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CHAPTER 8



Male Love and Islamic Law in Arab Spain

Louis Crompton

A unique flowering of homoerotic poetry took place in Iberia after the Arab conquest in 711. The efflorescence there repeated a phenomenon of the Islamic world generally, paralleling the erotic lyrics of Iraq, Persia, Afghanistan, Mughal India, Turkey, and the North African states of Egypt, Tunis, and Morocco. The anthologies of medieval Islamic poetry, whether compiled in Baghdad, Damascus, Isfahan, Delhi, Kabul, Istanbul, Cairo, Kairouan, or Fez reveal, with astonishing consistency over a period of a millennium, the same strain of passionate homoeroticism we find in love poems from Cordoba, Seville, and Granada.

The civilization created by the Umayyad rulers of Spain, who reigned in Cordoba from 756 until 1031, vied with and even surpassed that of Christian Europe. After the death of Charlemagne in 814, Cordoba's only rival among European cities was Constantinople at the other end of the continent. The caliphs may have exceeded the contemporary Byzantine emperors in culture and probably maintained a higher standard of public administration. Their laws were no more intolerantly cruel than Christian laws: many of their Christian subjects (and certainly Spain's Jews) preferred these infidel rulers to the illiberal Visigoths. Literature, in the form of poetry, was enthusiastically cultivated, as in all Arab countries. Christian Spaniards avidly studied Arabic

to perfect an elegant and expressive style and scholars from Christian Europe came to Toledo and Cordoba to study in an age when Arabic outranked Latin as the language of medical studies, astronomy, and mathematics.

To moralists beyond the Pyrenees who had no direct contact with Moorish Spain, Islam appeared a luxurious paradise tantalizingly endowed with harems, pretty slave girls, and handsome sakis. But in sexual matters, Islamic cultures in fact maintained a paradoxical ambivalence, not least with respect to homosexuality. The severity and intolerance that characterized traditional Judaism and Christianity reappear unmistakably in the laws of this third "Abrahamic" religion, many of which derive ultimately from the Hebrew scriptures. The Qur'ān, in particular, shows both Jewish and Christian influence in its interpretation of the Sodom story (7.80–81, 11.78–83, 15.51–74, 27.54–55; see chapter 4 in this volume).

In the *hadīth*, collected "traditions" or sayings attributed (rightly or wrongly) to Muhammad, which appeared in five enormous collections in the ninth century, is a decree that both the active and passive partners should be stoned, a tradition which had a definitive influence on Islamic law. The theologian Malik of Medina (d. 795), whose school of jurisprudence eventually became the dominant one in Spain and North Africa, endorsed the death penalty: so did the leader of another important school, the literalist Ibn Hanbal (d. 855) (Bosworth 1954–5:777b). Other more liberal schools of law reduced the punishment to flagellation, usually one hundred strokes. These penalties were not merely theoretical. Barbaric sentences were in fact meted out by Muhammad's immediate successors. The first caliph, Abū Bakr, a close intimate of the Prophet, had a homosexual "buried under the debris of a wall"—presumably the stones of the wall were pushed over on him. He was also reputed to have prescribed burning alive as an alternative punishment. Muhammad's son-in-law Ali, the fourth caliph (later regarded as infallible and semi-divine by Shi'ite Muslims), ordered a guilty man to be thrown headlong from the top of a minaret. Others he ordered to be stoned (Bosworth 1954–5:777a). Thus, through early judicial theory and practice, Old Testament harshness came to dominate the legal side of Islam.

When we look at other aspects of Islamic culture, however, the indices are strikingly contradictory. Popular attitudes appear much less hostile than in Christendom, and European visitors to Muslim lands were repeatedly shocked by the relaxed tolerance of Arabs, Turks, and Persians who seemed to find nothing unnatural in relations between men and boys (Greenberg 1988:178–81; Crompton 1985:111–18). One measure of this important cultural difference is a vein of ardent romanticism in medieval Arab treatises on love. For Arab writers this "emotional intoxication," as it has been called,

springs not just from the love of women, as with the troubadours, but also from the love of boys and other men.

Arab enthusiasts were concerned to establish that romantic love was an experience meaningful and valuable for its own sake. But how were they to reconcile such a view with their faith? They did this by appealing to a curious *hadīth* ascribed to Muhammad himself—"He who loves and remains chaste and conceals his secret and dies, dies a martyr" (Giffen 1971:99). The Iraqi essayist Jāhiz, who wrote extensively on the subject of love, had laid down the rule that *'ishq*—or passionate love—could exist only between a man and a woman. But Ibn Da'ūd, who was born the year Jāhiz died (868), extended the possibility to love between males in his *Book of the flower*, and this view seems to have prevailed in Arab culture subsequently (Giffen 1971:86). Ibn Da'ūd was a learned jurist as well as a literary man: according to an account frequently mentioned in Arab writings on love, his passion for his friend Muhammad ibn Jāmī (to whom his book was dedicated) made him a "martyr of love." Another friend told their story:

I went to see [Ibn Da'ūd] during the illness in which he died and I said to him, "How do you feel?" He said to me, "Love of you-know-who has brought upon me what you see!" So I said to him, "What prevents you from enjoying him, as long as you have the power to do so?" He said, "Enjoyment has two aspects: One of them is the permitted gaze and the other is the forbidden pleasure. As for the permitted gaze, it has brought upon me the condition that you see, and as for the forbidden pleasure, something my father told me has kept me from it. He said . . . "the Prophet said . . . 'He who loves passionately and conceals his secret and remains chaste and patient, God will forgive him and make him enter Paradise,'" . . . and he died that very night or perhaps it was the next day. (Giffen 1971:10–11)

Both these traditions, the punitive and the sentimental, figure in the literature of Arab Spain, and especially in the writings of its foremost theorist of love, Ibn Hazm. Ibn Hazm was born in Cordoba in 994 during the last days of the Umayyad dynasty. He died in 1064, seven years before the birth of William IX of Aquitaine, the first of the troubadours. Ibn Hazm's father had held political office under the Umayyad caliphs but Ibn Hazm was forced to flee from Cordoba in 1013 when the caliph was overthrown. Later in life he became famous—and controversial—as a theologian and the author of many books, including a notable essay on comparative religion. Sometime between 1022 and 1027, in exile at Játiva near Valencia, he wrote a treatise on love called, in the poetic style favored by Arab writers, *The Dove's Neck-Ring about Love and Lovers*.

Ibn Hazm begins his book with a conventional Muslim prayer and makes haste to justify his undertaking on religious grounds: "Love is neither disap-

proved by Religion, nor prohibited by the Law; for every heart is in God's hands." Love itself is an inborn disposition "which men cannot control" (1953:21–22).¹ Later he elaborates on this defense—"it is sufficient for a good Moslem to abstain from those things which Allah has forbidden, and which, if he choose to do, he will find charged to his account on the Day of Resurrection. But to admire beauty, and to be mastered by love—that is a natural thing, and comes not within the range of Divine commandment and prohibition: all hearts are in God's hands, to dispose them what way He will, and all that is required of them is that they should know and consider the difference between right and wrong, and believe firmly what is true" (Ibn Hazm 1953:76).

Ibn Hazm declares that "Many rightly-guided caliphs and orthodox imams have been lovers" (1953:22). Readers reared in the Judeo-Christian tradition will find this declaration somewhat surprising. We are used to biographers recounting the erotic entanglements of secular rulers: it is more difficult to imagine them celebrating the love affairs of saints or church fathers. Yet Ibn Hazm assures us that "of the saints and learned doctors of the faith who lived in past ages and times long ago, some there are whose love lyrics are sufficient testimony to their passion, so that they require no further notice" (1953:23). He then mentions several famous religious jurists of Medina.

Ibn Hazm's theory of love is vaguely Platonic, but though he repeats an anecdote about the Greek philosopher he does not seem to know the *Phaedrus* or the *Symposium*. He considers love "a conjunction between scattered parts of souls that have become divided in this physical universe, a union effected within the substance of the original sublime element" (1953:23). Love is most often aroused by physical beauty but this is not the whole story—harmony of characters is also important. Love is of several kinds: love based on shared religious beliefs, love of kin or of comrades, love inspired by the desire to benefit from the higher rank of the beloved, love that is purely carnal, and "passionate love, that has no other cause but that union of souls to which we have referred above" (1953:25). But the only love which lasts is the love of true passion, which has mastery of the soul: only it produces mental preoccupation, melancholia, moodiness, sighing, and the other familiar symptoms.

Though Ibn Hazm is pro-love he is not writing a simple panegyric. He does not exalt love because it leads to courage, virtue, and wisdom as the Greeks did. It may do so, but it may also produce simple derangement (1953:35). The Arab psychologist dwells on its paradoxical nature as a "delightful malady, a most desirable sickness. Whoever is free of it likes not to be immune, and whoever is struck down by it yearns not to recover" (1953:31). He emphasizes, and seems almost to relish, a masochist element in love: he tells

how a suffering friend of his was displeased when Ibn Hazm expressed a hope that he might be freed from his miserable condition. At one point he tells the story of a man of rank and power who was delighted when a page boy took notice of his infatuation by slapping him (1953:90).

What does Ibn Hazm's treatise tell us about Hispano-Arabic attitudes to homosexuality? This is not a question that can be simply answered. His book is a mixture of theoretical generalizations and personal anecdotes, most of them based on his own observations. Of the anecdotes perhaps nine-tenths concern the love of men for women, especially for lovely slave girls. Yet Ibn Hazm repeatedly intermingles stories of men falling in love with other males.

This sudden, unprepared transition from one kind of experience startles us since we tend, of course, to be intensely self-conscious about such matters. Often we are left in the dark—the love poem could be about a woman or another man, so could the story, which mentions simply a lover and beloved, with no sex indicated. Where the European or American reader of today would ordinarily think that a love story is about a woman and a man unless there is some indication to the contrary, and an ancient Greek might have assumed the opposite, we are often in the dark in *The Dove's Neck-Ring*.

When Ibn Hazm comes to theorize about the experiences of lovers he is even more disorienting. Though the anecdotes in the book are far more numerous on the heterosexual side, in general descriptions of erotic phenomena he feels quite at ease using male pronouns. As an example, we may take the following passage from his second chapter, "On the Signs of Love":

The lover will direct his conversation to the beloved, even when he purports however earnestly to address another: the affectation is apparent to anyone with eyes to see. When the loved one speaks, the lover listens with rapt attention to his every word; he marvels at everything the beloved says, however extraordinary and absurd his observations may be; he believes him implicitly even when he is clearly lying; agrees with him even though he is obviously in the wrong, testifies on his behalf for all that he may be unjust, follows after him however he may proceed and whatever argument he may adopt. The lover hurries to the spot where the beloved is at the moment, endeavors to sit as near to him as possible, sidles up close to him, lays aside all occupations that might oblige him to leave his company, makes light of any matter however weighty that would demand his parting from him, is very slow to leave when he takes his leave of him. (Ibn Hazm 1953:33–34)

Presuming that Ibn Hazm means his masculine pronouns to be read inclusively, so that his observations would be applicable both to heterosexual and homosexual situations, what post-Hellenic Western writer would feel comfortable with such a convention? We may consider, for example, Andreas Capellanus. Capellanus wrote his famous essay "On love" a century and a half

later at the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine's daughter, Marie de Champagne. In the opening paragraph of his second chapter Andreas states categorically the assumptions of medieval Christian Europe:

The main point to be noted about love is that it can exist only between persons of different sex. Between two males or between two females it can claim no place, for two persons of the same sex are in no way fitted to reciprocate each other's love or to practise its natural acts. Love blushes to embrace what nature denies. (Capellanus 1982:35)

Later writers on the subject of love north of the Pyrenees would overwhelmingly have agreed. What we may call Ibn Hazm's romantic bisexuality would have been incomprehensible to them. On this point of sensibility a chasm existed between Christendom and Islam.

What is likely to disconcert the modern western reader is that Ibn Hazm seems oblivious to the idea that same-sex love might be any different from the love of men and women. Just as he makes no distinction between the love for slave women and free, so he makes no distinction between the love of women and the love of youths, morally or socially. To him all love is psychologically one and the same. The Greeks also recognized both homosexual and heterosexual love as valid. Nevertheless, they differentiated between them. In the *Symposium* Phaedrus makes a point of arguing that women can love men heroically just as men can. Aristotle is keenly aware of the love of males as something distinct from the love of women. Plutarch and the pseudo-Lucian of the *Erotes* contrast the two kinds of love sharply. But Ibn Hazm moves from a story about a man's infatuation for a slave girl to a story of male love with no suggestion that the one experience differs from the other. Only in the penultimate chapter of his book when he takes up legal issues does he consider them separately.

We may glean some insight as to how Ibn Hazm and his fellow religionists viewed love between men indirectly from his anecdotes and poems. In a chapter in which he argues that lovers should keep their love secret and not divulge it even to the beloved he tells the story of a well-known poet, whom he names, who was "deeply smitten" by another man. Scolded by the man for gazing at him so intently, the poet excused himself on the grounds that he would not have done so had he not been under the impression that the man was drunk and insensible (Ibn Hazm 1953:80). Arab delicacy and discretion are amply illustrated by Ibn Hazm's tales of men who kept silent about women or men they loved. He tells of a man who carefully refrained from letting a friend know of his love for him, knowing that any openness would end their intimacy (1953:80–81). This suggests that it was not regarded as proper in polite Arab society for two men to avow their love publicly, in con-

trast, say, to ancient Greece, Imperial China, or Tokugawa Japan, though it was perceived as highly romantic to harbor such feelings without naming the beloved. Here is a Platonism which out-Platos Plato.

Ibn Hazm's treatise contains, as we might anticipate, a chapter on "martyrs of love." He quotes the well-known tradition: "He who loves, and controls himself, and so dies, the same is a martyr," and cites six cases of persons who died, or nearly died, of love (1953:220). Interestingly, two cases involve women who loved men, two men who loved women, and two men who loved men. The tales are intermixed, not grouped by gender. The first story is about an official of Cordoba, Ibn Quzman, who fell in love with Aslam, the brother of the prime minister—"an exceedingly handsome man." He became ill from love, but though Aslam frequently visited him he was not aware he was the cause of his friend's decline and death. When another friend explained to Aslam what had happened, Aslam rebuked him: "Why did you not let me know? . . . I would have kept myself even more closely in touch with him, and would scarcely have left his bedside; that could have done me no harm" (1953:220; but see Nykl 1946:167).

The other case involved a close personal friend of Ibn Hazm's, Ibn al-Tubni, whom he praises highly for his learning, personal qualities, and his beauty—"It might have been said that beauty itself was created in his likeness, or fashioned out of the sighs of those who looked upon him" (Ibn Hazm 1953:222). They were separated when Berber troops overran Cordoba. In exile in Valencia Ibn Hazm was saddened by the news that Ibn al-Tubni was dead. When a friend had asked Ibn al-Tubni what made him sick and emaciated he had replied:

"Yes, I will tell you. I was standing at the door of my house in Ghadir Ibn al-Shammas at the time that 'Ali ibn Hammud entered Cordoba, and his armies were pouring into the city from all directions. I saw among them a youth of such striking appearance, that I could never have believed until that moment that beauty could be so embodied in a living form. He mastered my reason, and my mind was wholly enraptured with him. I enquired after him and was told that he was So-and-so, the son of So-and-so, and that he inhabited such and such a district—a province far distant from Cordoba, and virtually inaccessible. I despaired of ever seeing him again; and by my life . . . I shall never give up loving him, until I am laid in the tomb." And so indeed it was. (Ibn Hazm 1953:225)

Both Ibn Hazm's anecdotes and his poems, from which he quotes unabashedly in *The Dove's Neck-Ring*, reveal something of his own erotic sensibility. His grand passion seems to have been an infatuation which he experienced at sixteen with a slave girl in his family household. However, he

does include several poems in *The Dove's Neck-Ring* about his feelings for other men. One of these appears in his chapter on the signs of love. As a poet Ibn Hazm rarely rises above mediocrity; but his very banalities are instructive:

If he should speak, among those who sit in my company, I listen only to the words of that marvelous charmer.

Even if the Prince of the Faithful should be with me, I would not turn aside from [my love] for the former.

If I am compelled to leave him, I look back constantly, and walk [like an animal] wounded in the hoof.

My eyes remain fixed firmly upon him though my body has departed, as the drowning man looks at the shore from the fathomless sea.

If I recall my distance from him, I choke as if with water, like the man who yawns in the midst of a dust storm and the sun's noonday heat.

And if you say: "It is possible to reach the sky," I reply: "yes, and I know where the stairs may be found." (Ibn Hazm 1953:225)

When he discusses sex and morality, Ibn Hazm assures us, with naive candor, of his own purity: "I am completely guiltless, entirely sound, without reproach . . . and I do swear by God by the most solemn oath that I have never taken off my underwear to have an illicit sexual intercourse" (Ibn Hazm 1931:181).¹ Yet he admits to being tempted by the beauty of men. On one occasion he dared not attend a party where he would meet a handsome man who attracted him, in order to avoid any occasion for sin (Ibn Hazm 1953:267).

In the last two chapters of his book Ibn Hazm turns to the moral, religious, and legal questions raised by love. (In Muslim culture, these are of course one.) Several of the transgressions he describes in "The Vileness of Sinning" are homosexual. In one case a man of his circle who was a noted religious scholar lost his high reputation because of his open liaison with a boy. He mentions another scholar, no less renowned, and the former head of an important Muslim sect, who fell so madly in love with a Christian boy that he committed the ultimate enormity—that is, he composed a treatise in favor of the Trinity. Another man allowed "his harem to be violated, and exposed his family to dishonour, all for the sake of gratifying his amorous whim for a boy" (Ibn Hazm 1953:244). But not all Arabs were as censorious as Ibn Hazm. At a reception given by a wealthy businessman, a guest withdrew repeatedly with a relative of the host into a private chamber. When Ibn Hazm hinted at his disapproval of their misconduct—characteristically by reciting a poem—the host ignored him.

This chapter also contains Ibn Hazm's sole reference to lesbianism. "I once saw a woman," he tells us, "who had bestowed her affections in ways not pleasing to Almighty God." But her love changed to an "enmity the like of which is not engendered by hatred, or revenge, or the murder of a father, or the carrying of a mother into captivity. Such is Allah's wont with all those who practice abomination" (Ibn Hazm 1953:249). But again, Islamic references to lesbianism were apparently not always this condemnatory. At least a dozen love romances in which the lovers were women are mentioned in *The Book of Hind*, who was herself an archetypal lesbian. The ninth century produced a lost *Treatise on Lesbianism* (*Kitab al-Sahhakat*) (Bosworth 1954-5:777b; Foster 1958:84-85) and later Arab works on eroticism contained chapters on the subject. In this respect they are perhaps unique in pre-modern literature.

In Islam questions of morality were inevitably also questions of law. So Ibn Hazm's chapter on the sins of fornication, adultery, and sodomy ends with detailed discussions of various penalties prescribed by religious tradition. Among these he speaks of executions for homosexual acts. He recounts a story of Abū Bakr's burning a man alive for playing the passive role (Ibn Hazm 1953:259). The first caliph, he tells us, could be equally severe about acts which were not quite sodomy in the traditional sense; Abū Bakr struck and killed a man "who had pressed himself against a youth until he had an orgasm" (Ibn Hazm 1931:200). Ibn Hazm also notes that the jurist Malik expressed approval of an emir who beat a young man to death for allowing another man to embrace him in a similar way. But for Ibn Hazm this is excessive zeal; he thinks that the relatively lenient punishment of ten lashes might have sufficed, though he admits this is a heterodox view (Ibn Hazm 1953:258). As to the completed act of sodomy, he cites only Malik's opinion that both parties should be stoned. Ibn Hazm pointedly declines to say whether he agrees with him or not.

In this atmosphere of harsh religious laws and overcharged romanticism, men loved, expressed their feelings openly in fervent verse, and loudly proclaimed their chastity. Perhaps some of the poetic fervor was merely literary. Perhaps some of the protestations were sincere.

Occasionally, these affairs involved famous rulers. Caliph 'Abd al-Rahman III who ruled Cordoba at its political and cultural zenith (912-61) was attracted to a young Christian hostage, was repulsed, and had him barbarously executed. The boy was canonized as Saint Pelagius, and became the martyr-hero of a narrative poem by the German nun Hrosvitha which condemned Arab lust and glorified Christian chastity (Hrosvitha 1936:129-53).

Architecture, belles lettres, and scholarship flourished in Cordoba under 'Abd al-Rahman's son al-Hakam II, who was their eager and discriminating patron. In his youth his loves seem to have been entirely homosexual. This exclusivity was a problem when he succeeded to the throne, since it was incumbent upon the new caliph to produce a male heir. The impasse was resolved by his coupling with a concubine who dressed in boy's clothes and was given the masculine name of "Jafar" (Lévi-Provençal 1950:173n4).

The love of al-Mu'tamid, emir of Seville and the outstanding Andalusian poet of his day, for the poet Ibn 'Ammar ended violently after a long friendship. Al-Mu'tamid was a passionate lover of women but also loved males. Of a cupbearer he wrote, "They named him Sword; two other swords: his eyes!/. . . now we both are masters, both slaves!" (Ibn Hazm 1931:143). His love for Ibn 'Ammar is the most famous, and most tragic, romance in the history of al-Andalus. In 1053 al-Mu'tamid, aged thirteen, had been appointed titular governor at Silves by his father with Ibn 'Ammar, who was nine years his senior, as his vizier. A story tells how after an evening of wine and poetry his fondness led him to declare to Ibn 'Ammar, "Tonight you will sleep with me on the same pillow!" (Ibn Hazm 1931:156). In a poem he sent to al-Mu'tamid's father Ibn 'Ammar declared:

During the night of union there was wafted
To me, in his caresses, the perfume of its dawns,
My tears streamed out over the beautiful gardens
Of his cheeks to moisten its myrtles and lilies. . . . (Ibn Hazm 1931:157)

Apparently the prince's father came to disapprove of the relation with the commoner, for he exiled the poet to separate them (Daniel 1977:10). After his father's death al-Mu'tamid recalled Ibn 'Ammar and gave him great political and military power. A famous tale, which we are not required to believe, tells how, when they were sleeping together in one bed, the poet dreamed that his lover would kill him, fled the scene, and was wooed back by the king who assured him that this could never happen (Ibn Hazm 1931:156).

But later the two men quarreled bitterly. In a poem full of scurrilous abuse Ibn 'Ammar nevertheless reminded his lover of their former intimacy in terms that are startlingly specific:

Do you recall the days of our early youth,
When you resembled a crescent on the sky?
I would embrace your body that was fresh,
And from your lips I sipped pure water as well,

Contenting myself in loving you, short of *haram* [forbidden acts],
When you did swear that what I did was *halal* [permitted]! (Ibn Hazm 1931:160)

It is hard to understand how such tender lines found their way into a poem that is otherwise a violent assault on al-Mu'tamid's honor. Perhaps Ibn 'Ammar meant to imply that, despite his disclaimers, the youth had been his catamite. Finally, when Ibn 'Ammar fell into his hands, the ordinarily humane and generous al-Mu'tamid first pardoned him, and then, when Ibn 'Ammar boasted too triumphantly of his reprieve, fell into a rage and hacked him to death with his own hands. "Afterwards he wept, as long ago Alexander had wept for Hephestion, and gave him a sumptuous funeral" (Daniel 1977:10).

Almost any collection of Hispano-Arabic poetry yields a plethora of love poems by men to or about other males. Erotic poetry first flourished in Andalusia at Cordoba under 'Abd al-Rahman II (822–52). His grandson, 'Abdallah (888–912) penned amorous verses to a "dark-eyed fawn" (Ibn Hazm 1931:22). Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, a freedman poet at 'Abdallah's court, wrote of another young man in a typical mood of subjection—

I gave him what he asked for, made him my master . . .
Love has put fetters on my heart
As a herdsman puts fetters on a camel. (Ibn Hazm 1931:39)

Ramadi, the most foremost poet in Cordoba in the tenth century, was enamored of a young Christian to the point of making the sign of the cross when he drank wine. When his turbulent political career landed him in prison he fell in love with a black slave. Again we see the submissiveness of the lover and the conscious reversal of social roles: "I looked into his eyes, and became drunken. . . . I am his slave, he is the lord" (Ibn Hazm 1931:59). Latin poets in Augustan Rome had likewise addressed love poems to slave boys; but the extreme self-abasement of these Andalusians is closer to the chivalric romanticism of medieval France.

After the fall of the Umayyads at Cordoba Arabic Spain was fatally weakened. It disintegrated under the "Kings of the Taifas" (i.e., "parties" or "factions") into more than twenty petty states. But despite this political disarray the eleventh century was a golden age of Arabic poetry in the Iberian peninsula, and poetry continued to pour forth in the Almoravid period (1090–1145) and under the Almohad rulers (1145–1223). Homoerotic verse proliferated with the rest. Ibn al-Farra' taught the Qur'ān and poetry at Almería about 1220. "He liked beautiful boys and did not shun addressing aesthetic

compliments to them in his class." When a favored student asked him to complete a poem with the line "What a beauteous fawn I see!" the facile teacher quipped:

If your roses can't be culled,
 If your white teeth can't be kissed,
 What's the use my saying then:
 "What a beauteous fawn I see!" (Ibn Hazm 1931:257)

Andalusian poets wrote much poetry in the classical language and rhythms that had been traditional in Arabic since pre-Islamic times. They also invented two new stanza forms, the *muwashshah* and the *zajal*. At first disdained as an illegitimate experiment unfit for serious anthologies, the *muwashshah* eventually gained popularity throughout the Arab world. Its fame was spread by an Egyptian literary scholar, Ibn Sana al-Mulk (d. 1211), who collected examples in his *House of embroidery* (*Dar al-Tiraz*). He praised the Andalusian *muwashshah* as a new poetic form of high merit, and traced its origin to ninth-century Spain. There is some dispute as to how many of the love poems in his collection are addressed to males. One scholar has asserted that all are, which would make the collection a kind of Arabic counterpart to Book 12 of the *Greek anthology* (Roth 1982:27n29). (However, since the imagery in poems about boys is almost identical with those about women, the descriptions rarely provide a clue to gender—with one exception, playful references to the blossoming beard.) Another specialist, less certain as to the gender of the adored, notes that it was sometimes the convention in Arabic verse to use masculine pronouns in love poems to women, as more discreetly proper; nevertheless, she identifies a significant number of the poems as male oriented (Compton 1976:67). As an example we may take a *muwashshah* by Ibn 'Udda, a poet writing about 1100 at the court of al-Mut'asim of Almería:

I loved a new moon, incomparable in its beauty. The eyes and long lovely neck of the gazelle are modeled after it.
 He swaggered in his beauty, which desires no increase, a full moon shining in perfect proportion.
 Elegance adorned him and his figure was slender
 He is a full moon that triumphs with sheer magic. The down on his cheek is curved over jasmine.
 A lily was placed beside a well-guarded rose whenever he came into view. . . .
 (Compton 1976:18)

The most acclaimed lyricist of this brilliant era, Ibn Quzman (ca. 1080–1160), has been called one of the greatest of medieval poets.

An irreverent Bohemian of the cut of François Villon, he composed racy, colloquial *zajals*, far removed in style from the canons of classical Arabic verse. Tall, blond, and blue-eyed, Ibn Quzman led a licentious life resembling that of Haroun al-Rashid's boon companion in Baghdad, the poet Abū Nuwās, who was also unabashedly explicit about his homosexuality. In short, terse lines and elliptical stanzas that are almost untranslatable, he celebrates "wine, adultery and sodomy" (Ibn Hazm 1931:268). Like the troubadours of Provence he complains of the hauteur and disdain of his lovers, who are often male, but laughs at the refined conventions of idealistic love: "What do you say about a beloved, when he and you, without anyone else, are alone, and the house door is locked?" (Ibn Hazm 1931:283, and *passim*) Poverty-stricken, he ended his days not on the gallows but as an imam teaching in a mosque.

The philosopher Ibn Bajja, better known to Latin Europe as Avempace, was in every respect a more respectable figure. It was he who introduced Aristotelianism to Spain and paved the way for Averroes. Ibn Bajja, we are told by the anthologist Al-Fath ibn Haqan, wrote memorial verses on the death of "a black slave with whom he was infatuated . . . who died at Barcelona, much to his grief" (Ibn Hazm 1931:252). Al-Fath was at daggers drawn with Ibn Bajja, but his anthology, *Necklaces of pure gold*, compiled about 1120 is an important source of Andalusian poetry. His sobriquet "Ibn Haqan" has been taken to imply that he was a passive homosexual. (Ibn Hazm 1931:226).

Several other anthologies by native Andalusians appeared in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Perhaps the most important is the collection by Ibn Sa'id which appeared in 1243 under the title *The Pennants of the Champions*. Its fame in our day has been enhanced by a translation into Spanish by the scholar Emilio García Gómez which has in turn inspired English versions of many of the poems. A selection of these poems, translated by the poet-scholar A. J. Arberry has been published in his *Moorish Poetry*. (Ibn Sa'id 1953) The cautious Briton seems to have eschewed poems whose sexual details were explicit, but his book nevertheless reveals an astonishingly broad range of homoerotic poems intermixed with other lyrics (Roth 1982:28n34–35). Ibn Sa'id, who was born at Alcalá la Real near Granada, arranged his anthology according to the poets' birthplaces and occupations. Verse in praise of boys appears from Seville, Lisbon, Cordoba, Toledo, Granada, Alcalá, Murcia, Valencia, and Saragossa, authored by kings, ministers of state, scholars, men of letters and civil servants, as well as professional poets.

From the beginning of the thirteenth century Arab power ebbed in Spain, until it surrendered its last outpost, Granada, in 1492. To the end its poets

hymned the love of boys, as in the case of Yusuf III, who reigned in the Alhambra from 1408 to 1417, and composed this *muwashshah*:

O you who have aimed at my heart with the dart of a piercing glance:
Meet one who's dying, whose eye is shedding fast-flowing tears!
Who will claim justice from an alluring fawn
Slender of body as is the fresh, green bough,
Who has insisted on distance and shunning? . . .
He has seduced me with the spell of his eyelids
Had it been allowed—yet he shuns me ever—
I'd have won my desires by undoing his sash. (Monroe 1974:372)

As the Christian advance continued, many Arab families of note emigrated to Morocco or Tunis. Among them was the clan of Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), the great Arab historian, whose *Muqaddimah* (or “Introduction” to his work) has been called the first significant work on the philosophical foundations of history. Ibn Khaldun looked back to Arabic Spain and its culture with appreciative admiration and reflected its attitudes to homosexuality with all their contradictions. Thus the *Muqaddimah* condemns male love as a non-procreative threat to population, approves the judgment of Malik that homosexuals should be stoned, and at the same time rounds off its fifteen hundred pages with an extensive anthology of Spanish and Moorish poetry, freely sprinkled with ardent homoerotic verse (Ibn Khaldun 1967, 2:295–96; 3:344–71, and *passim*).

How are we to explain this legal-lyrical schizophrenia, where a potent religion and a vibrant secular culture seem so at odds? The religious prohibition derived its force from the Arabs' claim to be the descendants of Abraham's son Ishmael, and Muhammad's view of Abraham's nephew Lot as a prophet who condemned men who favored men. This racial-religious affiliation ensured that Islam would share the prejudices of Judaism and Christianity. One might have even expected the general cultural stance to be, if anything, more hostile, since homosexuality seems to have been comparatively little known among the Bedouins of Arabia in pre-Islamic times. It has frequently been suggested that Arab attitudes to sex underwent a change as they conquered more advanced and sophisticated empires, especially Sassanian Persia. Culturally, the conquest of Persia did for the Arabs what the conquest of Greece did for Rome—it introduced a rather primitive tribal society to a markedly more advanced and luxurious one. Unfortunately, though we know boy-love flourished spectacularly in Islamic Persia, inspiring a very substantial literature, we know little about Persian mores before the Arab conquest. One thing the conquest did indubitably effect, however: it provided an ample supply of young male slaves.

† A crucially important difference between Islam and Christianity was their relation to slavery: Islam freely granted men sexual access to their slaves, Christianity did not. Fiercely condemnatory of adultery with other men's wives, Muhammad nevertheless made an exception in the case of married women who were purchased or captured and enslaved. Unlike Christianity, which for its first three hundred years lacked political or military power, Islam from the start had enormous military success, conquering nation after nation. In this triumphal atmosphere few moralists were prepared to challenge the victors' prerogatives, which included sexual rights to women, married or unmarried, belonging to men defeated in battle. To these all-powerful rulers, riding the crest of a wave of military good fortune, it must have seemed eminently reasonable that attractive young male captives should also be regarded as legitimate bedmates. Some authorities seem to have sanctioned such intercourse (Greenberg 1988:177).

X The parallel with Rome is clear. But this is not the whole story, for though a significant number of love affairs with male slaves are recorded (and poetry on this theme abounds), we note that in the circles of Ibn Da'ud, Ibn Hazm, and various royal courts, men repeatedly fall in love with friends, acquaintances, and sometimes strangers of equal rank with themselves. Here we have a pattern akin to the ancient Greeks. However, the emphasis in such affairs is not on mentorship, as in Sparta and Athens, but on feeling itself, which is regarded as especially privileged, and allowable under the guise of a quasi-religious Platonism.

It was the "love-martyr" *hadīth* that conferred an exalted status on love in Islam. It opened the door and provided religious sanction to a fervent romanticism, which later crossed the Pyrenees and found its way into medieval Provence. The startling thing (from a Christian point of view) is that this Islamic glorification of love was gender-blind. Linked with a theoretically perfect chastity it could escape moral condemnation. In the literature of Sufi mysticism, rapturous love poems ostensibly addressed to male lovers became a common way of symbolizing union with the divine. So Islam paradoxically forbade, allowed, and exploited homoerotic desire, providing striking similarities with Judaism and Christianity in the sphere of law, yet fostered a radically different literary, social, and affective atmosphere.

By combining the menacing legalism of the Judeo-Christian world with a remarkable expressive freedom in their poetry, the Arabs of Spain created a situation in which a formal disapproval of homosexual acts was balanced by a popular acceptance of bisexual amorousness. The result was to create a status for the male homosexual lover somewhat akin to that of the romantic devotee of women in the medieval West. Homosexuality was officially

decried, but the man who admitted to such feelings might still be respected and admired; he was not in Islamic culture regarded as a pariah, a moral monster, or a threat to the safety of the state.

Note

1. Arberry's translation is generally the better, but occasionally obfuscates sexual details. Where this is the case, I have used Nykl's.

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