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# An Exposition Of The Development And Stages Of Arabic Literature In Al-Andalus

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**Abstract:** The article analyzes the formation and development of Andalusian literature in three stages. In the first stage, the literature fully imitated Eastern traditions; in the second, local elements grew stronger, greater attention was paid to musicality and the beauty of expression, and new genres such as the muwashshah emerged. The third stage is the period of creative independence, during which Andalusian literature, free from Eastern influence, reached its highest peak. The works of renowned poets such as Ibn Zaydūn hold a special place as vivid examples of the literature of this era.

**Keywords:** Traditionalism, period of imitation, localism, muwashshah, period of creative independence.

**Introduction:** Arabic Literature in al-Andalus

## The Development of Andalusian Literature: Ascent in Three Stages

Arabs lived in the land of al-Andalus for nearly eight centuries. There they encountered a new country, a new society, a new way of life, and conditions entirely different from those of the Orient. Consequently, Andalusian literature took shape under the influence of this new life and environment. The circumstances of the era helped clarify and consolidate the distinctive features of this literature. Three stages can be observed in the development of Andalusian literature:

1. The Traditionalist Stage — the period of complete imitation:

This stage fully coincided with the period of Umayyad rule and lasted for nearly three centuries. The poets and writers who emerged in this period had come from the East—from the Hijaz, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq. Because they longed deeply for their homelands, they sang in

their poems of the lands of Najd, Syria, and Yemen, and they wrote their verse in the Eastern style. This imitation is noticeable in every respect—in themes, meanings, styles, descriptions, and images. Subjects such as panegyric (*madīh*), satire (*hajv*), elegy (*marṣiya*), ghazal, and wine poetry (*khamriyyāt*) were popular.

The second generation of poets also followed in the footsteps of their predecessors, for they too were deeply influenced by their forebears. Time had not been sufficient to assimilate them fully into the new environment. They still felt themselves to be strangers; their ties to, and longing for, the homeland of their ancestors remained strong. Therefore, they too followed the Easterners in meter, theme, meaning, and style; yet this imitation did not elevate them to the level of originality. They remained imitators rather than creators. This is clearly seen in the works of poets such as Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, Ibn Hānī, Ibn Shuhayd, and Ibn Darrāj al-Qaṣṭālī. Their ghazal openings, their depictions of ruins, camels, oxen, revelation, the desert, and Bedouin tents adhered entirely to Eastern tradition.

If we look in terms of the natural law of development, Andalusian literature could not have been renewed in an instant. But the reason it remained wholly traditionalist for three centuries is that Andalusian poets felt themselves inferior when set against the Easterners. The artistic achievements of Eastern poets were immensely rich and powerful. It was this that impelled the Andalusians to imitate celebrated Eastern poets such as Abū Nuwās, Muslim ibn al-Walīd, Abū Tammām, al-Buḥturī, and Abū Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī.

In the field of prose, the earliest Andalusī authors did not reach the level of Eastern writers at the end of the Umayyad period and the beginning of the Abbasid era. Among them there was no one on a par with such major writers as ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib, Ibn al-Muqaffa’, al-Jāhīz, or Sahl ibn Hārūn. The first true Andalusī man of letters was in fact someone who had come from the East—Abū ‘Alī al-Qālī. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir brought him to al-Andalus because he could not find prominent teachers in his land who could disseminate Arab culture.

Abū ‘Alī al-Qālī lived in Córdoba for twenty-eight years and spread his knowledge there until his death in 357 AH (967 CE). In the final years of his life, the Andalusī littérateur who later became famous, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, was alive. He produced his renowned work *al-‘Iqd al-Farīd* (“The Unique Necklace”). Although this book was written in the style of the *al-Amālī* (“dictations”), it is broader and deeper. Through it, he brought Eastern culture to al-Andalus. One of the Eastern men of

letters, Ṣāhib ibn ‘Abbād—then vizier of the Buyid state—looked at this book and said: “This is our product returned to us.” This indicates that he had expected novelty from the Andalusians but did not find it, and that the Andalusians followed the Mashriqīs to a considerable degree.

Another important aspect of this stage is that a number of Andalusī men of letters were active in the field of linguistics. The first Arabs who came from the East sowed the seeds in this field, and Abū ‘Alī al-Qālī carefully nurtured them.

Under his tutelage, a number of men of letters and lexicographers emerged, including many linguists and writers such as: Ibn Qutiyya (author of the book *al-Af’āl*), Abū Bakr al-Zubaydī (author of *Akhbār al-Naḥwiyyīn*), and Ibn Sayyid al-Baṭalyawsī (author of *al-Iqtīṣād*).

Stage 2 — The transition from tradition to innovation:

This stage marks the Andalusians’ move from imitation to innovation. During this interval they began to become aware of their own identity; they were more deeply influenced by the Andalusian environment and its way of life. The roots of culture grew deeper in their land. Thus, signs of renewal began to appear in both poetry and prose, even though imitation did not disappear completely. Even the Andalusians’ imitation of innovations made by Easterners embodied an element of novelty.

This period lasted from the beginning of the fifth Islamic century to the end of the sixth. The most important innovations in Andalusian poetry were the following:

1. Attention to musicality and the beauty of expression:

The Andalusians sought to understand poetry not so much as a vehicle for conveying ideas as an art of musical and artistic expression. They viewed poetry as a spiritual and emotional experience and began to pay greater attention to form and style. They gave great weight to musicality in verse, word choice, subtlety of expression, and the lightness of meter. For this reason, in this stage Andalusian poetry distinguished itself from Eastern poetry by its light cadence, fluent style, and simple yet alluring language.

2. Localism (regionalism):

The later generations born and raised in al-Andalus began to forget the lands of their forefathers. They started to describe the environment in which they lived—its fertility, beauty, and developed culture—and drew strong inspiration from this land. This love, in particular, intensified their attachment to this paradise-like country upon which foreign aggressors were casting covetous eyes.

Thus a clearly marked regional (local) tone emerged in

Andalusian poetry. A poet would be profoundly moved by the landscapes of his native land and the memories of youth; his heart would surge, and as a result he would portray his country's beauty with affection and delight. We see this in the works of many poets such as Ibn Ḥamdīs, Ibn 'Abdūn, Ibn Khafāja, Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb, Ibn Zaydūn, Ibn 'Ammār, and al-Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbād.

### 3. The muwashshah (موشحات) genre:

The muwashshah is an Andalusian invention. It is a new poetic form that differs completely from classical qaṣīdas in meter, rhyme, and structure, though it maintains similarities with them in terms of subject matter. Muwashshahs were originally composed to be sung and were used on various themes. In particular, khamriyyāt (wine poetry), ghazal (love poetry), and descriptions of nature were widely employed in this form. These themes were closely intertwined with Andalusian life.

In this stage, following the example of the Mashriq (the East), rulers and landholders in al-Andalus also paid attention to attracting writers of high literary ability to state affairs. As a result, the art of official correspondence (tarassul) developed. Writers strove to compose their essays and treatises in a polished and elegant manner. Prose literature gained high prestige in al-Andalus. The esteem of men of letters rose; they attained high offices, and some even reached the rank of vizier—just like literati in the East.

For example: Ibn Ḥazm served as vizier to the Umayyads; Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb served as vizier to the rulers of Gharnāṭa (Granada); Ibn Zaydūn served as vizier under the Banū Jahwar dynasty. In this period prose works multiplied greatly. They included prose on linguistics, literature, religion, history, philosophy, science, and political and military affairs. Prose writings were distinguished by a unique refinement, stylistic precision, delicacy of expression, and ornate exposition. Authors paid close attention to modes of presentation, employing styles of varying color suited to the content and striving to preserve literary beauty.

### 3. The Renewal Stage — The period of creative independence:

This stage is the third and final phase of Andalusian literature, and it is precisely in this period that it reached the height of its development—both in poetry and in prose. This process unfolded alongside a broad awakening in the fields of science, culture, and thought.

In this period poetry became entirely free from Eastern influence and acquired its own distinctive styles and artistic forms. These forms were directly inspired by

the unique life of the Andalusians themselves. Among them were: the muwashshah genre (as noted), measured and deeply descriptive poems, emotive (lyric) poetry, marāthī (elegies) about fallen dynasties, cries of supplicants for aid (isti'āna), and other types of verse that spread widely during this era.

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