zahra' on a day in which destiny was careless, and did not look upon it and did not touch it; [it was] free of vicissitudes. Joys wrote down its history; desire bared its cheek to it [the day], and drank the dregs of its redness, and the pilgrims made clear their fervor, and they never rested, moving from palace to palace, over-indulging in those chambers [*ghurafāt*] and gave themselves to drink in those lofty heights, until they settled down in the garden, after they had taken from the ruins that which they desired...."²⁸

The ritual listing of the ideal or "absolute"²⁹ qualities of the *majlis* setting signals to the audience their removal into its mirage-like world; al-Fath transforms the palace's crumbling rooms into *ghurafāt* (sg., *ghurfā*), a term with paradisiac connotations which intimate the heavenly nature of the bliss experienced by the companions during their peregrinations. Wine, star-like and glowing, is abundant, and the *zurafa'* overindulge elegantly, relishing its effects among the charming views offered to them by the decaying palace. The use of *saj'* or rhymed prose, further underlines this piece's belonging to the genre of "*majlis* anecdote," and would also have served to evoke, in the imaginations of the audience, the wording used in Qur'anic descriptions of paradise.

In *majlis* literature, we find the tableaux set against a background of utopia (in its literal meaning of "no place"). The utopian characteristics assumed by the ruins of Madinat al-Zahra' in their guise of *majlis* setting are only accessible to them once they have been divested of their dynastic associations. The king's magical gardens are mirages, figments of the poet's and audience's imagination, the result of careful manipulation of visual and verbal meaning systems through channels with which the audience was well acquainted. The term utopia, or "no place", might also be used to describe the ruins of Madinat al-Zahra' in the context of later "Ubi Sunt" literature: they assume, for a time, the function of a theatrical backdrop, only to be left vacant and meaningless once their function as *majlis* setting has been fulfilled:

They abounded in considerations [became pensive]; they liberated their thoughts, raining them down, pulling the petals off the striped flowers. [The site was] embroidered with small brooks and rivers, and the branches were

proud, covered with vegetation in their topmost points, and are doubled in the abundant breezes, and they had grown above the ruins of the palace, inclining over its devastation and the termination of its delights like the bereaved [over] a loved one. Cracks play among her foundations and on every wall, a crow calls ... and the events have spent themselves, and the shadow and darkness have gathered and, extending, look down over caliphs and rejoice, and the green season blooms over their odor of musk, the days in which they sat down in its intimacy, and its shadows changed positions, and its gardens and *jinnat* flourished and hopes were awakened by its loftiness, and the lions were fierce among its fortresses, and the moisture was abundant in its flowing. It was clear midday, and [the palace appeared to have] gray hairs, and to be veiled; it looked as though about to fall into ruins. And from among its ruins there only remained desolation and serpents' nests; its dawns had become ruins; its youth [was] destroyed and the iron had become rusty: its newness had aged....³⁰

The caliphal palace is the stage for a *majlis*, and the *zurafā'* are consummate actors. As though in response to a prompter's cue, the company becomes pensive before the dolorous spectacle of the ruins. The mood of the piece changes abruptly and the elegant and merry guests turn to contemplate the mourning trees which incline over the ruined walls of the palace, the cracks and fissures which play among the crumbling stones. The tone of the paragraph, however, is detached and removed; the ruins evoke not "splitting entrails",³¹ but pleasant melancholy.

Through the patent artificiality of the language employed, as well as the comparison of the natural elements of the setting to man-made luxuries, the artificiality of the pilgrims' melancholy is evoked. Al-Fath seems to imply that the pilgrims found the spectacle before them picturesque as they took advantage of the opportunity to "liberate their thoughts, raining them down," pensively "pull[ing] the petals off striped flowers." Such references to textiles, to the site "embroidered" with brooks and small rivers, give us to understand that we are still within the subjunctive space³² of the *majlis*, that destiny still smiles upon the fortunate *zurafā'*, and that, even in their melancholy, they are merry, for the scene before them causes them no sorrow. Although treatises regarding the proper behavior of the *zarif* do not specifically discuss melancholy as being one of the necessary reactions of the sensitive man or woman before the spectacle of ruins, it is not difficult to imagine that displaying

such sentiments would have been in keeping with the behavioral code established for the *zurafā'*. The two are in fact equated by al-Fath — "and they wandered all about ... with courtly manners and pensively." There is more than a little of the theatrical in their posturing; as al-Fath observed, they "took from the ruins that which they desired":

and they wandered all about it [into the nooks and crannies] with courtly manners and pensively, until a messenger of al-Mu'tamid came to them and invited them at his order to go up:

Indeed, the castle is envious of al-Zahra' and, by my life and by yours, there is no cure.

You have climbed its [the castle's] height in the morning sun; come down to us in the light of the evening moon.³³

In Ibn Shuhaid's lament, the audience's attention was focused on the ruined palace and the civilization it represented. Here, the focus of the anecdote is no longer the ruins themselves, but the company of *zurafā'* and their actions; the melancholy contemplation of ruins is just one of several activities in which they engaged during the outing, as though this in itself were part of some larger ritual, as though it were "next on the program." Here, in fact, if anything is truly mourned by the merry company, it is the inexorable passing of time, the aging of all things, the slow but sure graying of a beautiful mane of hair black as ink, the destruction, in the words of al-Fath, of youth:

... And they went to the Qasr al-Bustan near Bab al-'Attarin, and they prepared an indescribable *majlis*; pleasure and licentiousness were brought together there, and the stars of its wine were ignited. The servants' waists were sinuous, and it was more superb than Sudair and Khawarnaq. The face of the moon was manifested from among the flowers, and they passed their night, and sleep did not overcome them, and no obligations hindered the excellence of their pleasures. Cordoba was the highest fulfilment of their hopes and the desire of their will was fulfilled in deeds.³⁴

Also contained within the hermetic perfection of the *majlis* is the utopia of eternity: the company was not overcome by sleep, and "no obligations hindered the excellence of their pleasures." With these phrases al-Fath subdues, with a few clever strokes of the pen, the unnamed fear that tormented the intelligentsia of Taifa society ever more insistently as the century

drew to a close: that of the passing of time — not just any time, but the time in which they themselves existed. Taifa court culture's obsessive recording of actions and festivities reveals a preoccupation with seizing the day, its moments and hours, and freezing it into the form of words, indestructible and immune to the ravages of time. Only by removing their own culture of pleasure from the realms of present or memory (i.e., of time) and by relegating it to that of myth could the precious moments of pleasure be made eternal. Taifa culture mythicized itself in a vain search for immunity from the destruction which, ironically, it knew to be imminent.

The utopia of eternity is one of the most important concepts in both the literary and visual expressions of late Taifa culture, and its achievement was only possible within the subjunctive space of the *majlis*. As an ultimate expression of the triumph of the *nudama*' over the irrevocable forces of time, their tableau is enacted amidst the crumbling ruins of the Umayyad palace: Cordoba was, indeed, the fulfillment of their hopes, not the Cordoba of 'Abd al-Rahman III, nor that of Ibn Shuhaid, but a Cordoba that had been reclaimed and recast by the Taifa courtly *imaginaire* in terms of its own utopias — endless pleasure and the brilliant perfection or a world composed of absolutes and eternity.

If the passage of time was here successfully arrested such was not always the case. The following excerpt reveals the same utopic desires — eternal pleasure, freedom from earthly concerns, and perfection. In contrast, however, to the Sevillan *zurafa*'s indefatigable pursuit of pleasure, after hours of merry-making the revelers are overcome by sleep (read: death or obliteration). As they wake, drinks are handed round again and downed with renewed fervor. Nevertheless, in the brothers' eagerness for the morning draught, we read a certain desperation born of the awareness that, while they slept, they were robbed of precious moments of pleasure and pushed nearer to the moment of obliteration or death:

Al-Fath recounted that the *wuzarā*' Banu Qabturnah [went] to the *munya* called *al-Badi'a*, a garden in which the theaters (*masāriḥ*) of its vegetation had become green, and the night journey was traveled among the leaves, and the eyes of its flowers wept tears of dew, and the crystal rivers flowed and melted over its topaz, and beauties diverse were united [there]. Events there were clear and easily malleable, and in its patios the fantasies of the breeze gallop, and they do not become pale.³⁵

The opening paragraph of the anecdote, through its use of metaphor and terms which signal a removal into the alternative reality of the *majlis*, creates the setting for the tableau to follow: in line 5, the audience is informed that the host — al-Mutawakkil, Taifa king of Badajoz — had transformed the garden into a theater. Al-Fath describes, in rhymed prose, dew-covered flowers and sparkling rivers, transforming them, through the alchemical powers conceded to words in the arcane context of the *majlis*, into tear-filled eyes and liquid crystal spilling over topaz, out of the reach of the destructive forces of the passage of time: the utopia of eternity is invoked. We (and the original audience) are thus led to expect that a familiar sequence of events will follow.

Al-Fath refers to the "night journey" on which participants embark as they sip their first cup, thus readying them for departure. With an allusion to the "pale horses of fantasy," he seduces the audience's collective imagination into cooperating in the necessary process of transformation, for the exquisite sensations offered by setting and wine are possible only once the threshold to the world of illusion and fantasy has been crossed. An informed audience would have assumed that the anecdote would proceed according to the laws of the inverted, hermetic world of the *majlis* ... the ritual licentiousness, the carefully staged orgy, of the royal *majlis*, intimations of eternity. Generally, the spell, once cast, is not broken until the last line of prose which follows the poetic selection, where we are informed that the transformation effected upon the revelers is reversed, just as the first pale rays of light begin to dilute the midnight blackness of the sky.³⁶

Here, however, a hint of desperation, of disbelief, taints the paradise: already in the opening paragraph the revelers, even as they begin the ritual of "pushing aside their sorrows," express the desire that the *majlis* should be eternal, a dead give-away that they were perfectly aware that such would not be the case:

... And the seeds have perforated the face of the moist earth; the earth was hidden from the eyes — it neither sees nor is seen. And al-Mutawakkil was preparing the scene for the playing, pushing aside his sorrows. And they spent the night in [the *majlis*], going round, brilliant and burning [with thirst] desiring that it should be eternal, perceiving melting gold which did not let its interior (*batinihi*) be melted....³⁷

In the following lines, however, despite the revelers' desires, old age descends upon them with sudden vengeance:

... Until the daughter of joy left them, as if they were old, like abandoned palm trees, and with the desires of the dawn, the shadows became blackest of black, and the cock crowed to the wine; and the oldest of them, Abu Muhammed, awoke hurriedly and began to improvise:

Oh, my dear brother ...³⁸

The dawn, usually described using metaphors of light or femininity, is here an evil force that renders the shadows "blackest of black." Something has gone awry in paradise; a negative force beyond the revelers' control has robbed them of their joy. The illusion of eternity has been abruptly dispelled:

And then his brother Abu Bakr awoke on hearing his voice, and feared for the passing away of those moments, and awoke their brother Aba al-Husn, and he improvised:

Oh, my brother, stand up and witness the breeze and the wine!
and his brother awoke at his words.³⁹

The drunken sleep into which the brothers had fallen following their excesses had robbed them of precious moments of pleasure; upon waking, desperate to pursue the illusory endeavor of recapturing what they had lost, they take up their festivities with renewed vigor. The key to this anecdote, in fact, is found in the phrase, "He feared for the passing away of those moments." Suddenly made aware that the eternity of the *majlis* was an illusion, Abu Bakr fights back with the only weapon he has at hand: a renewed effort to seduce his mind once again into the state in which this illusion appears attainable. A thread of despair, however, runs through the brilliance of his heightened gaiety, symptomatic of an incipient awareness among Taifa *zurafa* that, despite their best efforts, their civilization was slipping away.

While the ruins of Madinat al-Zahra, symbolic for Ibn Shuhaid's generation of the vanished grandeur of caliphal civilization, had formerly inspired grief in those who viewed them, the *imaginaire* of the second half of the Taifa period stripped them of their dynastic associations and converted them into a playground for the king and his boon companions. The elegant company effectively laughed in the face of the inexo-

rable force of time, arresting its flow with their elegant words and their excesses.

The Madinat al-Zahra' recreated by Taifa court society — the backdrop against which eleventh-century *zurafa*' might enact the ideals of their culture — also possesses a darker obverse, which tells the other side of the charming tableau represented by the Seville courtiers. In the last anecdote, the gathering is not set among ruins; in fact, no mention is made of them, or of the past, for that matter. Here the attention of the brothers and of the audience is riveted on the passing of precious moments in the present, on their irrevocable conversion into the past. Nostalgia, in other words, is focused on the present, even as it is being experienced. This telescoping of literary time, this subversion of the "Ubi Sunt" genre by shifting its focus onto the present, is deliberate and not without significance. Whereas "Ubi Sunt" literature of the first decades of the Taifa period had been preoccupied — indeed, obsessed — with the ruined Umayyad palace, this structure (and all of its possible referents) are entirely absent from the final passage examined here. Nostalgia no longer evokes her image, for Madinat al-Zahra's mythical vanishing pales in comparison to the painful fashion in which Taifa society witnesses its own demise. The Taifa cultural obsession with seizing the moment, experiencing it, and recording it before it could slip away and become the past was connected to the precarious situation in which these kingdoms existed, a reality that remained silent during feverish orgies, but produced disquiet and anxiety during the revelers' sober hours.

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NOTES

1. Ibn Shuhaid, *Diwan*, ed. Mahmoud 'Alī Makki (Cairo, 1969), pp. 109–11, no. 26 (my translation). See also *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Ibn Shuhaid" (Charles Pellat), and Cynthia Robinson, "Seeing Paradise: Metaphor and Vision in Taifa Palace Architecture," *Gesta* (forthcoming).
2. Henri Pérès, *Esplendor de al-Andalus: La poesia andaluza en árabe clásico en el siglo XI; sus aspectos generales, sus principales temas, y su valor documental*, trans. Mercedes García-Arenal (Madrid, 1953), pp. 72, 100–1, 244–45.
3. For this interpretation, see Cynthia Robinson, "Palace Architecture and Ornament in the 'Courtly' Discourse of the *Mulūk al-Tawā'if*: Metaphor and Utopia," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995, pp. 336–97; see also Peter

- C. Scales, *The Fall of the Caliphate of Córdoba: Berbers and Andalus in Conflict* (Leiden, 1994), and David Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party Kings: Politics and Society in Islamic Spain, 1002–1086* (Princeton, N.J., 1985), and idem, *The Caliphate in the West: An Islamic Political Institution in the Iberian Peninsula* (Oxford, 1993).
4. See Robinson, "Palace Architecture and Ornament," pp. 336–97.
 5. For an Umayyad example of the "Ubi Sunt" genre, see Zakariyā al-Qazwīnī, *Athār al-Bilād wa Akhbār al-'Ibād* (Beirut, 1960), pp. 65–67; Spanish trans. in María Jesus Rubiera Mata, *La arquitectura en la literatura árabe: datos para una estética de placer*, 2nd ed. (Madrid, 1988), pp. 32–33; for this genre in an Abbasid context, see Jerome W. Clinton, "The Maedan Qasida of Khaqāni Sharvāni; pt. 2: Khaqāni and al-Buhturi," *Edebiyat* 2, no. 2 (1977): 191–202; and M. Zwettler, "The Poetics of Allusion in Abu'l-'Atāhiya's *Ode in Praise of al-Hādī*," *Edebiyat*, n.s. 3, no. 1 (1989): 1–29.
 6. See Pellat, "Ibn Shuhaid."
 7. The priest who does double duty as a cupbearer is common in Abbasid *khamriyya* poetics, and this would have been noticed by the intended audience. See Andras Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton, N.J., 1974), esp. chaps 2–3.
 8. Also "conquered"; given that the priest-cum-*saqi* is often compared to a gazelle, the polyvalence of this term could allude to the topos of the gazelle-conquering lion (king or patron). For uses of the "lady gazelle with the deadly glance" topos, see J. C. Burgel, "The Lady Gazelle and Her Murderous Glances," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 20, no. 1 (1981): 1–11.
 9. Again, the priest or monk wearing a seductively beautiful belt is evocative of the Abbasid *khamriyya*.
 10. I.e., dawn, another topos associated with the Abbasid *khamriyya*.
 11. Also "building"; probably intended to be read as both; thus alluding to the ruined cloister against which the revels were set.
 12. "Night vision" and "furtive glances" are associated with the "gazelle with the deadly glances" topos; Taifa audiences would connect these topos with the *ghazal*. See Burgel, "Lady Gazelle."
 13. Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maqqarī, *Analectes sur l'histoire et la littérature des arabes d'Espagne*, ed. R. Dozy et al., 2 vols. (Leiden, 1855–61; rpt., Amsterdam, 1967), 1:345 (my translation).
 14. On the "majlis anecdote," see Robinson, "Seeing Paradise"; eadem, "Separation and Seduction: The Two Faces of Luxury at the Taifa Courts," *Scripta Mediterranea* (forthcoming).
 15. See Clinton, "Maedan Qasida," and Zwettler, "Poetics of Allusion."
 16. See Hamori, *On the Art of Arabic Literature*, pp. 118–25.
 17. In the poem, mention is also made of the guests' having been "transformed"; see Hamori, *On the Art of Arabic Literature*, p. 120.
 18. See Suzanne P. Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the 'Abbāsīd Age* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), p. 9.
 19. For one of the earliest Andalusian *qasā'id* written in the *badi'* style, see al-Maqqarī, *Analects* I: 282–94; English trans., Robinson, "Palace Architecture and Ornament," pp. 523–26.
 20. *Badi'* refers to a densely metaphorical style of poetry whose roots lie in non-Sunni schools of Qur'anic exegesis and may be translated as "novelty." Also from the same root comes loosely *bida*, often associated with heresy; *badi'* and its practitioners were looked upon with mistrust by more conservative members of the Abbasid and Taifa society. On *badi'*, see Kamal Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Poetic Imagery* (Warminster, 1979); Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām*, esp. Preface, Introduction, and chap. 1 and 2; and Robinson, "Palace Architecture and Ornament," pp. 480–555.
 21. *EI*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Ibn Zaidun" (A. M. Goichon). The poet, possibly aided in the foundation of the independent Taifa kingdom ruled from Córdoba by the Banu Jawhar. He served members of this "dynasty" as court poet, disputed with al-Mu'tamid, and wound up in prison. Later he migrated to the Abbasid court at Seville, where he enjoyed great success. He met his death while on a mission trumped up by an enemy.
 22. *Diwān Ibn Zaidun wa Rasā'iluh*, ed. 'Alī 'Abd al-'Azīm (Cairo, 1980), pp. 139–40 (my translation); see Fedwa Maltī-Douglas, "Ibn Zaidūn: Toward a Thematic Analysis," *Arabica* 23, pp. 63–76.
 23. See M. M. Badawi, "Abbāsīd Poetry and Its Antecedents," in *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 146 ff. The "dew-covered flowers/eyes" metaphor would have been recognized as a reference to al-Sunawbarī; see Hamori, *On the Art of Arabic Literature*, pp. 78–100.
 24. On courtly culture, see Abū-l-Ṭayyib Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Yahyā al-Washshā', *Kitāb al-Muwashshā'aw, al-Zarf wa-l-zurafā'*, ed. Karam al-Bustani (Beirut, 1965); Teresa Garulo, trans. and ed., *El libro del Brocado* (Madrid, 1990); and Jean-Claude Vadet, *L'esprit courtois en Orient dans les cinq premiers siècles de l'Hégire* (Paris, 1968). On love poetry and courtly love, see, for example, Lois A. Giffin, "Love Poetry and Love Theory in Medieval Arabic Literature," in *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development*, ed. G. E. von Grunebaum (Wiesbaden, 1973), pp. 107–24; María Rosa Menocal, *Shards of Love; Exile and the Origins of the Lyric* (London, 1994); for a recent reinterpretation of courtly culture in al-Andalus, see Robinson "Palace Architecture and Ornament," pp. 159–260.
 25. Ibid.
 26. Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton, 1987).
 27. On the ritual nature of the *qasida*, see Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām*, esp. chaps. 1–2, and Hamori, *On the Art of Arabic Literature*, esp. chaps. 1–2.
 28. Al-Maqqarī, *Analectes* 1:411–12 (my translation).
 29. The term "absolute" has been adopted from Hamori, *On the Art of Arabic Literature*, see esp. chap. 3.
 30. Al-Maqqarī, *Analectes* 1:411–12 (my translation).
 31. The term, "splitting entrails," was used by Ibn Shuhaid to describe his sorrow over the ruined Umayyad palace.
 32. The concept of "subjunctive space" (the space within which certain conditions hold, e.g. the powers of metaphor) has been borrowed from David Summers, "Real Metaphor," in *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, ed. N. Bryson, M.

- A. Holley, and K. Moxey (London, 1991), pp. 231-59; see Robinson, "Palace Architecture and Ornament," pp. 620-30.
33. Al-Maqqari, *Analectes* 1:411-12.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p. 422 (my translation).
36. For a discussion of dawn as signifying the end of revelry in Abbasid *khamriyyāt*, see Hamori, *On the Art of Arabic Literature*, pp. 31-77; see also F. Harb, "Khamriyyāt Wine Poetry," in *Abbāsīd Belles-Lettres*, pp. 219-32.
37. Al-Maqqari, *Analectes* 1: 422 (my translation).
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.