ADAB AND HISTORICAL MEMORY.
THE ANDALUSIAN POET/POLITICIAN IBN AL-KHATĪB AS PRESENTED IN AḤMAD AL-MAQQARĪ (986/1577-1041/1632),
NAFH AT-TĪB

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In his description of a journey 1048/1638 from Damascus to Tripolis in Lebanon the Damascene writer Yaḥyā al-Mahāsīnī complains about the destruction of Lebanese landscapes and towns which occurred in the course of the struggles of Fakhr ad-Dīn b. al-Maʿn and his rivals. As he also draws parallels between these catastrophes and the ill fate that had befallen al-Andalus,¹ his text reflects the historical memory of Muslim Spain in Arabic literature, a subject hardly touched upon in research yet.

Modern Arab authors may use the Andalus motive in order to evoke the glorious past of Islamic culture. Some draw a picture of Andalusian social order that enabled members of different religions to live together peacefully and insofar could serve as a model for the solution of today’s problems in the relations between “Islam and the West”.² Yet, al-Andalus may also be taken as an example for the decline of the Muslim community after its great days, and Muslims may regard the often bewailed³ fall of Islamic Spain, the lost para-

dise (al-firdaus al-mafqūd), as a paradigm for the defeats which the umma suffered time and again at the hands of western powers. In the history of al-Andalus examples of Muslim piety and heroism are found, side by side with cases of Muslim decadence and ineffectiveness which, in this perspective, finally led to the just punishment by Allāh. Historiography of al-Andalus can be a medium of criticism of the Muslims’ disunity or a call for heroic defense against aggression and for martyrdom.

In Yahyā’s text some of these themes are included as well. But he also combines the presentation of the al-Andalus motive with a general meditation about human existence, thus increasing its moral and theological relevance. The problem that Yahyā discusses may be summarized in the following way: Since everything in the world, in the dunyā, is bound to destruction by an always menacing evil fate, how is life to be given sense, and, another question: how can some permanence be reached?

Since the connection between the al-Andalus motive and the problem of fate interested also other 17th authors—one may even say that it was one of the major themes in certain intellectual circles—it seems to be legitimate to give it some further attention. Apart from Yahyā al-Mahāsini, some of his Syrian friends will be discussed, especially the Maghrebian scholar and adīb Ahmad al-Maqqarī who spent some time in Damascus and who, with his work Naḥḥ at-ṭīb min ghūṣn al-Andalus ar-raṭīb wa-dhikr waẓīrihā Lisān ad-Dīn b. al-Khaṭīb (“The breeze of the good scent from the fertile branch of Andalusia and the report on its minister Lisān ad-Dīn b. al-Khaṭīb”), not only inspired Yahyā but also other Damascenes.

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5 Arslan: Al-Hulal, p. 7.
8 ‘Inān: Nihāya, p. 16.
9 The sources mention at least of nine persons: Yahyā al-Mahāsini (d. 1053/1643), Naḥf, II 430-432; Khulāṣa, IV 463 Tāj ad-Dīn al-Mahāsini (d. 1060/1650), Naḥf, II 448, 459f.; Khulāṣa, I 456f. Abū Bakr al-ʿUmarī (d. 1048/1638), Naḥf, II 446; Khulāṣa, I 99-110 Muhammad b. Yūṣuf al-Karīmī ad-Dimashqī (d. 1068/1657), Naḥf, II 434; Khulāṣa, IV 273