

**ABŪ ISḤĀQ AL-ILBĪRĪ:  
A LITERARY REVISITATION**

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**Abstract**

This paper gives an overview of the poetry and poetics of Abū Ishāq al-Ilbīrī (10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> c.). While modern critics have focussed mainly on al-Ilbīrī's invective against the Jews of Granada, I here offer a more composite picture of his oeuvre. I discuss selected ascetic poems, two invectives/praises and one elegy to a fallen city. I draw attention to the persona that the poet constructs in his ascetic poems, and the interactions between this persona and the poet's own engagement in the local politics of Elvira and Granada.

**Keywords**

Abū Ishāq al-Ilbīrī, Elvira, Granada, Elegy, Hispano-Arabic Poetry, Zuhd, al-Andalus.

**Resumen**

Este estudio propone una nueva valoración del verso y la poética de Abū Ishāq de Elvira (ss. x-xi). Mientras la crítica contemporánea se ha esforzado sobre todo en interpretar la famosa invectiva del poeta contra los Judíos de Granada con finalidades historiográficas, he tratado aquí de proporcionar una imagen más exhaustiva de su obra poética desde el punto de vista literario. Analizando una selección de sus poemas ascéticos, dos invectivas/elogios y una elegía a una ciudad abandonada, pretendo llamar la atención del lector sobre la persona literaria que Abū Ishāq va construyendo en sus poemas ascéticos, y sobre la interacción entre dicha persona y la participación del poeta en la vida política de Elvira y Granada.

**Palabras clave**

Abū Ishāq al-Ilbīrī, Elvira, Granada, Elegía, Poesía Hispano-Árabe, Zuhd, al-Andalus.

The fame of Abū Ishāq al-Ilbīrī<sup>1</sup> among Western scholars rests largely on his notorious invective against the Jews of Granada.<sup>2</sup> In this poem Abū Ishāq issues a warning (*taḥdhīr*) to the king of Granada, the Berber Bādīs ibn Ḥabūs. Ap-  
pallingly for the poet, Bādīs has appointed a Jew, Yūsuf b. Naghrīla, as his prime minister. Through Yūsuf, the poem continues, the Jews have grown arrogant; they live in luxury, while the Muslims are in rags. According to the poet such an arrangement is an abomination: Bādīs should dispatch Yūsuf, kill off the Jews, seize their property, and restore ‘order’.

We do not know the exact time when Abū Ishāq completed his invective, yet the poem is related to a tense situation which came to a head towards the end of the poet’s life. In 1066, just one year before his death, a riot broke out in Granada. Frenzied mobs of Andalusian Muslims and Ṣanhāja Berbers fell on the Jewish quarters. Yūsuf b. Naghrīla was captured and lynched, and as many as four thousands Jews, according to Arabic sources, were murdered (Sanjuán, 2004, pp. 202-204).

As is to be expected, Abū Ishāq’s invective against the Jews has been often read as the spark behind this riot —referred to as a ‘pogrom’ by some scholars (Monroe, 1974, p. 27; García Gómez, 1944, p. 38; Sanjuán, 2004, pp. 167-205). The first to associate the poem with the 1066 massacre was Ibn al-Khaṭīb in his *Iḥāṭa* (Dozy, 1932, pp. 71-72). Yet Ibn al-Khaṭīb, a minister to the Nasrid emirs of Granada, was writing three centuries after al-Ilbīrī. No previous historiographical source mentions Abū Ishāq’s poem in conjunction with the 1066 riot. This fact led Bernard Lewis and other contemporary scholars to put in perspective the repercussions of al-Ilbīrī’s invective (Lewis, 1992, p. 172; Sanjuán, 2004, pp. 182-205). The poem was originally translated by Dozy (Dozy, 1881, pp. 282-294) into French and, more recently, into English by James Monroe (Monroe, 1974, pp. 206-213).

Dozy proffered the following remarks on the character of al-Ilbīrī:

“Je ne sais si je me trompe, mais je crois que l’auteur du poème contre les juifs était plutôt un ambitieux désappointé qu’un fanatique sincère” (Dozy, 1881, p. 293).

<sup>1</sup> In this paper I will refer to the poet as “Abū Ishāq” and “al-Ilbīrī” interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> On this invective see: Dozy, 1881, pp. 282-294; Lewis, 1992, pp. 169-174; Monroe, 1974, pp. 206-213; García Gómez, 1944, pp. 119-121; Wasserstein, 1985, pp. 207-209; Sanjuán, 2004, pp. 167-205.

Through a literal reading of Abū Ishāq's verses, Dozy concluded that the poet, in spite of his many verses in scorn of luxury and wealth, did in fact enjoy and benefit from the refinement of Andalusian society. Abū Ishāq did not even make it a point to disguise his thirst for wealth and power in his poems. Only when exiled and ostracised from Granada did the poet "devote himself to asceticism" (Dozy, 1881, p. 293).

A literal reading of Abū Ishāq's poems yields easily to such an interpretation, but we must resist, of course, reading a poet through his poetic persona. Other interpretations of al-Ilbīrī's character have been put forward by later critics.

Henry Perés focussed mainly on Abū Ishāq's invective when he described the poet as a publicist for the Grenadine religious hierarchies (Perés, 1983, p. 277). Perés also presented another three poems in order to provide some social and historical information about Granada in the 11th century.

The entire *dīwān* of Abū Ishāq al-Ilbīrī was published in 1944 by Emilio García Gómez (al-Ilbīrī, 1944). His edition was based on the only known manuscript of the *dīwān* (El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, MS 404). Drawing largely on biographical dictionaries, García Gómez assembled a biography and discussed the oeuvre of al-Ilbīrī (al-Ilbīrī, 1944, pp. 110-111). He also re-created some intriguing vignettes of the poet's life, based on literal readings of his verses. Little can be added to García Gómez's insights on the life of al-Ilbīrī, and the present article is largely indebted, in this sense, to his pioneering work. Nonetheless, García Gómez's judgement of Abū Ishāq's poetry seems heavily marred by the poet's infamous invective: "This *dīwān*, of which a MS has been preserved in the Escorial (no. 404), has been published by the author of this article, with an introduction. It is very characteristic of the limited poetical faculties of an Andalusian *faḳīh* of medium culture, who rises to eloquence only when expressing his intolerant fanaticism" (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, I, 130).

In his 1946 *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, Nykl criticised the description of al-Ilbīrī given by García Gómez and Dozy. Addressing the latter's, he wrote: "it shows a great lack of understanding of the Western Muslim psychology" (Nykl, 1946, p. 197). Nykl was, however, only able to support his attack against on Dozy with the fantastical definition of Abū Ishāq as an *Arab mystic poet* (*ibid.*).

In his commentary on Abū Ishāq's invective, James Monroe sketched a description of the poet as a member and defender of the Andalusian *malikī fuqahāʾ*. Monroe poignantly resumed the situation at Granada in al-Ilbīrī's times, as follows:

Abu Ishāq had the misfortune, for an Arab, of living under the Zirid dynasty of Granada who were Berbers. The latter had found it impossible to rule the Arabs without the su-

port of a neutral element of society, and so they had raised the Jewish Banū Naghriḷa family to a position of power over the hostile Arab population. The king Badīs ibn Ḥabbūs was ignorant, old, and an alcoholic to boot. Insensitive to the feelings of his Muslim subjects he allowed matters to get out of control. The *fuqahā'* who were orthodox and narrow-minded were forced to lead a marginal life in a kingdom ruled by a religiously indifferent monarchy. (Monroe, 1974, p. 27)

Monroe explained how the *fuqahā'* had enjoyed influence and prestige under the Amirids, former rulers of al-Andalus; “now relegated to obscurity, they expressed their dissatisfaction and discontent” (*ibid.*). While it is perhaps an exaggeration to state that the *fuqahā'* were “relegated to obscurity”<sup>3</sup> (they still enjoyed important administrative positions such as that of chief *qādī* in Granada), their tense relationship with both Zirid power and the Muslim citizenry is evident in some of Abū Ishāq’s poems that will be discussed in this paper.

In modern scholarship, Abū Ishāq has been repeatedly quoted for his invective, whose vehemence has largely overshadowed the rest of his production: ascetic poems, elegies, praises. Teresa Garulo, in her wide-ranging study of Andalusian Arabic literature, only briefly addressed the poet’s ascetic poems, without foregrounding Abū Ishāq’s overall poetics (Garulo, 1998, p. 214). Yet another study by Alejandro García Sanjuán inscribed the infamous invective within the political context of Zirid Granada (Sanjuán, 2004, pp. 167-206), without however addressing the rest of the poet’s oeuvre.

Notwithstanding his grim reputation in modern scholarship, al-Ilbīrī is better known among Arab readers as the master of Andalusian *zuhd*, or ascetic poetry. A second edition of the *diwān* was published in 1991 by al-Dāya (al-Ilbīrī, 1991). It includes previously unpublished poems drawn from different sources. Al-Dāya offers a reconstruction of al-Ilbīrī’s biography which differs slightly from García Gómez’s; he also provides an overview of Andalusian intellectual life in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Al-Dāya disapproved of Dozy’s and García Gómez’s negative judgements on al-Ilbīrī. He fashioned the poet as a critic of the luxury, ostentation, and decadence which, according to him, prevailed in al-Andalus in the 11 century. Regrettably, however, al-Dāya did not proffer a literary analysis of any of al-Ilbīrī’s poems.

More recently, Raimond Scheindlin explored original traits of al-Ilbīrī’s verse in his study of old age in Jewish and Arabic *zuhd* poetry (Scheindlin, 2002, pp. 85-104). Scheindlin called attention on the use of poetic dialogue and on al-Ilbīrī’s personal reworking of ascetic themes and imagery. He also used al-Ilbīrī’s

<sup>3</sup> See Benaboud, 1984, pp. 7-52, and Fierro, 2011, pp. 137-67.

*zuhdiyya* to formulate general statements on *zuhd* in the Arabic tradition and on the poetry of Moses ibn Ezra. I believe, with Scheindlin, that al-Ilbīrī's poetry needs to be re-evaluated from a literary standpoint. In this article, I am interested in looking at how Abū Ishāq constructs his poetic persona: that of an old man whose religious concerns clash, at the end of his life, with other immanent and material concerns. Abū Ishāq's poetics is informed by unease, struggle, angst and, I will argue, by the poet's own *untimeliness*.

#### THE HISTORICAL CHARACTER

Much of the biography of Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Mas'ūd ibn Sa'īd al-Ilbīrī al-Tujībī is based on conjectures drawn from literal readings of his poems.<sup>4</sup> He was probably born in Elvira towards the end of the 10th century. His early education is likely to have been based on Koranic sciences and an extensive curriculum of Arabic language and grammar: the prerequisites of the professional scribe which he would later become.

Al-Ilbīrī lived in turbulent times. As a youth, during the Berber *fitna*, or civil war (c. 1009-1031), he witnessed his hometown being repeatedly sacked by the Ṣanhāja Berbers. At this time, two parties, the 'Andalusian' and the 'Berber', were competing to install their own representative as a puppet-caliph in Cordoba. This *fitna* was to result in the collapse of the Andalusian Caliphate. The Berber armies prevailed over the Andalusians and tribal leaders seized portions of al-Andalus as personal fiefdoms.

Elvira was occupied in 1010 by Zāwī b. Zīrī, a Ṣanhāja Berber warlord who, not long before, had sacked the city with his army.<sup>5</sup> Zāwī, moved by logistic and defensive purposes, decided to relocate the population of Elvira to the more secure and strategically located town of Granada, at the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. Elvira was thereby abandoned and a new political regime was established. The Zirids ruled over Granada *de facto* as kings, appointing ministers and tax collectors loyal primarily to themselves. Suspicious of the Andalusians, and diffident in the face of the *mālikī fuqahā'*, the Zirids recruited their administrators from amongst the more neutral Jewish population (Monroe, 1974, p.27). King Habbūs (r. 1019-1038), successor of Zāwī, appointed as his vizier a Jewish Mala-

<sup>4</sup> On the Arabic biographies of al-Ilbīrī see: García Gómez, 1944, pp. 102-105.

<sup>5</sup> On the early history of the Taifa of Granada see: Wasserstein, 1985, pp. 140-145, and Fletcher, 1992, pp. 81-83.

gan shopkeeper, Samuel b. Naghrīla, who rose to be a prominent political and intellectual figure in al-Andalus, and is also known by his Jewish epithet Samuel ha-Nagid. Notwithstanding these political changes, the old religious hierarchies retained much of their traditional power: the *qāḍī al-quḍā'* (chief judge) was chosen among the city's *mālīkī fuqahā'*. This situation gave rise to an uncertain balance of powers in the newly founded Granada. As Monroe and others have repeatedly stated, the poems of al-Ilbīrī resonate as the voice of propaganda of those *mālīkī fuqahā'*, whose authority was being questioned and challenged in these transitional and chaotic times.

#### THE POETIC PERSONA: *ZUHĎ* AND OLD AGE

Abū Ishāq's poetic persona surfaces best in his ascetic poems, or *zuhdiyyāt*, which made him famous in his times (Sanjuán, 2004, p. 184). The *zuhdiyya* branched out from the Arabic *qaṣīda* as an independent sub-genre in the Abbasid period, the poet Abū al-'Atāhiya (748-828 CE) being its father and consecrator.<sup>6</sup> Poems defined as *zuhdiyyāt* are centred on reflections upon decay, old age and preoccupations with the afterlife.<sup>7</sup> A customary beginning of the *zuhdiyya* has the poet reflecting on the rapid passing of earthly glory, typically symbolised by the ruins of once majestic palaces and cities. Very often the poet confronts the signs of ageing on himself, white hair in particular, and reflects upon the approaching of death. He bemoans his deceiving desires, and ponders the unworthiness of honour and wealth and the vanity of sensual pleasures. Worldly gratifications, often acquired at the expense of spiritual integrity, appear now as but allurements and deceptions. The *zuhdiyya* is often formulated as a pious admonition: the poet addresses an audience, warns them against the temptations of the material world (*Dunyā*) and incites them to abandon once and for all their worldly desires and to concentrate on piety and religion. Abū Ishāq relished this kind of poetry. He adopted and reproduced the many canonical themes, motifs and imagery of the genre. But his ascetic poems are not devoid of an original poetic persona.

The most striking feature of Abū Ishāq's poetics of asceticism is, paradoxically, its focus on carnality. The poet denounces, almost obsessively, his pathetic attempts to obtain sexual gratification as an old man. In a long *zuhdiyyā*, for example, Abū

<sup>6</sup> On *Zuhdiyya* see Hamori, 1990, pp. 265-74

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of *Zuhd* see Kinberg, 1985, pp. 25-44.

Ishāq, an old man of sixty, preaches to a youth about the advantages of abstinence. The youth, in turns, scolds the poet over the latter's own shameful urges (see Scheindlin, 2002, pp. 89-90). In other poems, Abū Ishāq crafts his discourse on a strident dialectic between the linguistic lore and imagery of the *nasīb*, the Classical amatory preface of the Arabic ode, and vivid incursions into the theme of *al-ṣayb wa al-ṣabāb*, the depiction of old age in Arabic poetics. Let us see one example:<sup>8</sup>

no. 9 [metre: *khafīf*]

١	قَد بَلَغْتَ السِّتِينَ وَيَحْكُ فَاعْلَمْ	أَنْ مَا بَعْدَهَا عَلَيْكَ تَلَوَّم
٢	فَإِذَا مَا انْقَضَتْ سِنُوكَ وَوَلَّتْ	فَصَلِّ الْحَاكِمُ الْقَضَاءَ فَأَبْرَمْ
٣	أَنْتَ مِثْلَ السَّجْلِ يُنْشَرُ حِينًا	ثُمَّ يُطْوَى مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَاكَ وَيُخْتَمُ
٤	كَيْفَ يَلْتَذُّ بِالْحَيَاةِ لَبِيبٌ	فَوَقَّتْ نَحْوَهُ الْمُمَنِّيَّةُ أَسْهَمُ
٥	لَيْسَ يَدْرِي مَتَى يُفَاجِئُهُ مِنْهَا	صَائِبٌ يَقْصِفُ الظُّهُورَ وَيَقْصِمُ
٦	مَا لِيُغْصِنِي ذَوَى وَكَانَ تَضْيِرًا	وَلِيُظْهِرِي انْحِنَى وَكَانَ مُقَوِّمًا
٧	وَلِيُحْدِي نَبَا وَكَانَ مُبِيرًا	وَلِيُجِيشِي انْتِنَى وَكَانَ عَرْمَمًا
٨	وَلِدَهْرِي أَدَالَ شَرَحَ شِبَابِي	بِمَشْيَبٍ عِنْدَ الْحَسَانِ مُدَمِّمًا
٩	فَأَنَا الْيَوْمَ عَنْ هَوَاهُنَّ سَالٍ	وَقَدِيمًا بِهِنَّ كُنْتُ مُتَمِّمًا
١٠	لَوْ يَرُوقُ الزَّمَانُ يُنْطَحُ يَوْمًا	رُكْنٌ تَهْلَانُ هَدَاهُ فَتَهْلَمُ
١١	نَحْنُ فِي مَنْزِلِ الْفَنَاءِ وَلَكِنْ	هَوَّ بَابٌ إِلَى الْبَقَاءِ وَسَلَّمُ
١٢	وَرَحَى الْمَوْتِ تَسْتَدِيرُ عَلَيْنَا	أَبْدًا تَطْحَنُ الْجَمِيعَ تَهْشِمُ
١٣	وَأَنَا مُوقِنٌ بِذَاكَ عَلِيمٌ	وَفِعَالِي فِعَالٌ مَنْ لَيْسَ يَعْلَمُ
١٤	وَكَذَا أَمْتَطِي الْهُوَيْنَا إِلَى أَنْ	أُتَوَفَّى فَعِنْدَ ذَلِكَ أَنْدَمُ
١٥	فَعَسَى مَنْ لَهُ أَعْفَرٌ وَجْهِي	سَيَّرِي فَاقْتِي إِلَيْهِ فِيرْحَمُ
١٦	فَشَفِيعِي إِلَيْهِ حُسْنُ ظَنُونِي	وَرَجَائِي لَهُ وَأَنْتِي مُسْلِمُ
١٧	وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ أَنْ هَذَا نِي لِهَذَا	عَدَدُ الْقَطْرِ مَا الْحَمَامُ تَرْتَمُ
١٨	وَالْبِهْ ضِرَاعَتِي وَابْتِهَالِي	فِي مُعَافَاةٍ شَيْبَتِي مِنْ جَهَنَّمُ

1. You have reached your sixties, beware! Know that what is to come is but borrowed time
2. and if your life is not over yet, the judge has proclaimed a final verdict
3. You are like the scroll, which is briefly unfurled and then rolled back and sealed

<sup>8</sup> This poem has been partially translated by Scheindlin, 2002, p. 94-95

4. How can a wise man enjoy life, while Death points arrows at him?
5. He does not know when its infallible archer will suddenly hit him with a fatal shot
6. What happened to my branch, now withered, once in full bloom?! what of my back, now curved, and once straight?!
7. What of my blade, now dull, and once sharp?! my army surrenders, it once was almighty!
8. Time! it exchanged the prime of my youth for grey hair, despised by young maidens,
9. Now I am neglected by them, once I was yearned for
10. If the side of Mount Thahlān<sup>9</sup> was hit by the horn of Time, it would be cracked and demolished
11. We reside in the abode of annihilation; it is also a door and a staircase to eternal life
12. The mill of Death constantly revolving over us, forever grinding and crushing all,
13. And though I am aware of this, I act as if I did not know!
14. And so I travel calmly towards death, and on its verge, I repent!
15. But to whom will I now turn my face, that he may see my misery and be merciful?
16. My intercessors to Him: my good thoughts, my trust in Him, and my being a Muslim.
17. May he be praised as much as the constant thin rain falls, and as long as the doves coo
18. To him I submit in supplication: may He spare my grey hair from Hellfire!

These lines exhibit the main themes of al-Ilbīrī's ascetic poems: old age, sin and damnation, wisdom (*ḥikma*) and the closing supplication to God (*du'ā'*). The poem's thematic arrangement is as follows: an introductory segment on old age [1-9], a second section on wisdom (*ḥikma*) [10-13], fear of damnation [14-16] and the final supplication to God [17-18]. I call attention to the poem's central section, where Abū Ishāq looks down on his ageing body [ll. 6-9]. This section is particularly effective in depicting the poet's sexual impotence and physical decrepitness, through the images of a limp branch and a dull sword. Strength has

<sup>9</sup> Mountain in the Najd (modern-day Saudi Arabia), commonly quoted in Arabic poetry as the epitome of permanence.



vanished: the poet's army surrenders before the fight. The anti-climax in this description reaches its lowest in line nine, where the poet concludes that young girls, who once favoured him, now shun him on account of his old age.

The whole section tampers subtly with the archetype of the poet-hero. The section parodies both the *nasīb* (amatory preface) and the *fakhr* (boast) sections of the *qaṣīda*, enhancing the metatextual density of the poem. Such allusion, as clarified by Gruendler (2003, chapter 1), is meant to enhance the overall quality of the ode. The allusion to *fakhr*, through the use of martial lexicon, is instrumental in increasing the satirical effect of the poet's self-portrait as an old man. A similar use occurs in yet another *zuhdiyya* by al-Ilbīrī, which opens with an unlikely contextualisation of the *nasīb*.

no. 2 [metre: wāfir]

١. تُغَاذِلُنِي الْمَيِّتَةُ مِنْ قَرِيبٍ      وَتَلَحُّظُنِي مُلَا حِظَّةَ الرَّقِيبِ

1. *Death is courting me closely, she looks at me with the look of a censor*

In this opening line, we find three staples of Arabic love poetry. First, the verb *ghāzala*, to court or flirt; second, the *lahz* or glance which betrays love or causes one to fall in love; third, the *naqīb*, or censor, who scolds the enamoured poet over his childish infatuation. Embedding these tropes in the *zuhdiyya* creates a dramatic contrast: the *nasīb* is reproduced, as the customary opening of a tripartite ode, within an unexpected setting. This opening is thus a sort of anti-*nasīb* with a singular reversal of roles. The poet is the object, not the subject of the amatory preface, and his suitor is none other than his own death. The anti-*nasīb* leads to an anti-*fakhr* (boast), in which the poet describes himself as follows:

٥. أَدَالُ الشَّيْبُ يَا صَاحِبَ شَبَابِي      فَعَيْضْتُ الْبَغِيضَ مِنَ الْحَيِّبِ  
٦. وَبَدَلْتُ التَّنَاقُلَ مِنْ نَشَاطِي      وَمِنْ حُسْنِ النِّضَارَةِ بِالشُّحُوبِ  
٧. كَذَلِكَ الشَّمْسُ يعلوها اصْفَرَّاءُ      إِذَا جَنَحَتْ وَمَالَتْ لِلْغُرُوبِ

5. White hair, my friend, has vanquished my youth; once I was loved, now I am loathed
6. I was nimble, now I am slow, I was healthy, now I am withered and pale
7. like the sun going yellow, when it declines and sets

Abū Ishāq laments his physical decay: beauty has vanished, vigour declines, he has become an unwelcome lover. The paleness of his countenance resembles the weak light of a fading sunset, harbinger of the night. Subsequently, the poet re-deploys martial analogies in a succession of maxims:

٨. تحاربنا جنودٌ لا تجارى      ولا تُلقب أساد الحروب  
 ٩. هي الأقدارُ والآجالُ تأتي      فتنزِلُ بالمطَّيبِ والطبيب  
 ١٠. تفوقُ أسهُمًا عن قوسٍ غيبٍ      وما أغراضها غيرُ القلوبِ  
 ١١. فأنى باحتراسٍ من جنودٍ      مؤيِّدَةٍ تُمدُّ من الغيوبِ

8. Troops with no equal wage war on us; not even the champions of war can overpower them
9. They are Fate and Death approaching, who fall upon both patient and doctor
10. Arrows are aimed from an invisible bow, their target is but the heart
11. How to be on guard from such a might army, reinforced by divine powers?

The poet then apostrophises himself over his heedlessness of the warning of old age:

١٢. وما آسى على الدنيا ولكن      على ما ركبتُ من الذنوبِ  
 ١٣. فيا لهفي على طول اغتراري      ويا ويحي من اليوم العصيب  
 ١٤. إذ أنا لم أُنح نفسي وأبكي      على حوبي بتهتانٍ سكوب  
 ١٥. فمن هذا الذي بعدي سيبكي      عليها من بعيد أو قريب؟

12. I grieve not the world, but the sins I rode on
13. Woe unto me! How long my delusion! Woe unto me on reckoning day!
14. If I will not lament myself and my sins, as copious as raindrops in the storm
15. Who will, after me, cry over them, whether near or far?

The thematic arrangement of the lines above is very similar to that of the poem previously analysed: old age, Time and mortality (*hikma*), sin and fear of damnation. The poem's imagery closely adheres to the sub-genre's conventions. But al-Ilbīrī does not fail to endow these lines with personality and vigour. The metre, *wāfir*, is a fast paced one, which enhances immediacy; the initial reversed *nasīb* in which the poet is both courted and scolded by Death opens the poem to an intertextual layering which enriches its meaning. We surmise that an educated

audience would have appreciated the unexpected borrowing from love poetry, which in al-Andalus found such illustrious heralds such as Ibn Zaydūn and Ibn Ḥāzīm. Then, the martial lexicon of lines 8-11 resuscitates the glories of the Arabic war poem (*ḥarbīya*) in a surprising inversion of roles. The old poet is here the hunted; invisible weapons wait to deal their blows, no respite is granted. The poem's closing line, perhaps the nearest to modern audiences' sensibility, condenses in itself humankind's shared apprehension over oblivion after death.

As it emerges from the lines above, the theme of old age fares prominently in Abū Ishāq's poetry. The theme, referred to in Arabic as *al-šayb wa al-šabāb* (white hair and youth) had been developed into an independent sub-genre in the Abbasid era, particularly by Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī, after appearing occasionally in pre-Islamic poetry. As it flourished in a mainly urban society, one of the most appreciated features of this type of poetry was that it abandoned the conventions of desert poetry in favour of more universal human experiences. The sub-genre lent itself to creating a more intimate bond between poet and audience. It was also a prominent motif in ascetic poems (*zuhdiyya*), as in the case of Abū Ishāq. Here is another example from the *diwān*:

no. 8 [metre: *kāmil*]

١. الشيب نيةٌ ذا التهي فتتبعها ونهى الجهول فما استفاق ولا انتهى  
 ٢. بل زاد نفسي رغبته فتنهاقتت تبغي اللهى وكأن بها بين اللهى  
 ٣. فإلى متى ألهو وأفرح بالمنى والشبخ أقيح ما يكون إذ لها  
 ٤. ما حسنه إلا التقى لا أن يرى صباً بالحافظ الجاذر والمها  
 ٥. أنى يقاتل وهو مفلول الطبا كابي الجواد إذا تأوها  
 ٦. محق الزمان هلاله فكأنما أبقى له منه على قدر السها

1. White hair warns the sensible ones, and they obey; it is forbidding for the ignorant one, he does not awake and he does not refrain
2. Indeed, my soul increased its cravings, they come in crowds! It seeks pleasure, while it is about to be swallowed<sup>10</sup>
3. Until when will I amuse myself and rejoice in my desires? How ugly is an old man given to pleasures!

<sup>10</sup> Literally: "it's between the uvula [and the throat]".

4. There is nothing more laudable than fearing God, and not being seen casting covetous glances at young girls!<sup>11</sup>
5. How will he fight with a blunted sword, and a stumbling horse that pants and moans when he rises?
6. Time has shrunken his crescent, there remains nothing of it but a fading star.

In the first verse, the *dramatis persona* of white hair appears in its traditional role of admonisher and censor.<sup>12</sup> Line two introduces the voice of the poet through the use of the first person possessive suffix pronoun attached to *nafs*. From this line on, the focus is on the poet. It is a quite mortifying self-description. His persona, described in lines three to six, is more appropriately that of a dirty old man. While his hair has gone white, he still casts lewd glances at young girls, and once again, the poet insists on his sexual impotence. Consider, for example, the phallic symbolism of the crescent now shrunken and barely visible in line six, or the vignette of the old poet gawping, or perhaps looking furtively, at beautiful women in line five.

The rhythm of the poem flows through a liberal use of alliteration and paronomasia (*tajnīs*). In line one, for example, the root *nahā* is pervasive, as well as the letters *hāʾ*, *wāw* and *yāʾ*. These are the three last letters of the Arabic alphabet and they recur in the majority of the poem's lines. The poem's rhyme is in *hāʾ*, the antepenultimate letter of the Arabic alphabet. Consider the alliteration in the following lines:

٧. فغدا حسيراً يشتهي أن يشتهي      ولكم جرى طلق الجموح كما اشتهى  
 ٨. إن أن أوّاه وأجهش في البكا لذنوبه ضحك الظلوم وقهقها  
 ٩. ليست تُتنهيه العظاُ ومثله      في سنّه قد أن ينتنها  
 ١٠. فقد اللدات وزاد غيا بعدهم      هلا تيقظ بعدهم وتنبها؟  
 ١١. يا ويحه ما باله لا ينتهي      عن غيّه والعمر منه قد انتهى

7. He has grown tired of craving to crave, and how often does the toiling of a headstrong man result as he had wished?
8. If he laments and weeps for his sins, darkness laughs and guffaws

<sup>11</sup> Literally: *young cows and wild oxen*.

<sup>12</sup> For a treatment of white hair in the motif of *al-shayb wa al-shabāb* see Beatrice Gruendler, 2003, 'White Hair'.

9. Sermons do not restrain him, while it is time for the like of him, at his age, to restrain!
10. His peers in age are less and less, he multiplies his transgressions after them. Will he not be vigilant after them, and be aware!?
11. Woe unto him, what is it with him that he will not stop his transgressions, while his time is running out?

Line seven is built around the verb *istahā*, to desire, which recurs three times. The subsequent line complements this one by depicting the result of men's stubborn desires: wailing and lamentations (both containing the letter *hā'*). To these, the darkness of the tomb responds with chilling laughter (*qahqahā*). Line 9 is centred on yet another quadriliteral verb *nahnaha*, to restrain, also dominated by *hā'*. Line 11 is played out on the verb *intahā*, to end, and half the total words of this line contain *hā'*. Through the alliteration in *hā'*, and *tajnis* of the alphabet's final letters, the sense of impending death and termination is conveyed both in form and meaning.

The poem's message, like many other *zuhdiyyāt* by al-Ilbīrī, is surprising. As Scheindlin has has it:

no more women for me – not only it is disgusting for an old man to lust after them, but they are revolted by him; so I take comfort in religion (Scheindlin, 2002, p. 95).

If *zuhd* defines “a voluntary abstention from the world”, then we are at odds with al-Ilbīrī's persona of a *zāhid*, an ascetic individual. His *zuhdiyya* constructs a persona that does not withdraw, a situation that does not resolve, attachment that will not subside. Carnality is not replaced by contemplation. It is recreated in the many evocations of the beloved's physical attributes. This beloved is elusive but corporeal: not the mystic's beloved of *taṣawwuf*, but the sensorially charged subject of the *nasīb*. Repentance is wished for but not achieved, solace in death is overshadowed by apprehension.

We have also seen how Abū Iṣḥāq's *zuhdiyya* is enlivened by self-irony and satire. The use of an elegiac and martial lexicon (the sword and horse of line 5, the crescent and the fading star of line 6) to describe pedestrian subjects such as an impotent penis results in the comical effect which, as unto today's reader, would not be lost unto al-Ilbīrī's audience. Al-Ilbīrī's poetic of asceticism, while surprisingly accessible and direct in lexicon, is subtly built on the revisitation of ancient models; first and foremost, the pre-Islamic *nasīb*. It is a singular revisitation, that of al-Ilbīrī, in that the sub-genre is subverted and parodied. Al-Ilbīrī's borrowing from genres antithetical to the *zuhdiyya*, such as the *nasīb* and the

*ḥarbiyya* enriches his poetry by allowing for the important interplay between the audience's expectation and the delivered message, as explained by Heinrichs and Gruendler (Gruendler, 2003, chapter 1).

As a further example of Abū Ishāq's own reworking of the *zuhdiyya*, I should like to quote yet another short poem. At times, al-Ilbīrī's misanthropic rants are compensated by an inclination to empathise with animals. In a short poem, (*qī'ā*), al-Ilbīrī describes the wolves that roam around his monastery. These are, in his words, "meeker than the *faqiḥ*" the latter word being a possible allusion not only to professional rivals, as Henry Perés has it (1983, 445), but also to the poet himself. In this other poem, al-Ilbīrī evokes the totemic figure of the dove:<sup>13</sup>

no. 3 [metre: *kāmil*]

فِيحَسِّنِ صَوْتِكَ مَا الَّذِي أَبَاكَ؟	١. أَحَمَامَةَ الْبِيَدَاءِ أَطَلْتُ بُكَاءِ
فَوْقَ الَّذِي بَكَ مِنْ شَدِيدِ جَوَاكِ	٢. إِنْ كَانَ حَقًّا مَا ظَنَنْتُ فَإِنَّ بِي
مِنْ مُؤْنَسٍ لَكَ فَارْتَمَضْتِ لَذَاكَ	٣. إِنِّي أَطَلْتُكَ قَدْ دَهَيْتِ بَفَرْقَةٍ
بِخِلَافٍ مَا تَجَدِّدِينَ مِنْ شِكَاوِكَ	٤. لَكِنَّ مَا أَشْكُوهُ مِنْ فَرْطِ الْجَوَى
وَهِنَايَ الشُّكُوكِ مَنَالُ فِكَاكَ	٥. أَنَا إِنَّمَا أَبْكِي الذَّنُوبَ وَأَسْرَهَا
وَتَجَاوَزًا فَبِكَايَ غَيْرِ بَكَكَ	٦. إِذَا بَكَيْتُ سَأَلْتُ رَبِّي رَحْمَةً

1. Oh dove of the deserts, long is your weeping; what is it you cry with your beautiful verse?
2. Yet, If I am right, what ails me is more painful than your sorrow
3. For I think you have been struck by the loss of a friend and are tormented by grief.
4. The overflowing grief I lament is far different from what ails thee!
5. For I cry over my sins and their fetters, and my wish, as I cry, is to obtain deliverance,
6. as I weep, I ask my Lord to have mercy and forgive... my crying is not your crying.

The poetic persona that Abū Ishāq crafts in his ascetic poems gives us an interesting perspective on the subgenre of the *zuhdiyya*. The latter, at least for al-Ilbīrī, is

13 For examples of the dove in Andalusian poetry, see al-Dāyā, 1991, p. 38.

built upon the dialectic opposition of the inherently human —evident in explicit representations of carnality and conceptualizations of desire— and the unattained transcendent, which is hoped and yearned for, but is reserved for God's mercy in the afterlife. The poet's choice of lexicon and register is quite natural: al-Ilbīrī aims to deliver an immediate message. He succeeds by adopting swift metrical choices and relatively straightforward wording. Some verses are pervaded by tenderness and transmit, it seems to me, the private regret of this medieval man who seeks an intimate communion with his audience through his verse.

Al-Ilbīrī's *zuhdiyyāt* articulate a personal poetics which encompasses stylistic norms, shared existential concerns, and the crafting of an exaggerated, almost caricaturesque poetic persona. Reading this persona literally as a representation of the historical poet, as Dozy or Nykl have done, is dangerous. It is important instead to contextualize Abū Iṣḥāq's ascetic poems within the poetic subgenre to which they belong: a subgenre which foregrounds ageing amongst its many motifs. Only then we can appreciate the distinctive traits of al-Ilbīrī's *zuhd*. These traits, which are vehemently depicted, are unforgiving towards the poet's own persona, his poetic avatar, his literary self. The word 'self', in Arabic *nafs*, is the natural opposite to *zuhd*. Hence its debasement, first and foremost, in the very persona that is satirised time after time in al-Ilbīrī's *zuhdiyyāt*.

I conclude my study of Abū Iṣḥāq's *zuhdiyya* by quoting the very last poem which, according to the compiler of the *diwān*, al-Ilbīrī ever proffered (al-Ilbīrī, 1991, pp. 69-70). In this poem, the old *faqīh* comes back as a kind of preacher. From his deathbed, he rebukes a member of the Grenadine *khaṣṣa* (loosely translatable as aristocracy). Having learned that Abū Iṣḥāq was gravely ill in bed, Ibn Abī Rajā', a minister whom the poet had previously criticised for his ostentatious clothing, went to visit him. When Ibn Abī Rajā' made a remark about the poet's modest dwelling, al-Ilbīrī rebuked him once again, improvising the following verses:

no. 13 [metre: *basīf*]

- ١ . قالوا ألا تستجد بيتاً      تعجب من حسنه البيوت
- ٢ . فقلت ما ذلكم صواب      حفش كثير لمن يموت
- ٣ . لولا شتاء ولفح قبط      وخوف لص وحفظ قوت
- ٤ . ونسوة يتغين سترأ      بنيتُ بنيان عنكبوت
- ٥ . وأي معنى لحسن مغنى      ليس لأربابه ثبوت
- ٦ . ما أوعظ القبر لو قبلنا      موعظة الناطق الصموت

1. They told me: would you not renovate a house, so that other houses may admire its beauty?
2. I replied: don't you think a small hut is very appropriate for one who is dying?
3. If it weren't for the winter, for the scorching heat of summer, for the fear of thieves, for preserving my sustenance
4. and for preserving the honour of women, I would build a house like the spider's web.
5. What is the meaning of a beautiful abode, when its masters are bound to pass away?
6. No speech is more eloquent than the grave, if only we accepted the sermon of a silent preacher!

The poem reiterates the message of *zuhd* poetry in a dialogue form: worldly pursuits are worthless, death impends and the afterlife awaits, mankind should be contented with little. On the other hand, another facet of al-Ilbīrī's character surfaces from this poem: his passion for invectives and rebukes. This is the second prominent feature of al-Ilbīrī's poetics, and is discussed in what follows.

#### THE POLITICAL POET

Al-Ilbīrī built his career as a professional scribe and a *faqīh* by remaining close to prominent religious figures, whom he eulogised in his verses, and whose favour and protection he enjoyed both in Elvira, his birthplace, and in Granada, the city in which he flourished professionally. Moreover, al-Ilbīrī could capitalise, for his professional ascension, on the fame that his poems earned him in Elvira. This is readily explained by the following point made by Benaboud:

los 'ulamā' disfrutaron de una privilegiada posición social conseguida sobre todo gracias a su conducta y su saber, así como sus actividades y a su producción literaria (1984, p. 26).

Abū Ishāq's closeness to influential political figures in Granada is testified by one of his early poems, dedicated to his teacher and *qāḍī* of Elvira, Ibn Abī Zamanīn.<sup>14</sup> The *qāḍī* himself wrote poetry, primarily ascetic in content. It is clear

<sup>14</sup> For a thorough study of Ibn Abī Zamanīn, see the work of María Arcas Campoy, such as her 1992 essay, pp. 14-16.



how this figure exerted a strong influence on al-Ilbīrī, who, like his patron, combined his profession of *faqīh* with writing poetry, mainly ascetic in tone. The occasion for this praise/invective was an uprising of the people of Elvira against Ibn Abī Zamanīn. In the poem, al-Ilbīrī passionately defends the *qādī*, casting invectives against his rebellious fellow-citizens.

no. 29 [metre: *tawīl*]

١ . رفعتُم على قاضيكمُ فحفظتُم      و حاولتُم خزيًا لهُ فخرتُم  
٢ . وطال، لعمرى، ما سعدتُم بسعده      ولو أنه يشقى إذن لشقيتُم  
٣ . وما كانَ إلا سترُكم لو عقلتُم      ولكنكم عن رشدكم قد عميتُم  
٤ . فها هو ذا يقضي على رغم منكمُ      فماتوا بغيظٍ واصنعوا كيف شيتُم  
٥ . وحكوا على ظهر الصعيدِ ستاهكمُ      فلن تعشروه في العلى لو خريتُم

1. You rose up against your *qādī*, and you've been put down; you attempted to dishonour him, and you were dishonoured
2. By my life! You prospered from his good fortune for a long time! were he to have suffered, you too would have suffered!
3. He was but your protection, if you only had intellect! But you have been guided astray!
4. So Lo and behold! He is the judge in spite of you! Now die with your wrath and plot what you will!
5. Scrape your arses on the ground! You will not reach a tenth of his height, no matter how much shit you amass!

Al-Ilbīrī's attack is reinforced by the use of pedestrian vocabulary and puns (*mutābaqa*) at the level of the single line: in line 1, first hemistich, *rafā'a*, "to raise" but also "to rebel" is opposed to *khafāda* (l. 5), to lower but also to be subdued. Paronomasia dominates line 2, where the poet associates the success of the *qādī* (*sa'd*) with the happiness of the citizenry (*sa'ada*) and his potential harm (*šaqā*) with theirs. Line 3 creates a binary between the figure of the *qādī* and two qualities which, the poet denounces, the rebellious citizens lack: sound intellect (*'aql*) and divine guidance (*rušd*). The use of derogatory language in lines 4 and 5 sharpens the message of utter spite towards the target of the invective. It also enhances the metaphorical distance between the lowly citizenry and a lofty elite of religious scholars. Al-Ilbīrī's vitriol against the rebels is also a declaration of

allegiance to guard, the *malikī fuqahā'* of Elvira. In the lines above we can sense the anger of the poet against the betrayal he saw in those he felt were shifting their loyalties, and his commitment to the preservation of the status quo. Al-Ilbīrī's rebuke to his fellow-citizens at a moment when their insurgence was tamed indicates that this poem was not only an invective, but also a praise to Ibn Abī Zamanīn on his triumph, much in the tradition of the classical Arabic panegyric. Given what we know about the co-dependence of the poet and the patron, we can also understand how al-Ilbīrī was positioning himself as public defender of Ibn Abī Zamanīn, his cause, and his supporters. The complex relationship of give-and-take inherent in courtly praise is here replicated in the context of Granada's religious hierarchies: in praising Ibn Abī Zamanīn in this place and at this time al-Ilbīrī not only demonstrated his reverence towards his teacher, but also renewed his allegiance to the triumphant religious establishment of al-Andalus's *malikī fuqahā'*. It is natural to assume that poems of this kind could only help the young al-Ilbīrī in his ascension to religious posts in the new city.

I would here like to take a brief detour from the main theme of this essay. The invective discussed above, in fact, opens up to a broader understanding of the political situation at this time and in this place. As al-Ilbīrī was writing this poem, any residue of the Umayyad caliphate had dissipated and a period of anarchy had ensued. As it emerges from this poem, large segments of the urban population were now quick to confront the traditional ruling classes. In Elvira, they revolted against the *mālīkī fuqahā'* who were the traditional supporters of the political institutions under the Umayyads. It is worth noting how Andalusian cities would be the natural arena for such a clash. The importance of the *malikī fuqahā'* as a mainly urban class has been underlined in detail Benaboud (1984, 29) and by Fierro (2011, 145-153). I call attention to the essay by Fierro, which documents the delicate balance of power between Andalusian rulers, citizens and *fuqahā'* in 11<sup>th</sup> century al-Andalus. Building on previous scholarship, Fierro reframes the question of political legitimacy in al-Andalus and its intertwinement with the decline of the taifa of Granada (2011, 153-167). Fierro also provides some valuable insights as to the possible reasons behind popular discontent against the *fuqahā'*:

“el radicalismo de los ulemas podía, pues, despertar la animadversión de la población y enajenarles su apoyo. Había otros motivos que podían también llevar a lo mismo. Entre las críticas más frecuentes a los ulemas se contaba la acusación de codicia y la de hipocresía, críticas dirigidas especialmente contra los alfaquíes.” (2011, p. 152)

The insurrection against Ibn Abī Zamanīn was also symptomatic of the radical demographic changes Muslim Iberia began to undergo in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, which Fierro poignantly illustrates in her essay (2011, 153-167). This essay also reinforces our understanding of the co-dependence of the ruler and the *fuqahā'* (Fierro, 2011, 143-145) and of the role of public censorship which the *fuqahā'* had carved for themselves. Such a role is nicely illustrated by Mones:<sup>15</sup>

“Muslim Spain was marked out by a rigid religious consciousness that did not leave the observance of sacred law up to the individual, and insisted on setting in place what could be almost called a religious censorship of all decisions made by the state or his citizens... It is not strange, due to this, that Muslim Spain was the only Islamic land where the *fuqahā'* participated openly in the tasks of government and stood beside the monarchs to make sure that they were legitimate and that they governed according to divine law.” (Mones, 1998, p. 289)

It is a similar censorship that Abū Işĥāq was carrying out when he wrote his political invectives. Let us look at a further example. After moving to Granada, the poet remained close to the religious elite, attaining the post of personal scribe to the chief judge Ibn Tawba, to whom he dedicated a lengthy panegyric. Ibn Tawba was an influential figure in the new city. In 1055 he had the *minbar* of the Friday mosque of Granada erected and he had the bridge over the Darro river built (parts of this bridge can be seen today; its name still makes reference to him, as *Puente del Cadi'*). In addition to a proper panegyric,<sup>16</sup> al-Ilbīrī composed another poem which also makes reference to Ibn Tawba. In it, al-Ilbīrī applauds the punishment of a Granadine poet, Abū Bakr ibn al-Ḥājj, who had satirised Ibn Tawba along with other *fuqahā'*. Displaying little patience with the poet, the *qāḍī* ordered him to be arrested and punished. Al-Ilbīrī described the chastisement in his verses, praising Ibn Tawba for his decree and mocking the author of the satire. Moreover, al-Ilbīrī directly warned the poet, and with him, all his potential audience, against defying the religious elites, whom he describes in highly laudatory terms.

<sup>15</sup> On the political role of the *fuqahā'* in al-Andalus see Benaboud, 1984, pp. 7-52 and Fierro, 2011, pp. 137-67.

<sup>16</sup> Abū Işĥāq al-Ilbīrī, *Diwān*, ed. al-Dāya, 1991, pp. 95-100.

no. 31 [metre: *basīf*]

وكان أبو بكر بن الحاج قد هجا أبا الحسن أبا توبة وجماعة من الفقهاء معه، فضربه ضربا وجيعاً،  
 وطيفَ به على الأسواق، فقال ابن مسعود -رضي الله عنه - في ذلك:

١. السوط أبلغ من قال ومن قيل      ومن نباح سقيه بالأباطيل  
 ٢. مُرُّ المذاق كحرّ النار أبرده      يُعقلُ المتعاطي أيّ تعقيل  
 ٣. رأى من الطبِّ ما بُقراط لم يره      في بُره كلِّ سخيّف العقلِ مخذولِ  
 ٤. ضئيلُ جسم تخاف الخيل سَطوتهُ      أعدى وأطغى من التماسح في النيلِ  
 ٥. يُرْقِصُ المرءَ ترقيصاً بلا طرب      لو كان أثقل أو أجسى من الفيلِ  
 ٦. عند السخيّف به خبرٌ وتجربةٌ      فقد رمى تحته ماعدٌ بالقولِ  
 ٧. وقد حسا منه أمراً مُفلفلةً      جشّته شرّ الجشّا من شرّ ماكلِ  
 ٨. وقد هجاهُ بهجوٍ مؤلمٍ وجعٌ      لا يُشبهه الشّعْرُ في نظْمٍ وتفصيلِ

“Abū Bakr ibn al-Ḥājj had satirised the *qāḍī* Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Tawba and a group of *fuqahā* that was with him. He had him beaten up, flogged and then paraded in the city markets. Ibn Mas‘ud [i.e. Abū Ishāq] wrote about this [event]”:

1. The whip is more eloquent than words, and [more eloquent] than the lies of a shameless man!
2. Its taste is bitter and its coldest part burns like fire, it brings to his senses —in what a way!— the one who receives it.
3. It knows more medicine than Hippocrates when curing a dim-witted man.
4. Although it is thin-bodied, even horses fear its strength, and it is more ferocious and terrifying than a caiman from the Nile
5. It makes a man dance without music, even if he were heavier or more thick-skinned than an elephant.
6. A silly man will find knowledge and experience in it, as under it he spills [blood drops as thick as] beans
7. From it, he sipped a spicy broth, he has had bad burps from bad food!
8. Pain lampooned him with a painful invective, equal to no poem in metre or imagery.

The poem stands out for its inventive use of the sub-genre of *wasf* (description) and for its vividly graphic account of the satirist’s ordeal. I draw attention to the opening line which borrows from the famous panegyric by Abū Tammām to the caliph al-Mu‘tasim (Dīwān, I, 47-79, Cairo 1951-7):

السيفُ أصدقُ إنباءً منَ الكُتُبِ      في حدهِ الحدُّ بينَ الجدِّ واللعبِ

The sword is more truthful than books, on its edge is the limit between what's serious and what's idle.

The reference to Abū Tammām's line in the panegyric underscores al-Ilbīrī's goal to dignify his patron Ibn Tawba by associating him with the figure of the Caliph (as well as to associate himself with Abū Tammām.) Such intertextuality would not be lost on Ibn Tawba, a learned scholar himself, nor to an highly literate public well-versed in poetry.

In the next section (ll. 9 to 11) al-Ilbīrī not only describes the public chastisement, but also sends out a warning against defying the ruling religious elites. In this section the poet addresses his audience directly. The audience witnesses the scene of the man paraded half-naked in the city market while the populace unleashes its rage upon him. If we read this section in conjunction with the following lines of praise of the *fuqahā'* of Granada [ll. 12 to 14] a section reminiscent of the pre-Islamic tribal boast (*fakhr*), we infer that al-Ilbīrī, with his invective, is addressing not only the guilty satirist, but all those who would dare defy the power of the religious hierarchies to whom he swears allegiance:

٩. فقل له إن جرى هجوٌ بخاطره      اذكر قيامك محلول السراويل  
١٠. واذكر طوافك في الأسواق مُفْتَضِحاً      مُجَرِّداً خاشعاً في ذلٍّ معزولٍ  
١١. واذكر عقوبة ما زورته سفهاً      في السادة القادة الشتم البهاليل  
١٢. عصاة عظم الرحمن حرمتها      وخصها منه إكراماً بتبجيل  
١٣. هم لوباب الزرى حقاً وغيرهم      عند الحقيقة أبقال الغرايل  
١٤. إن ابن توبة فيهم رافع علماً      من القضاء وممتاز بأكليل  
١٥. قضى بتنكيل من لم يرع حقههم      وحصن الحكم في هذا بتسجيل  
١٦. الظهْر قرطاسه والسوط يطلبه      بئس الكتاب بعقد غير محلول

9. Tell him, if ever a satire crosses his mind, remember when you stood with your pants lowered
10. Remember walking through the market, shamed, naked, head bowed, scorned like a leper
11. Remember your punishment for having foolishly insulted the lord judges and great leaders
12. Men on whom the Merciful has bestowed the greatest stature, granting them a reverence with which they are honoured

13. Verily, they are of the finest grain of humankind, and the rest, in truth, are but the bran left in the sieve
14. Among them, Ibn Tawba is the flag of command, raised high, and their crown, magnificent!
15. He ordered punishment for those who did not care for their right, and has fortified this order with his seal
16. The man's back is his paper, the whip is yearning for it, a miserable book for a permanent contract.

I draw attention to line 9, in which the poet not only admonishes the sharp-tongued critical satirist but all those who would dare speak out against al-Ilbīrī's and Ibn Tawba's position. It appears from this poem that al-Ilbīrī, as a member of the religious Andalusian establishment, felt it his duty to censor and reform the citizenry, providing guidance in moral but also in political matters. As stated above, this was not unusual in al-Andalus: al-Ilbīrī was exerting a function that had been a privilege of the Iberian *fuqahā'* for two centuries —a function that was under threat from the Zirid administration.

Elaborating on Wasserstein's and Fierro's argumentations, we can imagine that the subordinate classes in Granada, once delivered of the yoke of the old rule represented by the Umayyad authority, coupled with the religious hierarchies of the *mālikī fuqahā'*, felt safe to confront these directly. The case of Ibn al-Ḥājj is one example of such confrontation. The lines quoted above reinforce the historical evidence that such a conflict was simmering on the ground, in the streets and suburbs of Granada. We see the *fuqahā'* exerting efforts to maintain their control over the population, rallying the Arab-Andalusians around them in the new city where Jews constituted a significant percentage of the population and who were now holding high positions in the administration. Based on these and the previously analysed lines, we can picture the situation in Granada after the dismantling of Elvira as a moment of political adjustment which naturally brought about power struggles for the control of the high posts in administration. This moment is encapsulated in yet another ode by Abū Ishāq, his "Elegy to the Ruins of Elvira".

After Zāwī b. Zirī took possession of Elvira, Abū Ishāq was forced, along with his fellow citizens, to abandon the city and relocate to Granada. It is probably around this time that he wrote his famous "Elegy to the Ruins of Elvira", in which he re-imagined, in highly laudatory terms, an idealised version of the city. Borrowing imagery from the pre-Islamic ode and loyal to the Andalusian tradition of *rithā' al-mudun*, al-Ilbīrī's fashioned Elvira as a haven for scholars and poets. Subtly, he also hinted at the Umayyad Caliphate as the ultimate and lost

symbol of the glory of Islam in Iberia. The ode, consisting of twenty-three lines, opens with an accusation against the citizens of Elvira for too readily forsaking their hometown.

no. 20<sup>17</sup> [metre: *tawīl*]

١ . يَصْنَعُ مَفْرُوضٌ وَيُغْفَلُ وَاجِبٌ      وَأَنَا عَلَى أَهْلِ الزَّمَانِ لَعَاتِبٌ  
٢ . أَتُنْدَبُ أَطْلَالَ الْبِلَادِ وَلَا يُرَى      لِلْبَيِّرَةِ مِنْهُمْ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ نَادِبٌ  
٣ . عَلَى أَنَّهَا شَمْسُ الْبِلَادِ وَأَنْسَهَا      وَكُلَّ سِوَاهَا وَحِشَّةٌ وَغَيَاهِبٌ

1. A [religious] obligation has been breached and a [moral] duty has been neglected, and I stand pointing an accusing finger at those who live in my time
2. Will the ruins of the country be mourned, while not a single man among them is seen mourning Elvira?
3. But she was the sun of the land and its comfort, while all other [places] are desolation and darkness!

It is compelling to read Abū Ishāq’s “Elegy to Elvira” in juxtaposition with another, famous elegy to an Andalusian city, namely Ibn Shuhayd’s “Elegy to Cordoba”. A thorough parallel between the two poems would deserve a more in-depth study than space allows in this context. A preliminary comparison, however, reinforces our reading of al-Ilbīrī’s poetic persona as one of isolation, opposition and unrest. A distinctive feature of the elegy is, of course, its focus on the deceased or—in this case—on the fallen city. Alexander Elinson poignantly underscored how, in the elegy to Cordoba, Ibn Shuhayd uses the first person almost “reluctantly” and “cautiously”. Prominence is, as expected, accorded to Cordoba, and to the communal mourning of its demise. In the words of Elinson:

The focus of the *rithā’* is of course the destroyed Cordoba. Therefore it is natural for the poet to cede attention to the city. Nonetheless, the poet’s importance as a spokesperson and elegist is undeniable. Without the poet, there is no poem, and without the poem, Cordoba ceases to exist. So it is from this verse on that Ibn Shuhayd cautiously shares a little space with Cordoba. I say cautiously because the verbal agency of the poet fades as quickly as it came... (Elinson, 2008, el. vers., loc. 2480)

<sup>17</sup> I am indebted to William Granara for his advice on the English rendering of this poem.

Ibn Shuhayd adopts the first person in order to metaphorically step into the poem only at the very end of his elegy. The architecture of the poem starts with the city and closes in on the lone voice of the poet, which fades as quickly as it came.

Al-Ilbīrī's poem radically reverses this architecture. In the poem's opening, the poet calls attention on himself. The particle *inna* coupled with the first person pronoun emphasises the protagonism of Abū Ishāq in mourning an otherwise forgotten and forsaken Elvira.

Loyal to his persona, the poet posits himself as the censor (*'atib*) of his contemporaries (*Ahl al-Zamān*) who fail to keep alive the memory of Elvira. He also posits himself as the lone mourner for the fallen city. The poem opens with a striking juxtaposition of an Islamic religious lexicon with pre-Islamic lore. Line one evokes an unequivocally Islamic milieu, associating memory with a religious obligation (*farḍ*) now violated. The next line reiterates this message, this time by tapping into the pre-Islamic *aṭlāl* motif. The poet is metaphorically standing alone over the ruins of his hometown. He addresses these with the highly evocative term *aṭlāl*,<sup>18</sup> the vestiges of an abandoned encampment whose contemplation customarily opens the Arabian ode. However, the communal character of the *aṭlāl* motif, expressed in the *qaṣīda* by the poet's invocation to his travelling companions —as in the paradigmatic line by Imru al-Qays— is replaced in this line by solitary contemplation. The effect is enhanced through the lack of subjectivization which the passive verbs of line two (*yurā, tundab*) convey. On the other hand, the poet's emotional isolation, which prevades the pre-Islamic *aṭlāl* and *nasīb*'s segments, is reinforced in this line and throughout the ode by the poet's direct confrontation with his audience of Andalusian Muslims. Other cities are mourned, and yet no-one among the poets of al-Andalus is seen commemorating Elvira. We find in these two lines a double-edged invective against the *Ahl al-Zamān*, the poet's contemporaries, who chose to forget and failed to commemorate Elvira. By deploying an Islamic lexicon on the one hand and pre-Islamic tropes on the other, Abū Ishāq attacks his fellow-countrymen by aiming at their core values: Arabness and Islam. Forgetting Elvira is at once a breach in the shared values of Islam and of tribal coherence, a symptom of the decadence which al-Ilbīrī associates with the new times of the Taifas. The word *al-balad* (line two), is particularly telling in this sense. It implies a meaning larger than Elvira itself: namely, Muslim Spain in its entirety. Al-Andalus is effaced, poets left weeping over its vestiges. This line conveys al-Ilbīrī's outrage in witnessing the downfall of a cohesive, united, highly accomplished world at the onslaught of a

<sup>18</sup> On the *nasīb* see for example: Stetkevych, 1994, pp. 59-61.



new political order, an outrage that is compounded by the cowardice and complacency he sees in his fellow citizens.

These two opening lines project the poetic persona of al-Ilbīrī most concisely and powerfully. The poet feels and chooses to write “against the grain”: in his mourning, as in his victories, he is standing alone. His loyalty means isolation and his orthodoxy is a form of self-ostracism. We can here recall another facet of Abū Ishāq that immortalises such a persona: the old man who would not yield to ageing. We thus see how the poetic persona of Abū Ishāq surfaces consistently in his ascetic as well as in his political poems.

In the second part of the elegy to Elvira, Abū Ishāq complies with his role of public mourner in a more traditional fashion. From a focus on his poetic individuality, he shifts attention to the city of Elvira. In this section, the poet deploys a rhetorical arrangement that facilitates bonding with his audience, a bonding based on a shared commemoration of the deserted Elvira. Elinson has examined the use of repetition in Ibn Shuhayd’s poem as a rhetorical device that:

Creates a rhythm and a continuity that allow for a certain comfort and expectation that can act as a counterbalance to the unpredictability and severe rupture that occur with a traumatic loss. As well, this expectation can serve to shorten the distance between the poet and the audience: after a rhythm is established, the audience comes to sense come next. The line between the poet and the audience is blurred to the point where all the mourners are standing together, listening and reciting at the same time. (Elinson, 2008, el. vers., loc. 2065)

Elinson points out how the rhythm created by the repetition of particles such as the vocative *ya* and the enumerative *kam* was registered by Ibn Rashīq in his ‘*Umda* as a customary device of expressing sorrow and grief. In his words, such repetition is not unlike “the ritual movements associated with prayer, or the swaying and repetition of God’s name in the context of a Sufi *dhikr*” (Elinson, 2008, el. vers., loc. 2057). To these, we may here add the ritual wailing of professional mourners, typically women, at funerals. The formulaic repetition of *kam* to enumerate the glories of the fallen city occupies the second segment of Abū Ishāq’s elegy (lines 4-8):

- ٤ . وكم من مُجِيبٍ كَانَ فِيهَا لِصَارِخٍ      تُجَابُ إِلَى جَدْوَى يَدَيْهِ السَّبَاسِبُ  
٥ . وكم من نَجِيبٍ أَنْجَنَتْهُ وَعَالَمٍ      بِأَبْوَابِهِمْ كَانَتْ تُنَاخُ الرِّكَائِبُ  
٦ . وكم بَلَغَتْ فِيهَا الْأَمَانِي وَقَضِيَّتْ      لَصَبِّ لُبَانَاتٍ بِهَا وَمَارِبُ  
٧ . وكم طَلَعَتْ الشُّمُوسُ وَكَمْ مَشَتْ      عَلَى الْأَرْضِ أَقْمَارُهَا وَكَوَاكِبُ  
٨ . وكم فَرَسَتْ فِيهَا الظُّبَاءُ ضِرَاعِمَاً      وَكَمْ صَرَعَتْ فِيهَا الْكُمَاةَ كَوَاعِبُ

4. How many, there, answered to a cry for help! Deserts are traversed in search of the generosity of their hands.
5. And how many noblemen she engendered! And how many scholars stopped their camels at her doors,
6. How many realised their hopes there, satisfying their wishes and desires,
7. How many suns rose from her, and how many moons and stars walked on her soil
8. How many gazelles there hunted young lions, and how many buxom girls defeated great heroes!

The tropes evoked by the poet retain a distinctive character: they aim to celebrate a shared sociality. It is remarkable that no physical attribute of the city is recalled. No monumental grandeur, no architectural display of power, as for instance in Ibn Shuhayd's ode:

14. And the palace —that of Banu Umayyad— so abundant with everything, but the Caliphate was even more abundant.
15. And the *Zahiriyya* with its boats that shined brightly and the *'Amiriyya* that was filled with stars.
16. And the Grand Mosque that was jammed with all who recite, hear and study anything they wished to.

Instead, Elvira is identified with its inhabitants, the population displaced and deported to Granada. It is the Arabo-Andalusian citizenry of Elvira which is the real subject of Abū Ishāq's elegy: their generosity (line 4), praised with imagery borrowed from the pre-Islamic ode; the learning of its scholars (line 5) and the liberality of its patrons (line 6), the splendour of its male and female aristocracy (the suns of line 7, the moons and stars of line 8). Thus, we discover that the persona of Abū Ishāq cannot be simply, and simplistically, read as the lone voice of a dissenter. As he mourns and praises Elvira, the poet is in fact eliciting an emotional response from his fellow-citizens, who have been forced to abandon their once-glorious hometown. Al-Ilbīrī is here appealing and giving voice to the swathes of people who saw their position suddenly overturned as they were forcibly displaced from Elvira to Granada. Abū Ishāq's fellow citizens, previously the proud members of an Arabo-Andalusian aristocracy, are now subject to the once-despised Berbers. It is likely that al-Ilbīrī, who enjoyed the protection of influential religious figures such as Ibn Abī Zamanīn in Elvira and Ibn Tawbā in Granada, was one of the few public voices who dared to express discontent

with Zāwī's policies. His opening invective against the *Ahl al-Zamān* is, on the surface, a reproach to their complacency or cowardliness, while on a deeper level it subtly calls the Muslim Andalusian to remember and re-live a shared past effaced by Zāwī b. Zīrī and his Ṣanhājas. Thus, the poem is also a rumination on the dire fate of the Andalusian Muslims now fettered and gagged by the new lords of Granada.

As he praises Elvira, Abū Ishāq crafts an implicit praise for al-Andalus before the *fitna*. The ruins of Elvira that he evokes contain the memories of the refinement of a society now effaced by civil war. In contrast to the praise of Elvira, al-Ilbīrī also constructs within the same poem a disguised invective against the Ṣanhājas. The accusations against the new lords of al-Andalus, the Berbers, who had ordered the dismantling of Elvira, would not be lost on his contemporaries. Implied in this praise of Elvira, although not explicitly stated as such, is the Arab-Andalusian contempt for the Berbers, and possibly, the blame the poet suggests they must bear for the civil unrest that eventually brought down the Umayyad caliphate. Al-Ilbīrī's rage over the abandonment of Elvira is once again expressed through a double invective: the first against his fellow-citizens who sought accommodation with the Ṣinhāja Berbers; and second, against the Ṣinhājas themselves, whom —we infer from the poem— he despised as ungenerous toward the learned classes. We read in this poem the germ of the later, far-reaching critiques which Abū Ishāq would level against his contemporaries and his own rulers, culminating in his invective against the Jews of Granada.

#### CONCLUSIONS: *UNTIMELINESS* AS POETIC PERSONA

In his *On Late Style*, Edward Said discusses the concepts of timeliness and lateness in relation to the question of ageing and mortality (Said, 2006, pp. 3-24). The adjective *untimely* perhaps best defines the poetic persona of Abū Ishāq. We see its untimeliness in his ascetic poems, in the persona of an old man who cannot resign to old age. Such untimeliness also surfaces in his public poems, where al-Ilbīrī adopts the persona of a moral censor and a restorer of “the old customs” in a changing world. He crafts his public persona as that of a stubborn (anachronistic, one is tempted to say) custodian of orthodoxy in a problematic society, that of the Iberian Taifas. It was problematic, I argue, for the unprecedented political and social changes it generated since its onset by overturning a previous political and social arrangement. The poet, who thrived professionally in such an arrangement, expresses through the use of different poetic subgenres his angst

on contemplating the demise of the old order. Abū Ishāq's poetics, both in its ascetic as in its political manifestations, is centred on the struggle surrounding his incapacity to surrender to change. Whereas the *zuhdiyyāt* express this struggle on an intimate and existential level, the public poems convey it outwards. The struggle which al-Ilbīrī stages in his poems is partly aimed at creating a bond with his audience, which we can think of as the Andalusian Muslims of Elvira. In his ascetic poems, Abū Ishāq does not assume the role of a *zāhid*, an ascetic who has withdrawn from the world. Instead, his poetic persona is exasperatedly human. It embodies dismay in and despair of getting to grips with ageing and mortality. It is a persona designed to elicit sympathy and to allow a certain generation, i.e. the poet's contemporaries, to identify themselves with the poetic subject. This is the reason, I surmise, for al-Ilbīrī's success as a writer of *zuhd* poetry. His *zuhd* was read and admired in public; biographers state that it was widely read at funerals (García Gómez, 1944, p. 112; Sanjuán, 2004, p. 184) and it clearly contributed to the poet's prestige in Granada. It fulfilled the expectations of a cultivated audience with felicitous rhetorical choices. It also appealed to less bookish audiences by adopting a plain and easily accessible language. Abū Ishāq, savvy to the power of poetry, did not hesitate to employ the many sub-genres of the Arabic *qaṣīda* for social ascent and as a political weapon, as demonstrated by a conjunct reading of his ascetic poems, panegyrics and invectives.

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