

Great Ladies and Noble Daughters

Ivories and Women in the Umayyad Court at Córdoba

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The most favored of the group of [women] of [al-Nasir li-Din Allah] was Marjan, a slave girl, who was the mother of his most eminent male child, al-Hakam, his crown prince, and his brothers, ‘Ubayd Allah and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz. She . . . was distinguished above all of the other wives by bearing al-Hakam, his first-born, the one favored to be his crown prince and to inherit his authority after him. Her master, al-Nasir li-Din Allah, raised her, given the strength of her ties [to him] and the merit of her superiority, above the rank of all [other wives]. He called her “the great lady.”

—*Ibn Hayyan*, *al-Muqtabis V*,
(*trans. Stuart Sears*)¹

Produced as luxury objects during the caliphal era, the ivory boxes of Córdoba are among the most celebrated works of medieval Islamic art. Of the approximately thirty ivories that survive, the inscriptions on the earliest dateable ones are associated with women related by blood or marriage to the first Córdoba caliph, ‘Abd al-Rahman III (r. 912–61), and his son and successor, al-Hakam II (r. 961–76). Despite the high status implied by their association with these luxurious objects, the women have remained largely in the background historiographically.² The ivory objects offer a rare glimpse into family relationships that are otherwise difficult to discern, especially those between parents and children. This chapter will examine how relationships within the circumscribed context of the royal family are expressed through inscriptions on objects, focusing on five boxes made for the daughters of ‘Abd al-Rahman III, and on other objects that can be linked with high-status women at the Umayyad court. The earliest ivories comprise two groups: the first is made up of a long cylindrical box preserved in the Museo de Burgos and two small rectangular boxes preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; the second consists of two small caskets now in the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan in Madrid and the Church of Santa María la Real, Fitero.

These objects present a rare opportunity to explore the relationships between the Andalusí caliphs and the women within their immediate and extended families. They also provide a window onto issues of female agency and the prominent role of women during this period. How do these objects allow us to better reconstruct the material conditions of life at the Umayyad court during the tenth century; what role can inscriptions play in expanding our understanding of the social possibilities available to women; and how can the inclusion of the ivories in elite practices challenge our view of them as mere luxury objects?

The Great Lady

Marjan, mother of the caliph al-Hakam, was one of the noble ladies upon whom favor had been conferred due to the excellence of her refinement and the grace of her movement, which her lord, al-Nasir li-Din Allah found pleasing. He thus did not cease seeking to often draw her near. He held a high opinion of her service. He approached her more frequently and marveled at her ingenuity. She was blessed with intelligence, cleverness, mildness, charm, beauty in appearance, eloquence and graceful in gestures. . . . He made her his preferred wife, favorite consort, and the most valued woman in his palace. He gave his keys to her and trusted her privately and publicly.

She came before all his [other] women to the extent that even his noble women and most favorite consorts could not obtain their demands and wishes from al-Nasir li-Din Allah except with the intercession of Marjan on their behalf with him or with their imploring him through her due to her rank and her having captured his heart. . . .

God blessed him with five children with her. They were the most noble of his children according to him. . . .

Marjan never ceased to enjoy her favorable position with her master al-Nasir li-Din Allah until she died at the end of his reign.

—Ibn Hayyan, *al-Muqtabis* V, 9–13 (trans. Stuart Sears)

Court Women in the Texts

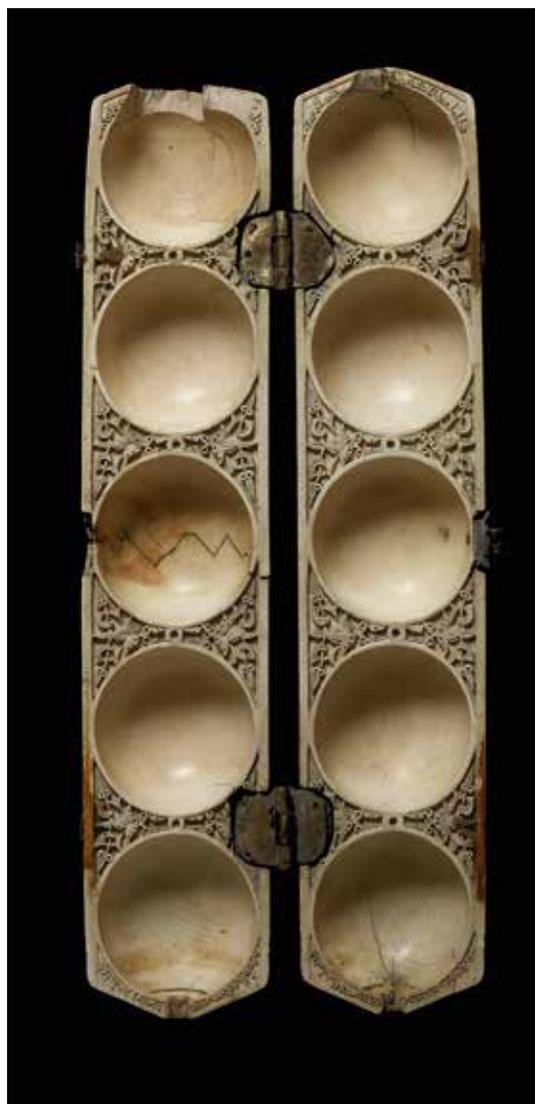
It is striking and suggestive of the importance of the women in ‘Abd al-Rahman III’s life that Ibn Hayyan (d. 1076), the court chronicler of the Córdoba Umayyads, devotes the first chapter of his account of this ruler’s reign to the women of the extended royal household, and the second chapter to the ruler’s children.³ Indeed, from the first sentence of the chronicle, Ibn Hayyan gives pride of place to Marjan (or Murjan), a concubine who rose to great prominence in the caliphal court and who bore him five children, including his heir, the future al-Hakam II. The bond between ‘Abd al-Rahman and Marjan was such that “to the extent that anytime he fell sick . . . he stayed only at her residence. No one tended to him except her. He did not accept any medication except from her, and he did not feel better except through her treatment and her companionship.”⁴

Marjan, along with other court women of the time, was an active patron of architecture, famous in her time, according to Ibn Hayyan, for establishing monuments, especially those intended for the public good, including a mosque described as one of the largest and most splendid monuments of the royal capital.⁵ The chronicle indicates that the caliph’s close relationship with her lent a privileged status to the children she bore him. ‘Abd al-Rahman, we are told, considered his three sons and two daughters by Marjan to be “the most noble of his children.” It is quite unusual—and perhaps indicative of their high status and special relationship with their eminent father—that the royal chronicler identifies these two daughters by name: Hind and Wallada.⁶ Might these princesses, the daughters of ‘Abd al-Rahman III and his beloved Marjan, be the daughters for whom the earliest ivories were created?

Reading the Early Ivories

The Burgos casket (fig. 1.1a–b) is an amazing 46.5 cm long, its sides surprisingly straight for an object made from a raw material that has a natural curve. This casket is entirely undecorated on its exterior, boasting a huge surface expanse that serves to emphasize the precious ivory from which it was carved. On the interior (fig. 1.1b), both halves feature five smooth, round hollows, interlinked with small roundels, whose potential function we will discuss below. The two V&A caskets (figs. 1.2, 1.3) were formed from blocks of ivory cut from the tusk longitudinally, above or below the nerve canal, making use of the best-quality dentine. It is conceivable that all three pieces were cut from the same tusk, and that one large tusk was obtained for the commission and made into as many objects as possible. Given the size of the Burgos casket, it was clearly the most important object of the commission, made from the greatest portion of the tusk. By comparison, the small V&A casket (fig. 1.2) is ten times smaller.

It is likely that the entire caliphal ivory-carving workshop was dedicated to producing the pieces in such a special order, with several craftsmen working at the same time. The carving style of the Burgos casket and the smaller V&A casket are very



close, and they were probably made by the same hand—an artisan who employed a delicate miniature style, quite distinct from the bolder, blockier style seen on the larger V&A casket (fig. 1.3), which seems to have been carved by a different artisan. The stylistic consonances are most evident in the execution of the vegetal decoration and inscriptions on the Burgos and smaller V&A caskets, as they also share a motif in the long thin leaf with two circles where it joins the stem. While the overall conception of the decoration is consistent between the two V&A caskets, the actual execution is different, and employs different vegetal motifs: on the larger casket, for example, a large lotus-like flower is seen on the sides and back, and a cornucopia-like motif from which palmette scrolls flow is seen especially on the lower part of the two short sides and on the front slope of the lid. These motifs are not seen on the smaller casket, likely indicating the work of a different hand.

It has been suggested that both V&A caskets were designed as a nesting pair, the smaller casket to be contained within the larger.⁷ This would maximize the experience of expectation and delight in the presentation of these luxurious gifts, and contribute to what Avinoam Shalem has called the “performance of the object.” As he observes: “That the present was hidden within lavishly decorated and eye-catching containers contributed an added excitement to the presentation process. Because the

1.1A–B. Cylindrical casket made for a daughter of ‘Abd al-Rahman III. Probably Madinat al-Zahra’, after 961. Ivory with metal mounts, length 46.5 cm, diam. 9 cm. Museo de Burgos, Spain, Sección de Bellas Artes (244)



1.2. Casket made for a daughter of 'Abd al-Rahman III. Probably Madinat al-Zahra', after 961. Ivory with nielloed-silver mounts, height 4.3 × width 9.5 × depth 6 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London (301-1866)

present was hidden or even locked within its case, expectations were enhanced and fantasies nurtured,” creating a “tension between the hidden object and the perceived container.”⁸ Such tension can be seen in various instances in the passage detailing 'Abd al-Rahman's gift to his Maghribi client, Musa ibn Abi'l-'Afiya, where several containers hold others, crafted equally luxuriously, leading ultimately to precious perfumed contents (see p. 40). The contents become more precious as each layer is peeled back.

Despite decorative differences, the wording of the inscriptions on all three objects is nearly identical, tying together the pieces in this group. A delicately executed inscription is repeated four times on each end of the Burgos casket's interior, located in the interstitial space between the outer circumference of the hollows and the outer edges of the casket. These inscriptions match the first part of the inscription seen on the two V&A caskets, which reads: *bismillah hadha ma 'amala* (or *'umila*) *al-ibnat* (sic, for *li'l-ibnat*) *al-sayyid/a ibnat 'abd al-rahman a/miw* (sic, for *amir*) *al-mu'minin rahmat allah/'alayhi wa-ridwanuhu*.⁹ The phrase *'amala al-ibna* is in the active voice, and if the inscription were read thus, it tells the viewer that a woman “made” the object. This potentially suggests that the caliph's daughter may have had a more active role in the creation of this splendid commission than has hitherto been considered. Nevertheless, this tantalizing interpretation must be rejected.¹⁰ It cannot be translated as “the daughter made” since the verb would have to be in the feminine case (*amalat*).

These inscriptions must be translated “In the name of God, this is what was made for the daughter, the lady, the daughter of 'Abd al-Rahman, Commander of the Faithful, may God's mercy and favor be his!” It is easier to explain the unusual phraseology (*'amala al-ibna*) as a writing error—the carver has written *alif-lam* (the definite article *al-*) where he should have written a second *lam* (*li'l-*, “for the”)—rather than a grammatical error, and to read the verb in the passive voice (*'umila*), thus “made for the daughter.” It is highly likely that the carver could not read (or, at least, could not read kufic calligraphy), but was following a text written out for him. An object produced in the caliphal atelier would have relied on the court chancery to issue phrases that were then carved into inscriptions. As noted above, there are various other writing mistakes on the V&A caskets: *amiw* instead of *amir* on the smaller casket, *mahman* for *rahman*, *ra'mat* for *rahmat* on the larger. The inscription on all three caskets may have been carved by the same craftsman, who made the same mistake each time, though on the larger V&A casket *amir* is written correctly, and new mistakes are made. Perhaps the text from which the carver was copying had been blotted or was otherwise unclear at the place that intended *li'l-ibna*.



The V&A caskets also incorporate a short prayer following ‘Abd al-Rahman’s name (*rahmat allah alayhi wa-ridwanuhu*, “May God’s mercy and favor be his!”), which commemorates his death, at age seventy, on October 15, 961. Such a prayer for the recently deceased is highly unusual in the luxury arts, but is well attested at this period in tombstones, which were increasingly used in al-Andalus from the tenth century onward.¹¹ The more usual phrase employed is *rahimahu Allah* (may God be compassionate), but the variant *rahmat Allah ‘alayhi* (or *-ha* in the feminine form) is also known, as well as longer compound expressions, which tend to be used on bigger—and thus more expensive—funerary inscriptions.¹² The appearance of this formula on a set of luxury objects made in the caliphal atelier may suggest the closeness of the relationship between father and daughter, or simply the mourning of ‘Abd al-Rahman’s passing by the machinery of the state. It is, however, extremely useful from a historical point of view, since it allows us to date the objects’ production to soon after the caliph’s death. This makes this group of three caskets the earliest datable extant ivories in the entire corpus. Since the Burgos casket does not include this prayer, scholars have frequently dated it to before ‘Abd al-Rahman III’s death, but given the correspondences with the other two caskets, a simpler and more likely explanation is that there was not enough space in this small area to include the full inscription.¹³

The nearly identical wording of the inscriptions across these three objects allows us to consider them as a single commission produced for a daughter of ‘Abd al-Rahman soon after his death. This commission may also have included other objects that have not survived or have not yet been identified among the objects that have lost their lids and thus their inscriptions (see below). We may never know for which of ‘Abd al-Rahman’s daughters they were made, or for which occasion, though as Renata Holod points out, it is likely that they were “made as gifts for a major social event, such as the lady’s marriage.”¹⁴

1.3. Casket made for a daughter of ‘Abd al-Rahman III. Probably Madinat al-Zahra’, after 961. Ivory with nielloed-silver mounts, height 8.5 × width 13 × depth 8.5 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London (A.580-1910)



1.4. Casket made for Wallada, daughter of ‘Abd al-Rahman III, signed by Khalaf. Madinat al-Zahra’, 966. Ivory, height 8.9 × width 12.8 × depth 8.3 cm. Church of Santa María la Real, Fitero, on deposit at the Museo de Navarra, Pamplona

1.5. Casket made for Wallada, daughter of ‘Abd al-Rahman III. Madinat al-Zahra’, 966. Ivory with metal mounts, height 4.5 × width 8.5 × depth 5.8 cm. Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid (4860)

The second set of ivory caskets made for a daughter of ‘Abd al-Rahman consists of those made in AH 355 (966) for the princess Wallada, Marjan’s daughter and the sister of al-Hakam II (figs. 1.4, 1.5).¹⁵ Again, the fact that these objects were carved as a pair is indicated by their identical inscriptions, which in addition to the date also include the significant information that they were carved at the palace-city of Madinat al-Zahra’ itself. The larger of the two caskets also includes the craftsman’s name, ‘*amala Khalaf* (“Khalaf made [it]”), linking it with the Hispanic Society pyxis (see fig. 1.7), discussed below.¹⁶

It was initially believed that the patron of these caskets was unnamed in their inscriptions, only referred to obliquely by a phrase that has been most frequently read as *li-ahabbi walladatin*, translated by E. Lévi-Provençal as “à la plus chère des femmes fécondes.”¹⁷ This has been widely accepted by scholars to mean Subh, the concubine of al-Hakam II. However, Laura Bariani recently subjected this phrase to epigraphical and philological analysis, and points out that this reading suppresses a *lam* that is present, as well as the fact that the grapheme read as *ha’* (in *ahabb*) could also be read as *kha’*, as it was by José Ferrandis Torres in 1928 when he read the phrase as *li’l-ukht wallada*, i.e., “for the sister [of al-Hakam] Wallada.”¹⁸ As in the first group of ivories, different styles are employed in these two caskets: the Fitero casket (see fig. 1.4) exhibits a flat style with crisp edges and outlines, with unusual palmette motifs (such as on the bottom back corners), and an innovative use of uncarved areas of ivory to create a contrasting texture to the decoration. In contrast, the casket in Madrid, which is extremely varied, has a three-dimensional sculptural style, with deep undercutting around the motifs and a fluid, rounded feeling to the carving, most noticeable when the object is viewed at an angle (fig. 1.5). This style relates most closely to the Hispanic Society pyxis (see fig. 1.7), which is the most famous work signed by Khalaf. Strangely, though, Khalaf’s signature appears on the Fitero casket, not the Madrid casket. He may have been such a skilled carver that he worked in different modes and made both these caskets, but there was no room on the tiny Madrid piece to include his name (due to lack of space this inscription also leaves out the word *ni’ma*). While the styles employed on the bodies seem quite different, the calligraphic style employed for the inscriptions is similar.¹⁹ Could Khalaf have done the more tricky inscriptions on both caskets, while the body decoration was handled by different carvers? Or was Khalaf “signing” as head of the workshop, and thus taking credit for others’ work?²⁰

As noted for the V&A caskets, it has been suggested that the Fitero and Madrid caskets were made as a nesting pair, with one fitting inside the other.²¹ Beautiful though they are, these ivories may merely have been the luxurious wrapping for yet more expensive gifts of perfumes and cosmetics, as we will discuss below.

Ivories for Royal Concubines

The most famous ivory object whose inscription links it to a woman in the Umayyad court is the so-called Zamora pyxis, preserved in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid (fig. 1.6). This pyxis is one of the largest surviving ivories produced during the reign of al-Hakam II. Carved around the base of the lid, the epigraphic band reads:

The blessing of Allah upon the Imam, the servant of God, al-Hakam al-Mustansir billah, Commander of the Faithful. This is what he ordered to be made for the noble lady [*sayyida*], the mother of 'Abd al-Rahman, under the direction of [*ala yaday*] Durri al-Saghir in the year 353 [964].²²

The year recorded in its inscription makes this pyxis the earliest dated ivory object to be produced by the Umayyad royal workshop. It was probably commissioned to celebrate the long-awaited birth of an heir to the caliphal throne, Subh's first-born son 'Abd al-Rahman, born in 962.²³ The young prince died in infancy, however, and it was his younger brother Hisham who inherited the caliphate in 976.

In an inscription commemorating Subh's patronage of a water fountain (*saqaya*) constructed in the town of Écija, an important commercial center located on the main road between Córdoba and Seville, she is named as *al-sayyida al-walida*, "the mother, she who bore a child."²⁴ The epigraphs on both objects are informative in the way that they refer to Subh—not by her name, but by her titles, emphasizing her status as a mother. Court etiquette and notions of propriety and modesty meant that aristocratic women were referred to by their titles and positions *vis-à-vis* their relationships to men, normally as daughters or mothers. The use of these titles both in this public fountain and on the Zamora pyxis thus expresses Subh's prestige and power.

The ivory objects made for women are primarily decorated with a luxuriant vegetal style, which has led scholars to associate their designs with female fertility and the continuation of the Umayyad dynastic line.²⁵ However, the view that the decoration of the Andalusí ivories falls into binary opposites of an aniconic vegetal style for female recipients and complex figurative repertoires for male patrons is overly simplistic. It is often overlooked that the decoration on the Zamora pyxis is figurative—probably because the figures depicted are not human; it appears to be the earliest dated object with figurative decoration made in Umayyad al-Andalus.²⁶ The object's surface is



1.6. So-called Zamora pyxis, made for Subh, concubine of al-Hakam II. Probably Madinat al-Zahra', 964. Ivory with nielloed-silver mounts, height 17.7 cm, diam. 11 cm. Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid (52113)

covered with deeply carved vegetation and animals. Curling vines, split palmettes, flowers, and pinecones combine to create a field of luxuriant vegetation. At the focal point of the decoration is the motif of a centralized tree and pairs of animals. The tree supports a pair of large confronted peacocks; just above and behind each peacock, two smaller birds, perhaps eagles or falcons, gaze over their own shoulders, looking away from one another. Below the peacocks two quadrupeds face one another, legs raised to suggest lively movement. It should also be borne in mind that some of the ivory objects that have lost their lids—and, thus, their inscriptions—might also have been made for court women. The body of a pyxis now in the Cloisters collection, for example, bears decoration that is extremely close to that of the Zamora pyxis, and likewise inhabited by pairs of parrot-like birds, deer, and lions.²⁷ These animals coexist in peaceable and sometimes joyful harmony, conveying an overall impression of delight in nature's bounty. This is not accidental and also metaphorically ties the objects' decoration to the Umayyad regime. The "iconography of bounty" visualizes the imagery employed in panegyric poetry composed in honor of the caliphal family, which was recited at ceremonial gatherings of the court.²⁸ This imagery highlights the idea that the caliph, as God's representative on earth, ensures a flourishing natural world through his rule. This was brought vividly to life by the opulent gardens of Córdoba and Madinat al-Zahra', and above all by the decoration of the caliphal palace itself.

The walls of such key royal spaces as the reception hall (the so-called *Salón Rico*) at Madinat al-Zahra' were lined with stone panels carved with representations of verdant nature, visualizing this poetic topos as a manifestation of the rightness of Umayyad caliphal rule. No more male space can be imagined than the caliph's reception hall; the decoration here, however, is entirely aniconic, like the earliest ivories made for 'Abd al-Rahman III's daughters. In fact, most surviving official spaces created by the Andalusí Umayyads are aniconic. The decoration of the *Salón Rico* and of the vegetal ivories represents an Umayyad dynastic style that not only appropriately connects the earliest objects made for 'Abd al-Rahman's daughters to the physical context in which they were created, but also signals the ivories' role as royal objects.²⁹

Also important to consider here is a final object whose inscription does not explicitly identify a female patron but whose vegetal style and sensual implications associate it with a female owner, probably another concubine. This is the pyxis now in the Hispanic Society of America, New York (fig. 1.7), whose sculptural style Anthony Cutler has described as "hypertrophic abundance."³⁰ This object's inscription is in verse, uncommon in al-Andalus in that period: "The sight that I offer is the fairest of sights, the still firm breast of a lovely young woman. Beauty has bestowed upon me a robe clad with jewels, so that I am a vessel for musk, camphor, and ambergris."³¹ At the end of the inscription, almost hidden between the two straps of the mount, is incised the phrase (reading from bottom to top) *'amala Khalaf*. Given that Khalaf also made the Fitero casket, dated 966, the Hispanic Society pyxis may also be dated to the 960s

and it has the same highlights of uncarved ivory as does the Fitero casket.

The verse implies that the surface decoration of the pyxis was embellished with color and encrusted with gems; another interesting implication concerns the ivories' function—confirming the information given by Ibn Hayyan that they contained perfumes (see p. 40). While the gems do not survive on the pyxis itself, both features have been identified on a rectangular ivory panel, probably from a larger piece of furniture, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.³² Most significant for the discussion of female ownership, however, is the metaphorical language of the pyxis's poem, which likens the color and shape of the ivory's lid to a young woman's breast. The equation of jeweled ivory with the desired body of a lover is a longstanding poetic topos in the Middle East, and can be traced back to the Song of Songs.³³ In Arabic poetry, this trope was modified by the Christian Arab poet 'Amr ibn Kulthum (d. 584), who wrote in his well-known *múallaqa*, "The tender breast is like the lid of an ivory, which is protected from those who would touch it."³⁴ As Heather Ecker observes, 'Amr ibn Kulthum's verses were compiled in the tenth century by Abu'l Faraj al-Isfahani in his monumental collection of pre-Islamic verse, the *Kitab al-Aghani*, and, according to Ibn Khaldun, the first copy was acquired by al-Hakam II for a thousand dinars.³⁵ Thus, the poem on the pyxis brings to mind a pre-Islamic verse preserved in a volume precious to the caliph and kept in his famous library.

Doron Bauer has observed that in the usual poetic metaphor the desired woman is compared to an ivory, whereas on the Hispanic Society pyxis, the topos has been inverted, so that the ivory is compared to a desired woman.³⁶ This may be a clever play on the part of the courtier who presumably composed the poem for this object. As Bauer points out, the members of the Córdoba elite who were the commissioners and recipients of ivory objects were well versed in poetry, and the verses of the pyxis would have activated these metaphors. In technical terms, the poem is a *nasib*, the opening section of a *qasida*, the most important form in Arabic poetry and one that reached new heights in al-Andalus in the tenth century.³⁷ A *nasib* starts with a description of the beloved's attributes, then gradually transforms into a description of a garden, which was also a frequent metaphor for a desired woman, or of hunted prey, another erotic metaphor. Thus, the poem on the pyxis opens the way for a reading of its vegetal decoration as a luxurious



1.7. Pyxis probably made for a concubine of al-Hakam II, signed by Khalaf. Probably Madinat al-Zahra', ca. 966. Ivory with nielloed-silver gilt mounts, height 16 cm, diam. 10.1 cm. The Hispanic Society of America, New York (D752)



1.8. Inscription of Sayyida al-Mushtaq. Spain, 961–76. Marble, 36 × 30 cm. Museo Arqueológico de Córdoba, Spain (CE000504)

garden, perhaps a visualization of the owner’s beauty. At the same time, the poem speaks in the first person, so that when read aloud it is the ivory’s owner who says “I,” describing herself as a delicate maiden with firm breasts, splendid clothes, and wearing scents made from musk, camphor, and ambergris.³⁸ As such, the object as a whole is explicitly sensual.

Bauer suggests that a would-be lover commissioned the pyxis for his beloved, perhaps composing the ode for her as well. The connections with texts in al-Hakam’s library make it tempting to speculate that he was the lover in this scenario, and that it was made for a woman of his court harem, if not his favorite, the celebrated Subh. Indeed, this reading implies not only that the owner of the Hispanic Society pyxis was a woman, but that she herself would have been able to read, understand, and appreciate the poetry inscribed on the object. This fits the impression offered by the Arabic texts that many women in the Córdoba Umayyad court were highly educated and well versed in such subjects as poetry,³⁹ and opens the way to a reassessment of women’s roles in art production.

Women and “Making”

Women’s patronage at the Umayyad court is attested both in the chronicles and in epigraphy. As noted above, Subh commissioned a water fountain in Écija and Marjan was an active patron of architecture, sponsoring one of the most prominent mosques of the capital along with other buildings for the public good.⁴⁰ In this respect neither woman was an anomaly. Following Marjan’s death, Ibn Hayyan notes that ‘Abd al-Rahman transferred his favor to the concubine al-Mushtaq.⁴¹ Indeed, the court chronicle goes so far to say that al-Mushtaq was a “manager” of the caliph’s authority after Marjan’s death. Like her predecessor, al-Mushtaq was also a patron of architecture, as we know from a marble inscription dateable between 961 and 976 (fig. 1.8).⁴² It reads:

Power and strength belong to Allah the Magnificent! The noble lady (*sayyid[a]*) [M]ushtaq, mother of the brother [of the prince, i.e., al-Hakam II] al-Mughira, ordered this minaret and the contiguous gallery (*hadha l-manar wa’l-saqifa*) and nine of the lateral portals (*turar*) of the mosque. And it was completed with the help of Allah, under the direction of the *fata* (page) Ja’far ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman, in the month of Ramadan (this year . . .) and three (hundred). . .⁴³

This extremely important inscription offers rare evidence not only of a woman’s name being used in an inscription, but also that women in the caliph’s extended family had direct access to the royal workshops through their collaboration with the high-ranking eunuch freedmen who directed the official artistic and architectural commissions of the Umayyad state. In this case, Ja’far was among the most powerful court freedmen of the time, one of five elite eunuch slaves whom the caliph ‘Abd

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al-Rahman III adopted as “sons.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, he was the major figure in the official architectural commissions of the caliph al-Hakam II’s reign. It was Ja’far who supervised the expansion of the Great Mosque of Córdoba and the construction of al-Hakam’s stunning *maq̣sura* and *mihrab*.⁴⁵ A woman who had direct access to the state architecture workshop, as the inscription indicates al-Mushtaq did, would likely have had equally direct access to the state ivory workshop. In this regard, it is significant that al-Mushtaq was the mother of al-Mughira (ca. 950–76), ‘Abd al-Rahman III’s youngest son, for whom the ivory pyxis now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, was created in AH 357 [968].⁴⁶ The al-Mughira pyxis does not identify its commissioner, which has led to much speculation about his or her identity and potential motives, and about the intended meaning of the object’s distinctive figural program. Given al-Mushtaq’s close relationship to the caliph, her status as a known patron of architecture, and the connection between women and ivories in the Córdoba court, we might speculate that she herself commissioned this splendid ivory pyxis as a gift for her son.⁴⁷

The verb used in the al-Mughira pyxis inscription is the simple passive form *‘umila*, “made.” The root *‘-m-l* means “to do, act, operate, be active, work; to make, produce, manufacture, fabricate, perform, carry out, execute.”⁴⁸ While today we understand “to make” in terms of a dichotomy between artist and patron—in which a patron desires an object and an artist makes it to his or her satisfaction—conceiving of “making” in a more expansive, collaborative sense would be more in keeping with the medieval concept.⁴⁹ In this regard it is instructive to look to the parallel use in medieval European sources of the Latin verb *fecit* (inf. *facere*), often designating a dual meaning of “to make” as well as “to commission.” As Therese Martin argued, *fecit* in the context of medieval artistic creation could denote the individual whose hands produced the work, or the person whose donation made the undertaking possible.⁵⁰

The place of women at the Umayyad court as one of power and patronage is connected to their access to education and training in arts such as calligraphy, poetry, and music, which were classified as crafts (*ṣina’ā*).⁵¹ In the ninth and tenth centuries, music and musicians were well regarded, important, and eminently connected with women in the holy cities of Mecca, Medina, and elsewhere in the Islamic lands.⁵² Córdoba was well known as a training center for accomplished female slaves, who rose to fame as notable women, well versed in the learned sciences, including religion, music, poetry, calligraphy, and even martial pursuits.⁵³ Another Umayyad princess, Wallada (d. ca. 1087–91)—who, like her tenth-century namesake, was also the daughter of an Umayyad concubine—had a solid education in the Islamic sciences and was well known in her own time as a poet and literary figure.

Educated women are ubiquitous in official chronicles and works of *adab* produced for the Córdoba Umayyad court.⁵⁴ Ninth-century texts refer to Tarub and Mut’a as two women known for their musical skill as well as their beauty, who subsequently rose to great prominence at court as mothers of royal sons and patrons of architecture.⁵⁵ Ibn Hayyan notes that Mut’a founded a mosque and cemetery in the western

The Gift

Nasir li-Din Allah's gift to Musa ibn Abi'l-'Afiya, which accompanied his reply to him in this year [934], was as follows: Twenty-five pieces of excellent, extraordinarily crafted, tirazi khassi linen of Iraq—of which five were 'Ubaydi; ten were tirazi; three were of sea silk; two were Zaragozan; and five were turbans.

A large silver caliphal perfume chest, with gilded engraving in its plating and a white bottom, and whose interior was lined with purple fabric.

Nine [containers] ranging from pyxides to caskets, all of which were filled with different kinds of perfume; among them a round silver pyxis containing incense mixed with ambergris; a pyxis of white ivory, containing sticks of frankincense seasoned with ambergris; another ivory pyxis, also with silver hinges, that had an Iraqi vase inside filled with an excellent ghaliya; a third pyxis of ivory with silver hinges and a flat lid, containing royal frankincense; a glass casket with a silver lid and silver chain, containing pungent musk powder; a fourth ivory pyxis with silver hinges, too, containing the powder used by kings against sweat in the summer; a gilded Iraqi flask with rosewater of the Iraqi caliphs; a dibaj sheath containing a sultan's large ivory comb to comb the beard, a gold kohl stick that had been wrapped in a checkered cloth with dibaj lining, covered in extraordinarily crafted Fez leather, with four compartments each containing a Frankish crafted silver casket; one of the two [sic] had a waxed and checkered neck with a silver lid and a silver chain; another casket had an extensive vegetal pattern except at the neck, a yellow bottom, and a silver lid and chain; a third casket was similar and imitated it; a fourth casket was identical in craftsmanship as the first; it had the four excellent caliphal plant extracts: wild mustard, yellow herbs, white herbs, and naduh [resin?]; the cavity of these caskets also contained an Iraqi bottle with caliphal ointment, and a small silver box with toothpicks and implements used by kings after eating.

—Ibn Hayyan, *al-Muqtabis* V, 238–39
(trans. Stuart Sears)

suburbs of Córdoba, “along with many other [works] for pious and charitable purposes, because she was one of the most generous of women.”⁵⁶ Ibn Hayyan’s history suggests a flourishing of such female patronage during the reign of ‘Abd al-Rahman II (r. 822–52).⁵⁷

Similarly, in the Abbasid caliphate (750–1258) there were royal women who were poets, musicians, and singers, despite attitudes among many that such pursuits were inappropriate, particularly for women.⁵⁸ The famed ninth-century Abbasid author al-Jahiz, one of the earliest to write about crafts, seems to have held a generally positive attitude toward the products of crafts as well as toward craftsmen.⁵⁹ Likewise, religious attitudes ran the gamut: hadiths (reports of the Prophet’s sayings) circulated that took a positive view of artisanal “making,” such as those alluding to King David as the maker of his own armor and to the Prophet Muhammad as one who had mended his own clothes and shoes and engaged in manual pursuits.⁶⁰ Similarly, a common topos in medieval Islamic sources portrays the ruler/patron involved in building activities with his own hands (Ibn Tulun in ninth-century Egypt and Yusuf ibn Tashfin in eleventh-century Morocco, to name two).⁶¹

Fragrance

Turning to what these ivory objects contained, we have already seen that the poetic inscription on the Hispanic Society pyxis describes its contents as musk, camphor, and ambergris. This is verified by a description of ‘Abd al-Rahman III’s rich diplomatic gift sent in 934 to his most important Maghribi client, Musa ibn Abi'l 'Afiya. This text,⁶² quoted adjacent, mentions incense, musk powder, rosewater, *ghaliya* (an unguent derived from musk and ambergris), essential oils, and other “royal” perfumes and cosmetics, contained within ivory, silver, and glass vessels. Also listed are compound scents such as “incense mixed with ambergris,” and cosmetics, including “the powder used by kings against sweat in the summer.” An “Iraqi bottle” contained a “caliphal ointment,” and a leather case with four compartments contained the “four excellent caliphal plant extracts: wild mustard, yellow herbs, white herbs, and *naduh*” (perhaps a type of resin). Another small silver box contained toothpicks and “the implements used by kings after eating.”

Such descriptions include the most expensive substances used by the elite society of the Arab world. The Abbasid court physician, Yuhanna ibn Masawayh (d. 857), defines the five most important aromatic substances (*usul al-tibb*) used in the medieval Islamic world as musk, camphor, ambergris, aloeswood, and saffron.⁶³ Musk and ambergris were the two most expensive substances derived from animals, as they came from great distances and were rare and difficult to extract. They had been associated with kingship since pre-Islamic times; indeed, the prototypical great king, Solomon, is said to have revealed the use of aromatics.⁶⁴ These substances were used on their own, as well as compounded with others: *ghaliya* was a luxury perfume made

from musk and ambergris mixed with *ben* oil, while *nadd* was an expensive incense formed from aloeswood, camphor, and ambergris. Saffron was the main component in *khaluq*, a perfumed dye paste worn by women, especially brides, and used in ritual sacrifices on the occasion of the birth of a son.⁶⁵

While Ibn Hayyan's list of the gifts to Ibn Abi'l-'Afiya devotes some attention to describing the materials from which the containers were made, it is significant that the main concern is to accurately describe their contents: perfumes, unguents, and cosmetics, the sine qua non of the privileged Arab lifestyle (a significance that would not have been lost on the Berber recipient of 'Abd al-Rahman's gift). A few years later, in March 939, 'Abd al-Rahman would himself be the recipient of a gift of fragrant substances from his vizier, Ibn Shuhayd, described by Ibn Khaldun as one of the greatest gifts in Islamic history. Among the many extraordinary contents were hundreds of pounds of aloeswood, approximately one hundred ounces of musk, and similar amounts of ambergris and camphor.⁶⁶

These precious substances were imported from the other side of the known world. Camphor is a white granular substance distilled with camphor oil from the sap of the tree *Cinnamomum camphora*, a large evergreen native to East Asia, from India to Japan;⁶⁷ musk derives from the gland secretion of the male musk deer and hails from Tibet and China;⁶⁸ ambergris is a secretion of the gallbladder of the sperm whale, and washes ashore along the eastern and western coasts of Africa.⁶⁹ These may have been imported in their raw or semi-raw state and were processed locally: musk was often sold inside its "pod" of skin as extracted from the deer; ambergris came in the form of waxy lumps; and camphor as crystals.⁷⁰ Other aromatics were probably already processed when they were imported. Ibn Hayyan's passage about the Ibn Abi'l-'Afiya gift, for example, highlights the Iraqi origins of the rosewater (*ma' al-ward* or *ma'ward*), and this may imply that Baghdad was the immediate source for this particular rosewater. While Iraq was clearly a major exporter of rosewater, it was not an important production center; the best roses for distillation were considered to be either the red roses of Damascus or those from Fars in southern Iran, and in the tenth century the caliphs of Baghdad received 30,000 flasks of rosewater from Fars annually.⁷¹ The widespread use of such exotic substances in the sophisticated etiquette of the Umayyad court speaks to the significant position of al-Andalus within far-flung international trade routes.

Nevertheless, perfumes and aromatics were also processed locally in al-Andalus, including the distillation of rosewater, and al-Andalus had its own druggists producing refined final products. Some of these men operated under direct caliphal patronage. Ibn Juljul (d. 994) reports that Ahmad ibn Yunis established a pharmacy (*khizana* or *khizanat al-adwiya*) in a room at the caliphal palace, by order of al-Hakam II;⁷² and we should not forget that 'Abd al-Rahman III famously obtained a copy of Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica* from the Byzantine emperor, for which Ibn Juljul himself wrote a supplement.⁷³ However, the most famous Andalusí pharmacologist of this period was



1.9. Bottle from the Treasure of La Mora. Lucena (Córdoba), 10th century. Silver, height 6.8 cm, diam. 4.5 cm. Museo Arqueológico de Córdoba, Spain (CE024205)

Abu'l-Qasim Khalaf ibn 'Abbas al-Zahrawi (d. 1013), known in the west as Abulcasis, but whose *nisba* al-Zahrawi derives from Madinat al-Zahra', where he was born and lived. He has been described as "le médecin du chambre du calife al-Hakam II."⁷⁴ Toward the end of the tenth century, al-Zahrawi wrote a monumental medico-pharmacological encyclopedia, *Kitab al-tasrif li-man 'ajiza 'an al-ta'lif*. This comprised thirty treatises (*maqalat*) encompassing all the healing arts.

Cosmetology, the art of beautification, is a branch of pharmacology, as many of the same substances were employed to make medicines. Book 25 of *Kitab al-tasrif*, for example, focuses on essential oils (*adhan*) and includes descriptions of rosewater distillation and the preparation of *ghaliya*.⁷⁵ The presence of a royal pharmacy among the ateliers of Madinat al-Zahra', which produced these luxury perfumes under the supervision of such men as al-Zahrawi, adds another level of complexity to the interaction between different craft workshops at the court. It also invites a consideration of the aromatic plantings in the palace gardens at Madinat al-Zahra' and elsewhere, such as private estates (*munyas*), where the flowers needed to produce these substances—such as rose, jasmine, and orange blossom—may have been grown.⁷⁶ Finally, it might also be noted that cosmetological/pharmacological treatises such as al-Zahrawi's *Kitab al-tasrif* offer one kind of primary literature where women were very much present, as patients and customers.

Liquids such as *ghaliya*, rosewater, and other essential oils would have been contained within bottles, and according to contemporary recipes these containers were usually made from gold, silver, or glass. *Ghaliya* recipes described by al-Zahrawi and in one of the Geniza documents instruct the maker to place the mixture into clean vessels of glass or gold.⁷⁷ The eleventh-century botanist al-Tighnari composed a long agricultural treatise in which he dedicated a whole chapter to the distillation of rosewater. Discussing the different receptacles for storing and keeping rosewater, he wrote that the best were made from glass, followed by earthenware, which do not alter the taste of the distilled essence.⁷⁸ These substances were also presented in vessels made from precious materials. A visitor to the Ghassanid court in the early seventh century described King Jabala being "daubed with ambergris and musk in vessels (*sihaf*) of silver and gold"; among other aromatics, musk was "brought to him in silver vessels."⁷⁹ As we have seen from the gift to Musa ibn Abi'l-'Afiya, many of the perfumes listed were stored in silver or glass receptacles. Where the container was ivory, its porous nature would allow the material to absorb the scent of the perfumes contained within.⁸⁰

In some cases, the perfumes would have been imported inside their containers, such as the rosewater imported from Abbasid Baghdad. But when they were manufactured in al-Andalus, these receptacles would have been made locally, presumably in the luxury arts ateliers at Madinat al-Zahra'. Interesting survivals such as silver perfume bottles found in excavations at Córdoba (fig. 1.9) suggest what these originally looked like,⁸¹ and it is intriguing that their dimensions seem to match the interior

dimensions of the cylindrical ivories, indicating that they could have fitted snugly inside.⁸² An almost spherical example from the second half of the eleventh century was made for an elite woman, Zahr, *al-sayyida al-‘aliyya*, “the noble (or elevated) lady,” wife of the *hajib* Mu‘ayyad al-Dawla ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Khalaf, second ruler of the Berber Taifa of the Banu Razin (r. 1045–1103). This luxurious example, which stands more than 15 cm high, is made from silver and decorated with niello, vegetal scrolls, and paired birds and animals, not unlike the vocabulary of the Zamora pyxis.⁸³ Purely spherical perfume containers exist as well, such as an unusual example now in the museum of La Seu d’Urgell (fig. 1.10a).⁸⁴ Apparently made from high-tin bronze and originally gilded, as indicated by traces that remain on the ground behind the nielloed decoration, this container features interlinked roundels that alternate prowling lions with heraldic eagles. Its two halves are hinged at the back, and originally closed with a clasp at the front; at the top is what appears to be a suspension ring. At only 4 cm in diameter, such a spherical container would have been perfectly sized to hold a small amount of a very precious substance, and also to fit inside the cavities of the Burgos casket (fig. 1.1b; roughly 8.5 cm diameter per cavity), an idea we will elaborate on below. Its production technique and decoration associate it with al-Andalus, and it has been given a *terminus ante quem* of the early eleventh century, on the suggestion that it formed part of the booty seized during the expedition against Córdoba led by Ramon Borrell, count of Barcelona, and his brother Ermengol I, count of Urgell, in 1010.⁸⁵

A second small object from La Seu d’Urgell made from turned ivory has the same provenance and may also have come from Córdoba in the early eleventh century (fig. 1.10b). This has been identified as an unguentarium, or container for cosmetic ointments. Its tiny size indicates that the ointment it contained must have been made from some highly precious aromatic substance, perhaps musk.⁸⁶ This object also indicates that other vessel types were made from ivory at this time and formed part of a royal “dressing table” set. It is highly likely that precious ivory material was not wasted and that blocks of ivory excavated during the production of, for example, the Fitero casket, would have been used to make smaller objects such as this unguent bottle, or chess pieces.

Sometimes aromatics came in solid form and were themselves processed into decorative items, “[combining] therapy with the elegance of ornamentation.”⁸⁷ One chapter of al-Zahrawi’s treatise discusses how to make medicated rosaries, necklaces, and beads from ambergris, musk, camphor, and clove: for example, powdered musk was mixed with prepared wax and rolled into beads; clove beads could be pressed into molds inscribed with a special inscription or decoration. Descriptions in the *Kitab al-hadaya wa’l-tuhaf* (Book of Gifts and Rarities, an eyewitness account of the contents of the Fatimid royal treasuries, written down in the mid-eleventh century) are revealing in this regard. Not only does the context in which these aromatic substances are mentioned indicate their important role in elite society, but it also tells us that camphor and ambergris were carved into figurines and other shapes. In the context



1.10A. Spherical perfume container. Probably Córdoba, early 11th century. Gilt metal, diam. 4 cm. Museu Diocesà d’Urgell, La Seu d’Urgell, Spain (MDU 18)

1.10B. Container for ointment. Probably Córdoba, early 11th century. Ivory, height 3.5 cm, diam. 3 cm. Museu Diocesà d’Urgell, La Seu d’Urgell, Spain (MDU 16)

of a gift from the Abbasid caliph al-Radi billah (r. 934–40), sent in 939, “two gold trays with figurines (*tamathil*) [modeled] of ambergris” are mentioned.⁸⁸ Found during dispersal of the Fatimid treasuries of curiosities and silverware were “twenty-two thousand ambergris figurines, each of which weighed twelve *mana*, and the largest ones were even heavier.”⁸⁹ In the same treasury, there was also “an unlimited quantity of camphor figurines, which included eight hundred [pieces] in the form of a watermelon (*bittikhah*) and other [shapes].”⁹⁰ In the scent treasuries (*khaza'in al-tibb*) was found “a piece of camphor in the form of a watermelon [kept] inside a gold net (*shibak*) studded [with precious stones].”⁹¹ These and other descriptions indicate that in addition to the use of aromatics to produce essential oils, perfumes, or incense, these precious substances were also prized in their “raw” form, and even enhanced with gold holders and mounts.⁹²

The term *battikh*, translated here as “watermelon,” carries the connotation of a sphere, and the fact that this was one of the most common shapes into which camphor was processed in elite society is significant when we reflect again on the spherical cavities inside the Burgos box (fig. 1.1b). It is worth reconsidering the function of this object in light of what we know today about the role of these ivory objects in the lives of elite women. In the earliest historiography of this object, it was suggested that it held either a game of five balls or spherical perfume containers.⁹³ It is now widely believed to be a game box related to the mancala group, an ancient “seed-sowing game” known from examples from both Pharaonic and Islamic Egypt and today widespread throughout India, Indonesia, and Africa.⁹⁴ However, the evidence that it was played in al-Andalus at this period is slim, and is dependent on the identification of boards cut into rocks or stones at fortified sites such as Vascos (Toledo).⁹⁵ Visual parallels to the Burgos box that would confirm its identification as a mancala board do not exist. The arguments cited always come back to this very object as the only example of a portable board. It does not feature the larger pits at the outer edges that many mancala boards have to stow the seeds in play, and the African art historian John Mack recently observed that if this board had been played, one would expect to see grooves worn between the hollows by the movement of the gaming pieces. Instead the edges of the carving here are pristine.⁹⁶

In the absence of any firm evidence for the game box attribution, it is more likely that the Burgos box served as the grand receptacle for expensive perfumes or cosmetics, which were perhaps the main intended gift to 'Abd al-Rahman's daughter. The cavities inside the Burgos box could have held either solid perfumes carved or molded into interesting shapes, as described in the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, or perfume containers in the shape of spheres, such as that which survives in La Seu d'Urgell. Given the high status of this commission and the fact that precious metals were the favored material for perfume containers, the putative original receptacles are likely to have been melted down at some later point in history. The five round cavities were totally smooth because they would have been hidden by whatever was contained inside

them. It is also tempting to speculate whether there were five hollows because each of them held one of the five principal aromatic substances (musk, camphor, ambergris, aloeswood, and saffron). This function might have inspired the way in which the object was later reused in the Monastery of Santo Domingo at Silos, when each one of its cavities housed a different precious relic.⁹⁷

Conclusion

We have suggested in this chapter that the earliest objects in the justly famous corpus of Córdoba ivories may reveal something of the connection between 'Abd al-Rahman III and his daughters, offspring from the union with his beloved Marjan—a relationship about which the historical texts are completely silent. The mourning for 'Abd al-Rahman's passing expressed in these boxes' inscriptions may well commemorate a loving bond between daughter and father, while at the same time making visible the royal identity of the woman or women for whom they were made. We have also speculated that these women may have been more actively involved in the creation of these boxes than their role as recipients might suggest. If they were not directly involved in their carving, they may well have been in their commissioning. Women such as Marjan, Subh, and al-Mushtaq had the education and sophistication to read and understand these objects' epigraphic, poetic, and decorative elements. Moreover, both the medieval court chronicles and the surviving material evidence indicate that they had access to caliphal workshops and enjoyed sufficient authority and status in the court to have carried out such commissions.

The ivories discussed here are historically significant for a host of other reasons. The information contained in their inscriptions provides clear evidence for the organization of workshops, information that is wholly lacking for other ivory groups produced in the medieval Mediterranean (in southern Italy, Sicily, or Fatimid Egypt, for example). Furthermore, they attest that the raw material of elephant ivory was clearly abundantly available in Islamic Iberia during the tenth century, which has major economic and political implications for our understanding of the Umayyads' relations with their clients in North Africa. The ivories' visual connections to the decoration of the royal spaces at Madinat al-Zahra' and their function as containers for precious fragrances thus elucidate the material dimensions of elite and royal women in the court of the Córdoba Umayyad caliphs.

NOTES

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- 1 Ed. P. Chalmeta, F. Corriente, and M. Sobh (Madrid, 1979), 7 (henceforth cited as Ibn Hayyan, *al-Muqtabis V*); Ibn Hayyan, *Crónica del califa 'Abdarrahman III an-Nasir entre los años 912 y 942 (al-Muqtabis V)*, trans. María Jesús Viguera and Federico Corriente (Zaragoza, 1981), 13.
- 2 This comparative neglect contrasts with the relatively rich art historical literature on women and the arts in the later medieval and early modern Islamic lands. Attempts to redress this historiographical gap for the medieval period have been made in recent years; for overviews, see María Elena Díez Jorge, "Women and the Architecture of al-Andalus (711–1492): A Historical Analysis," in *Reassessing the Roles of Women as "Makers" of Medieval Art and Architecture*, ed. Therese Martin, 2 vols. (Leiden, 2012), 1:481–84; Glaire D. Anderson, "Concubines, Eunuchs, and Patronage in Early Islamic Córdoba," in *Reassessing the Roles of Women*, 2:633–69; and Julie A. Harris, "Finding a Place for Women's Creativity in Medieval Iberia and Modern Scholarship," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 6, no. 1 (2014): 1–14.
- 3 Ibn Hayyan, *Al-Muqtabis V*, 7; *Crónica del califa 'Abdarrahman III an-Nasir*, trans. Viguera and Corriente, 13; Laura Bariani, "¿Fue Subh 'la plus chère des femmes fécondes'? Consideraciones sobre la dedicatoria de las arquillas califales del Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan y de la Iglesia de Santa María de Fitero," *Al-Qantara* 26, no. 2 (2005): 299–315, cited at 309–10.
- 4 Ibn Hayyan, *Al-Muqtabis V*, 5; *Crónica del califa 'Abdarrahman III an-Nasir*, trans. Viguera and Corriente, 19.
- 5 *Crónica del califa 'Abdarrahman III an-Nasir*, trans. Viguera and Corriente, 19.
- 6 Noelia Silva Santa-Cruz, "Nuevos datos para el estudio de dos piezas de eboraria califal: arquetas de la iglesia parroquial de Fitero y del Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan," *Anales de Historia del Arte* 9 (1999): 27–33, at 32. Medieval texts also tell us that 'Abd al-Rahman had a total of sixteen daughters, though only two others—Saniyya and Salama—are identified by name. See Ibn Hayyan, *al-Muqtabis V*, 13; and Bariani, "¿Fue Subh?," 309–10.
- 7 Noelia Silva Santa-Cruz, "Ivory Gifts for Women in Caliphal Córdoba: Marriage, Maternity and Sensuality," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 6, no. 1 (2014): 103–25, at 114 and 116n66. We are very grateful to Noelia Silva Santa-Cruz for sharing the unpublished version of her article with us. This attractive suggestion must remain speculative until it can be verified within the museum. The dimensions of the two objects do not make it impossible. Bearing in mind that the walls of these caskets are usually about a centimeter thick, we need to subtract a centimeter from either side, leaving us with the internal dimensions H 6.5 × W 11 × D 6.5 cm for the larger casket. However, given the care taken in carving these objects and their inscriptions, it is unlikely that one was meant to be invisible for much of the time. There would be a "performance" element even if each casket had been presented individually but contained a glamorous perfume container, as will be discussed in the main text.
- 8 Avinoam Shalem, "Performance of the Object," in *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, ed. Linda Komaroff, exh. cat., Los Angeles County Museum of Art (New Haven, 2011), 111–13.
- 9 This is the accepted transliteration based on 301-1866. The larger casket (A.580-1910) has a longer inscription with more mistakes: *bismillah al-rahman al-ra[him] hadha ma 'amala al-ibnat* (for 'umila li'l-ibnat) / *al-sayyida ibnat 'abd al-mahman* (for *rahman*) / *amir al-mu'minin ra'mat* (for *rahmat*) *Allah / 'alayhi wa-ridwanuhu*. María Antonia Martínez Núñez of the University of Málaga recently verified the readings of the inscriptions on the V&A's caskets for the purposes of this essay. The discussion here is based on this verified reading and on thoughts and information she generously shared. See also María Antonia Martínez Núñez, "Mujeres y élites sociales en al-Andalus a través de la documentación epigráfica," in *Mujeres y sociedad islámica: una visión plural*, ed. María Isabel Calero Secall (Málaga, 2006), 289–328, esp. 307ff.; and Sheila Blair, "What the Inscriptions Tell Us: Text and Message on the Ivories from Al-Andalus," *Journal of the David Collection* 2, no. 1 (2005): 78. Note that Évariste Lévi-Provençal's reading of the two V&A caskets, in his *Inscriptions arabes d'Espagne* (Leiden, 1931) (nos. 194, 195), is actually wrong.
- 10 As pointed out by Renata Holod in *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*, ed. Jerrilynn Dodds, exh. cat. Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 1992), 191n1, 192. She noted that the verb in its active tense is preferable grammatically, but ultimately discarded this reading since so little was known about court women at the time relative to the involvement of males in the production

- of the ivories (such as the eunuch Durri al-Saghir). On this subject, see Anderson, "Concubines, Eunuchs, and Patronage."
- 11 María Antonia Martínez Núñez, "Epigrafía funeraria en al-Andalus (siglos IX–XII)," *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 41, no. 1 (2011): 181–209.
 - 12 For example, Martínez Núñez notes that the phrase *rahmat Allah 'alayhi wa-'ala'l-muslimin ajma'in* (God's mercy be upon him and upon all Muslims) is used in a funerary stele from Baños de la Encina (Jaén), now in the Real Academia de la Historia in Madrid ("Epigrafía funeraria en al-Andalus," 190), while *rahmat Allah 'alayhi wa-maghfiratuhu wa-ridwanuhu* (May God's mercy and forgiveness and favor be his) is used in an epitaph from Almería dated 956, and in another from Mallorca dateable to the caliphal period. See Carmen Barceló, "Estructura textual de los epitafios andalusíes," in *Homenaje a Manuel Ocaña Jiménez* (Córdoba, 1990), 41–54, at 47.
 - 13 Admittedly, since the inscription repeats four times, two of these could have been given over to the prayer, but this is actually very short and might not have filled all the available space. As we can see on the larger of the V&A caskets (fig. 1.3), the craftsman ended up with too much space for his inscription and thus adopted lengthening strategies such as the full *basmala* and the insertion of decorative trefoils between letters to stretch out the words *rahmat*, *allah*, and *'alayhi*. The forward planning of the inscriptions in this group was apparently not too careful.
 - 14 Holod, in *Al-Andalus*, 190.
 - 15 See Silva Santa-Cruz, "Nuevos datos"; and Bariani, "¿Fue Subh?"
 - 16 Here also Lévi-Provençal's readings of these inscriptions are inaccurate (*Inscriptions*, nos. 197, 198). For example, he includes the phrase *'amala Khalaf* in his reading of no. 198 (the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan casket), whereas it only appears on the Fitero casket.
 - 17 *Ibid.*, no. 198.
 - 18 Bariani, "¿Fue Subh?," 304, citing José Ferrandis Torres, *Marfiles y azabaches españoles* (Barcelona, 1928). She draws a parallel (p. 314) with the al-Mughira pyxis, where the inscription refers to this younger brother of al-Hakam II as "el hermano" (*akh*)—though it should be noted that this word is not included in the reading of the inscription given by Lévi-Provençal, *Inscriptions*, no. 200, or by Sophie Makariou, "The al-Mughira Pyxis and Spanish Umayyad Ivories: Aims and Tools of Power," in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb (Leiden, 2010), 313–35.
 - 19 Similar but not identical: for example, the *kaf* of *baraka* and *'ayn* of *sa'ada* are written differently on the front of each casket.
 - 20 It is also interesting to note that Khalaf's name is written prominently on the Fitero casket, in relief and as fully part of the inscription as seen in fig. 1.4, rather than incised and in a hidden place as on the Hispanic Society pyxis. Was this another strategy for using up space?
 - 21 See note 7 above. The estimated internal dimensions of the Fitero casket would therefore be H 6.9 × W 10.8 × D 6.3 cm. It would be a tight fit, though not inconceivable.
 - 22 Lévi-Provençal, *Inscriptions*, no. 196; on the phrase *'ala yaday*, see Blair, "What the Inscriptions Tell Us," 86–87.
 - 23 Ibn Idhari al-Marrakushi, *Histoire de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne, intitulée al-Bayano'l-Mogrib*, trans. and ed. E. Fagnan, 2 vols. (Algiers, 1901–4), 2:389. Silva Santa-Cruz has recently suggested that the Zamora pyxis might have been commissioned on the occasion of her second pregnancy (with Hisham); see "Ivory Gifts for Women," 118.
 - 24 Lévi-Provençal, *Inscriptions*, no. 30; see Anderson, "Concubines, Eunuchs, and Patronage," 661–62.
 - 25 Francisco Prado-Vilar, "Circular Visions of Fertility and Punishment: Caliphal Ivory Caskets from al-Andalus," *Muqarnas* 14 (1997): 19–41. This notion was first suggested by Holod, in *Al-Andalus*, 191.
 - 26 Glaire Anderson, "Sign of the Cross: Contexts for the Ivory Cross of San Millán de La Cogolla," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 6, no. 1 (2014): 20.
 - 27 Ernst Kühnel, *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen VIII–XIII Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1971), cat. no. 29, pl. XVI.
 - 28 Evident in literary works such as the epic poetry of Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi or the so-called Calendar of Córdoba; see 'Arib ibn Sa'd, *Le Calendrier de Cordoue*, ed. Charles Pellat (Leiden, 1961), discussed in Glaire D. Anderson, *The Islamic Villa in Early Medieval Iberia: Architecture and Court Culture in Umayyad Córdoba* (Farnham, 2013), 155ff. See also James T. Monroe, "The Historical Arjuza of Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, a Tenth-Century Hispano-Arabic Epic Poem," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91, no. 1 (1971): 67–95.
 - 29 On material spatiality and Umayyad Córdoba with respect to female musicians, see Glaire D. Anderson, "Aristocratic Residences and the *majlis* in Umayyad Córdoba," in *Music, Sound, and Architecture in Islam*, ed. Michael Frishkopf and Federico Spinetti (forthcoming).
 - 30 Anthony Cutler, "Ivory Working in Umayyad Cordoba: Techniques and Implications," *Journal of the David Collection* 2, no. 1 (2005): 37–47. In analyzing its carving technique, Cutler highlights the way this object shows a "display of skill for its own sake"; for example, the fact that behind the

carving the background walls are only millimeters thick results in translucency when viewed against the light. The ivories were not meant to be viewed this way and this feature has nothing to do with their function; it is purely incidental and Cutler suggests it was a “demonstration of artistic virtuosity.”

- 31 Heather Ecker, *Caliphs and Kings: The Art and Influence of Islamic Spain*, exh. cat. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution (Washington, D.C., 2004), 125–26.
- 32 Metropolitan Museum of Art (13.141). The eyes of some of the figures on the Met’s panel and some drill holes of the framing band are inlaid with a clear stone, perhaps quartz; and traces of green pigments can be seen clearly on many of the leaves, with red on some of the buds and blue on the flower at the left-hand edge of the frame. Our thanks to Sheila Canby of the Department of Islamic Art for sharing the conservation report on this object with us. See also Holod in *Al-Andalus*, 203. Another pyxis, made for Ziyad ibn Aflah in 969, now in the V&A (368-1880), also has traces of color: green on the leaves, red on the buds, and blue in the background of the inscription. See *Analysis Report 06-60-LB Ivory Pyxis 368-1880*, prepared by Dr Lucia Burgio, Science Section, Conservation Department, Victoria and Albert Museum, 5 July 2006. The pigments on both objects have been separately analyzed and the results are interesting to compare: copper for green, cinnabar/vermillion for red (for which the Iberian Peninsula was well known as an exporter in Antiquity), and azurite for blue. All of these are traditional pigments, however, which means that they cannot be dated by analysis and it is therefore not possible to say when in the objects’ long lives these colors were applied.

- 33 Ecker, *Caliphs and Kings*, 125–26. See, for example, Song of Songs 5:14, in which a male lover’s belly is described as “polished ivory overlaid with sapphires.”
- 34 Ecker, *Caliphs and Kings*, 125–26n9; and Doron Bauer, “Dissimulation et sensualité sur une pyxide d’Al-Andalus,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 55, no. 4 (2012): 405–15, esp. 408. The Abbasid poet Ibn al-Rumi (836–96) had already used this same sensual comparison in the following lines: “Her breasts are like *curved caskets of ivory*, / And she has teeth made lovelier by the beauty of their perfect order / When those who always walk about and talk saw them / They said: There you have the *pearls from those little caskets*” (our italics). See Ibn al-Khatib, *Poesía árabe clásica: Antología titulada “Libro de la magia y de la poesía,”* ed. and Spanish trans. J. M. Continente Ferrer (Madrid, 1981), 149n585, as cited in Silva Santa-Cruz, “Ivory Gifts for Women,” 118n84. Interestingly, these verses imply that the pyxis form with a domed lid was already being made in Abbasid ivories in the mid-ninth century, though no examples have survived. These earlier uses of the trope probably influenced Andalusí poetry; an anthology compiled by Ibn al-Kattani (951–1029) includes a chapter dedicated to “breasts,” which lists no fewer than six different poetic metaphors that liken women’s breasts to apples, pomegranates, and “caskets of ivory.” See Bauer, “Dissimulation et sensualité,” 409.
- 35 Ecker, *Caliphs and Kings*, 125–26n10; and David Wasserstein, “The Library of al-Hakam II al-Mustansir and the Culture of Islamic Spain,” *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 5 (1990–91): 99–105, esp. 99.
- 36 Bauer, “Dissimulation et sensualité,” 409. Bauer notes that an example of the ivory-to-woman metaphor is found

in Ovid’s story of Pygmalion—is it possible that there was a copy of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in al-Hakam’s library as well?

- 37 Ibid., 413.
- 38 Ibid., 411. Ecker (*Caliphs and Kings*, 125–26) had already suggested a similar reading based on Prado-Vilar’s discussion; she says “it can be surmised from its floral and foliate carving that it was made as a gift for a lady at court. Second, its inscription can be interpreted as a celebration of both desire and fecundity: the object assumes the identity of its intended owner, who is both a beautiful young woman, and potentially fertile, a receptacle for royal perfumes.”
- 39 For example, Silva Santa-Cruz, “Ivory Gifts for Women,” 117n80, notes that Subh was a talented singer who would have received a sophisticated education in music and poetry.
- 40 *Crónica del califa ‘Abdarrhman III an-Nasir*, trans. Viguera and Corriente, 19.
- 41 Ibid., 14.
- 42 Lévi-Provençal, *Inscriptions*, no. 18.
- 43 Translation after Lévi-Provençal. Though it came to our attention too late to include in our argument, see the recent alternate reading and interpretation of this inscription in María Antonia Martínez Núñez, “Mujeres y élites sociales en al-Andalus,” 294–96.
- 44 Mohamed Meouak, *Saqâliba, eunuques et esclaves à la conquête du pouvoir: géographie et histoire des élites politiques “marginales” dans l’Espagne Umayyade* (Helsinki, 2004), 180–82.
- 45 Glair Anderson, *The Islamic Villa in Early Medieval Iberia*, 34–35; and *ibid.*, “Concubines, Eunuchs and Patronage,” 652–53.
- 46 See, most recently, Makariou, “The al-Mughira Pyxis,” which cites other bibliography.
- 47 A possibility that invites further research in light of recent work such as

- Kathryn M. Kueny, *Conceiving Identities: Maternity in Medieval Muslim Discourse and Practice* (Albany, NY, 2013).
- Makariou, "The al-Mughira Pyxis," 316–17, makes the point that al-Mughira would have been approximately 18 years of age in 968.
- 48 Sheila Blair proposes a division in the type of formulae used in the ivory inscriptions: a regnal one designating items that the caliph ordered to be made (*amara*, "to order") and a non-regnal one using *ʿamala* for those made by/for others. See Blair, "What the Inscriptions Tell Us," 79–80.
- 49 Therese Martin, "Exceptions and Assumptions: Women in Medieval Art History," in *Reassessing the Roles of Women as "Makers" of Medieval Art and Architecture*, ed. Therese Martin, 2 vols. (Leiden, 2012), 1:2–33.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 1:2.
- 51 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, 1960–2004), s.v. "Sina'a" (A. Ghabin).
- 52 *Ibid.*, s.v. "Kayna" (C. Pellat).
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 See Anderson, "Concubines, Eunuchs, and Patronage," 637, 642.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 642–46.
- 56 Ibn Hayyan, *Al-Muqtabas al-thani: Tab'ah faksimiliyah min makhtutat Maktabat al-Akadimiyah al-Malikiyah al-Tarikhiyah bi-Madrid*, ed. Joaquín Vallvé Bermeio and Emilio García Gómez (Madrid, 1999), 116r; Spanish trans. *Crónica de los emires Alhakam I y Abdarrahman II entre los años 796 y 847 (Almuqtabis II-1)*, Federico Corriente (Zaragoza, 2001), 177–78 (henceforth cited as Ibn Hayyan, *Almuqtabis II-1*). See also *Estudios onomástico-biográficos de Al-Andalus*, ed. Manuela Marín, vol. 11, *Mujeres en al-Andalus* (Madrid, 2000), 340.
- 57 Ibn Hayyan, *Almuqtabis II-1*, 177–78.
- 58 Hugh Kennedy, *The Court of the Caliphs: The Rise and Fall of Islam's Greatest Dynasty* (London, 2004), 112–20ff.; Amnon Shiloah, review of G. D. Sawa, "Music Performance Practice in the Early Abbasid Era, 132–320 AH/750–932 AD," *Speculum* 68, no. 1 (1993): 253–54; and G. D. Sawa, "The Status and Roles of the Secular Musicians in the Kitab al-Aghani (Book of Songs) of Abu al-Faraj al-Isbahani (d. 356 A. H./967 A. D.)," *Asian Music* 17, no. 1 (1985): 69–82.
- 59 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Sina'a." On al-Jahiz and material culture, see Oleg Grabar, "Silks, Pots and Jugs: Al-Jahiz and Objects of Common Use," in *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand*, ed. Bernard O'Kane (Edinburgh, 2005), 197–200.
- 60 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Sina'a."
- 61 On Yusuf ibn Tashfin, see, for example, Jonathan M. Bloom, *Minaret: Symbol of Islam* (Oxford, 1989), 116.
- 62 Ibn Hayyan, *al-Muqtabis V*, 19.
- 63 Anya King, "The Importance of Imported Aromatics in Arabic Culture: Illustrations from Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Poetry," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 67, no. 3 (2008), 175–89, esp. 175. Ibn Masawayh was followed by al-Mas'udi (d. 956), who lists the same five; see *ibid.*, 178. There was a common conception in the early medieval Arabic-speaking world that these five were superior to all other fragrances.
- 64 King, "Importance of Imported Aromatics," 180. The association with Solomon is mentioned in the *Qisas al-anbiya'* of al-Tha'labi (d. 1035).
- 65 King, "Importance of Imported Aromatics," 181; and Silva Santa-Cruz, "Ivory Gifts for Women," 116.
- 66 Al-Maqqari, ed. Pascual de Gayangos, *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain, Extracted from the Nafhu-t-tib min ghosni-l-Andalusi-r-rattib* (London, 1840–43), 12:150–53.
- 67 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Kafur" (A. Dietrich); and Bahram Grami, "Perfumery Plant Materials as Reflected in Early Persian Poetry," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23, no. 1 (2013): 39–52.
- 68 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Misk" (A. Dietrich); King, "Importance of Imported Aromatics"; and Anya King, "Tibetan Musk and Medieval Arab Perfumery," in *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*, ed. Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim (Ashgate, 2011), 145–62.
- 69 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Anbar" (J. Ruska-M. Plessner); Jean Devisse, "Trade and Trade Routes in West Africa," in *General History of Africa, vol. 3, Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century*, ed. M. Elfasi (Paris, 1988), 421–22. Ambergris may have been one of the commodities that traveled to al-Andalus along the West African trans-Saharan trade routes. See also Floréal Sanagustin, "Parfums et pharmacologie en orient médiéval: Savoirs et représentations," in *Parfums d'orient*, ed. Rika Gyselen (Bures-sur-Yvette, 1998), 189–202n21.
- 70 Anya King, personal communication, October 1, 2013.
- 71 Geert Jan van Gelder, "Rosewater," in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Josef W. Meri, 2 vols. (London, 2006), 2:683–84.
- 72 Sami Hamarneh, "The Rise of Professional Pharmacy in Islam," *Medical History* 6 (1962): 59–66, esp. 62n38, citing Ibn Juljul, *Atibba*, 112–14.
- 73 For a discussion and translation of the passage describing the arrival of the Dioscorides manuscript, see George F. Hourani, "The Early Growth of the Secular Sciences in Andalusia," *Studia Islamica* 32 (1970): 143–56. See also Bauer, "Dissimulation et sensualité," 411.
- 74 Expiración García Sánchez, "Les techniques de distillation de l'eau de rose à al-Andalus," *Parfums d'orient*,

- 125–40, esp. 125. See also Sami Hamarneh, “The First Known Independent Treatise on Cosmetology in Spain,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 39 (1965): 309–25, esp. 309; and idem and Glenn Sonnedecker, *A Pharmaceutical View of Abulcasis al-Zahrawi in Moorish Spain, with Special Reference to the “Adhan”* (Leiden, 1963).
- 75 Interestingly, his description of the manner in which rosewater is made refers to “the process used by the kings of Iraq (*muluk ahl al-Iraq*),” and manifests a similar awareness of the Abbasid use of this luxury product as does Ibn Hayyan in his description of the Ibn Abi’l-Afiya gift. Is Ibn Hayyan betraying an awareness of al-Zahrawi’s encyclopedia in this passage? For the Arabic text, with Latin and French translation, see García Sánchez, “Les techniques de distillation,” 131.
- 76 Anderson, *Islamic Villa*, 113ff.
- 77 For al-Zahrawi’s description, see Hamarneh, “First Known Independent Treatise,” 313; for the Geniza recipe, see Bauer, “Dissimulation et sensualité,” 410, quoting from Anya King’s unpublished PhD thesis, “The Musk Trade and the Near East in the Early Medieval Period” (Indiana University, 2007), 56–57.
- 78 García Sánchez, “Les techniques de distillation,” 137. Interestingly, white (tin-glazed?) ceramics from Córdoba and Seville are the least recommended, as a disagreeable odor develops from them. Red ceramics (from Córdoba or Granada?) were said to be the best.
- 79 King, “Importance of Imported Aromatics,” 180.
- 80 The function of these ivories as containers for luxury perfumes would also make sense of the unique openwork casket in the V&A made for al-Hakam II (217–1865). Its pierced walls and lid would have allowed its perfumed contents to permeate the room in which it was displayed, like a kind of pomander.
- 81 María Jesús Viguera Molins and Concepción Castillo, *El esplendor de los Omeyas cordobeses: La civilización musulmana de Europa occidental*, 2 vols. (Granada, 2001), 2:220.
- 82 Mariam Rosser-Owen, “The Metal Mounts on Andalusian Ivories: Initial Observations,” in *Metalwork and Material Culture in the Islamic World: Art, Craft and Text. Essays Presented to James W. Allan*, ed. Venetia Porter and Mariam Rosser-Owen (London, 2012), 301–16, esp. 306–7.
- 83 Now in the Museo de Teruel, inv. 00629. Teruel is close to Albarraçín, the home of the Banu Razin. See Holod, in *Al-Andalus*, 219 (cat. no. 16); Martínez Núñez, “Mujeres y élites sociales,” 310; for more images, see Red Digital de Colecciones de Museos de España, accessed July 15, 2014, <http://ceres.mcu.es>. The handles on this bottle may be later additions; if so, its original shape would have allowed it to fit inside another container more easily.
- 84 Inv. no. 603. See Juan Zozaya, “Recipient esfèric d’ús incert,” in *Thesaurus/estudis: L’Art als Bisbats de Catalunya 1000/1800*, ed. Jaume Barrachina et al. (Barcelona, 1985), 22, cat. no. 5; and “Vas-reliquiari,” *Catalunya Romànica* 23 (1988): 254.
- 85 Albert Vives, “L’art d’orfebreria al Museu Diocesà d’Urgell,” *Urgellia* 3 (1980): 483–507, esp. 488. This spherical container was found together with similar pieces, including textiles and other reliquaries, in a cavity in the altar of the cathedral of Seu d’Urgell (Catalunya), founded by bishop Ermengol (d. 1035) and consecrated by his successor, Eribau, in 1040. This object held a relic, and it has been suggested that the objects with which it was found were used in the cathedral’s consecration. Other Islamic objects in Catalan collections, such as the Girona casket, may have come to Catalonia in this way; more recently, however, scholars have pointed out that the contacts between Christian and Muslim Spain were much more varied than mere conflict; see Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza, “Botín de guerra y tesoro sagrado,” in *Maravillas de la España medieval: Tesoro sagrado y monarquía*, ed. Isidro Bango Torviso (Madrid, 2001), 31–39; and Mariam Rosser-Owen, “Islamic Objects in Christian Contexts: Relic Translation and Modes of Transfer in Medieval Iberia,” *Art in Translation* 7, no. 1 (March 2015): 39–64.
- 86 Inv. no. 601. Juan Zozaya, “Ünguentari,” in *Thesaurus/estudis*, 23, cat. no. 6; “Ünguentari,” *Catalunya Romànica* 23 (1988): 267–68. It seems that this unguentarium also served for the consecration of the cathedral erected in the time of Bishop Ermengol. It was found together with similar pieces, including textiles and other reliquaries, inside a large casket (*gran cofre*) hidden in the main altar.
- 87 Harmaneh, “First Known Independent Treatise,” 318.
- 88 Ibn al-Zubayr, *Book of Gifts and Rarities (Kitab al-Hadaya wa al-Tuhaf): Selections Compiled in the Fifteenth Century from an Eleventh-Century Manuscript on Gifts and Treasures*, trans. Ghada al-Hijawi al-Qaddumi (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 89, § 65.
- 89 *Ibid.*, 236, § 394. A *mana* was a unit of weight equivalent to about 0.5 kilogram.
- 90 *Ibid.*, 236, § 395. See also 237, § 399: “camphor from Fansur, each ball (*habbah*) of which weighed five *mithqals* or less—nothing comparable had ever been seen—and [further] pieces of ambergris, each weighing three thousand *mithqals*, or around that.”

- 91 Ibid., 238–39, § 405: “Its net weight was seventy *mana* and a piece of ambergris, called *al-Kharūf* [was also found], the net weight of which was eighty *mana*, excluding the gold holder.”
- 92 Shalem, “Performance of the Object,” 112, mentions that balls of musk and eggs of ambergris were given as gifts at al-Maʿmun’s wedding in ninth-century Baghdad.
- 93 The first publications of this casket were Rodrigo Amador de los Rios, “Arquetas arábicas de plata y de marfil que se custodian en el Museo Arqueológico Nacional y en la Real Academia de la Historia,” *Museo Español de Antigüedades* 8 (1877): 530–49, esp. 531; and José Ferrandis Torres, *Marfiles árabes de Occidente* (Madrid, 1935), 1:51–52, cat. no. 1. In her catalogue entry for *Al-Andalus*, ed. Dodds, Renata Holod (190–91, cat. no. 1) opted for the games-box theory “because of the interior configuration and the cylindrical slots [at either extremity].” The references cited by Holod did not definitively support this identification. Though there are many varieties, mancala boards usually have six holes and, most significantly, storage pits at each end. R. C. Bell—on whom Holod primarily relies—does not discuss historical uses of mancala, and while F. Rosenthal (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. “Laʿib”) discusses it as an important game type in Islamic society, he gives no evidence for al-Andalus. Silva Santa-Cruz notes that its use was first attested in documentary form in the *Kitab al-Aghani*, a copy of which, as we saw above, was owned by al-Hakam; see “Ivory Gifts for Women,” 111n33, citing Franz Rosenthal, *Gambling in Islam* (Leiden, 1975), 43–44.
- 94 Holod’s implication was that the game might have been imported into al-Andalus from the Umayyads’ Berber clients in North Africa, since mancala
- is still played with five holes in North Africa today. Most scholars have simply followed Holod in this identification, most recently, Silva Santa-Cruz, “Ivory Gifts for Women,” 111–12, mainly following Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza, “Mancala” and “Mancala de Silos,” in *Alfonso X el Sabio*, exh. cat. (Murcia, 2009), 615–17. However, no scholar has yet convincingly demonstrated why the Burgos box should be identified in this way.
- 95 Yolanda Cosín Corral and Constantino García Aparicio, “Alquerque, mancala y dados: Juegos musulmanes en la ciudad de Vascos,” *Revista de Arqueología* 201 (1998): 38–47; and idem, “Testimonio arqueológico de la tradición lúdica en el mundo islámico: Juegos en la ciudad hispanomusulmana de Vascos (Navalmoralejo, Toledo),” in *II Congreso de arqueología peninsular: Zamora, del 24 al 27 de septiembre de 1996*, ed. R. de Balbin Behrmann and P. Bueno Ramírez (Zamora, 1997–99), 4:589–600.
- 96 Personal communication to Mariam Rosser-Owen following a seminar given at the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, November 20, 2013. We have shown the image to other African art historians who do not immediately associate the Burgos box with the mancala game. The gaming board notion has partly grown from the assumption that the concentration of decoration on the object’s interior “indicates that the piece was designed to be seen and used open, being closed only to protect the board and to be carried around” (Silva Santa-Cruz, “Ivory Gifts for Women,” 112). We see it instead as deliberately showing off the expensive ivory material from which the box was made.
- 97 Eugène Augustin Roulin, *L’ancien trésor de l’abbaye de Silos* (Paris, 1901), 9.