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Ivory gifts for women in caliphal Córdoba: marriage, maternity and sensuality

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The small but outstanding group of Andalusi ivories of the caliphal period includes some pieces dedicated to women from the sovereign's immediate circle. Through these sublime remains, this paper seeks to reflect on women's involvement in the luxury artistic production of the Umayyad court in al-Andalus, analyzing the role of these high-ranking women as recipients and consumers of objects coming from the state ivory workshop, in connection with nuptial ceremonies and births, as well as with commissions bearing possible sensual or erotic content. I analyze the different social categories of people involved in the production of these boxes, looking at the lost functionality of the objects and at the particular decorative schemes that they incorporate.

Keywords: caliphate; ivory workshops; Córdoba; al-Andalus; Ṣubḥ; Wallāda

It will come as no surprise to scholars of medieval Iberia that a significant percentage of the surviving ivory objects produced in al-Andalus during the caliphal period are related to women. The inscriptions incorporated in the containers reveal that some of the most outstanding and exquisite objects coming from the court workshop of Madīnat al-Zahrā' were originally conceived for the use and enjoyment of distinguished ladies of the Umayyad court. Some daughters, sisters, and favorites of the series of caliphs who succeeded to the throne during the second half of the tenth century received luxury ivory containers produced by the royal workshop as gifts. This article analyzes these works of art within the context of well-established gift-giving practices by the rulers of Córdoba by examining their stylistic and technical features, as well as the symbolic value of their decorative scheme in relation to other contemporary luxury pieces preserved. Further, it will deal with the role women from the more privileged classes played within this system of state ivory manufacture.

The splendor and pomp of the court constituted a fundamental part of the policy of prestige implemented by the Umayyads in al-Andalus. Perpetuating the *modus operandi* of their forebears from the East, Andalusi rulers created a whole network of official art workshops at the service of the prince, designed to create and disseminate a lavish and magnificent image of the caliph as a means of political propaganda.[1] These palace industries, producing luxury items to be used by the monarch in his private life or in public ceremonies, whether precious fabrics from the *ṭirāz* or

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[1]The diverse ideological machinery involved in caliphal power in al-Andalus has been studied by Martínez Núñez, "Correos y medios de comunicación." Concerning the creation of artists' workshops responsible to

delicate ivory containers, also earmarked a significant portion of their industry for the production of gifts, by which the royal munificence could be lavishly demonstrated, following the model implemented by Roman and Byzantine emperors (*largitio*).[2]

The practice of giving was widespread in medieval Islam within courtly contexts, linked to certain religious festivals of the Muslim calendar, such as the Feast of Breaking the Fast (*ʿīd al-fiṭr*), but also associated with the complex world of the sovereign's personal and political relationships.[3] Once the Prophet had noticed the beneficial effects of exchanging gifts between individuals (*hadiyya*)[4] had on human relationships, he personally practiced and encouraged it. For him, exchanging gifts amounted to exchanging love, so throughout his life Muḥammad not only gave gifts to others, but also accepted them, always rewarding a generous present with a better one in return. Yet his use of gifts was occasionally much more sophisticated: he would use them as a means to open both doors and souls, ostensibly locked away.[5]

Within the caliph's systematized promotional strategy, the act of offering precious goods from royal workshops as gifts had to be carefully controlled. Any object presented by the monarch immediately became an obvious outward sign of his favor, so the distribution of these presents was restricted and suitably formalized. We can distinguish two basic categories of ivory gifts commissioned by royal initiative in al-Andalus in the caliphal period. A first group of examples, which includes the largest number of surviving pieces, is related to the official and ceremonial activities of the sovereign as a representative of the Umayyad state. In this connection, ivory receptacles were used as gifts of honor (*khilʿa*),[6] in the public exercise of one of the main virtues of the monarch – his generosity.[7] These gifts, endowed with great symbolic value as an expression of the caliph's power, formed a regular part of diplomatic practice, becoming part of the official paraphernalia instituted to entertain rulers or foreign delegations.[8] Likewise, this kind of present was also used in ordinary political activity, for the sovereign distributed these gifts among senior court dignitaries and prominent personalities, both civil and military, as a gesture of favor or distinction

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the rulers from the time of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II and their relationship with ivory production, see Silva, "Talleres estatales de marfil," 281–9.

[2]See *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World*, s.v.v. "Liberalitas, largitio" and "Munificentia." My thanks to Professor Alexandra Uscatescu for her suggestions on these points.

[3]For an approach to the importance and the different rationales behind gift-giving in Islamic courts, see Komaroff, *Gifts of the Sultan*.

[4]See *Book of Gifts*, 63–4. As Hilsdale has observed, beyond Mauss's classical studies, the contradiction lies in the concept of "gift," since its free and disinterested nature is accompanied by ideas of obligation and reciprocity. It is necessary to turn to the term "prestation" to resolve this semantic ambiguity: see Hilsdale, "Gift," 171–8 and Mauss, *Gift*. In the case of Islam, the distinction between the two cases is very clear, since in Arabic there are two words to refer to a gift, "*hiba*" and "*hadiyya.*" According to Islamic legal sources, *hiba* represents a contract whereby personal property is voluntarily transferred from one individual to another without expectations of receiving any consideration. *Hadiyya*, on the other hand, obliges the receiver to give something in return (*Book of Gifts*, 4, and *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. "Hiba").

[5]The Prophet, however, disapproved of gifts given as bribes (*rashwa*), although the line between a bribe and a legally permissible gift is sometimes very difficult to draw. See *Book of Gifts*, 4.

[6]For this term see Ballestín, "*Jilʿa* y monedas."

[7]One of the ninety-nine names of Allāh is "The Generous." The caliphs, as successors to Muḥammad, share this quality, since they form part of "those who are close to God" (Blair, "On Giving to Shrines," 51). The sovereign's generosity is often exalted by the official panegyrists: see, for example, the verses dedicated by the poet Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III in Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica del Califa Abdarraḥmān III*, 104, 117.

[8]The offering of diplomatic gifts goes back to the ancient Near East (Morony, "Gift Giving"). Andalusi chroniclers describe in great detail these lavish official gifts, notable among which was that sent in 934 by the first caliph of Córdoba to the North African Berber prince Mūsā b. Abī al-ʿĀfiya, which consisted of a great number of ivory containers, none of which has survived (Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica del Califa Abdarraḥmān III*, 264–5).

to his closest collaborators within the complex context of relationships of patronage.[9] They would be given as spontaneous signs of respect or courtesy to a subordinate, or might perhaps incorporate a deeper and less easily defined intention, being a payment for personal services or acting as a public reward. Nor can we rule out their occasional use as propitiatory gifts, aimed at capturing wills and ensuring loyalties.[10]

Outside the field of state representation, a second set of objects within the caliphal ivory works includes those pieces commissioned by the sovereign to be given to members of his family or inner circle: that is, to other individuals from the Umayyad dynasty and people in his immediate household or emotional entourage, such as wives or favorites. It is in this area that we find interesting traces of the presence of women linked to artistic activity.

Albeit insufficiently highlighted by the historiography, the role princesses and concubines played as "makers" within the caliphal artistic structure was notable. In addition to their patronage of civil and religious architectural works – an activity that, in large part, promoted their public transcendence – many of them were also privileged recipients of delicate luxury goods commissioned by the highest representative of the caliphal authority. The apparently uninfluential act of receiving belies these women's true status as participants in the design and manufacture of works of art commissioned for them. Furthermore, these women acted not only as a decisive element in the genesis of these artworks but also as those mainly responsible for the particularities that the pieces acquired when they were adapted to the women's personal needs or tastes.[11]

The surviving boxes that are linked to women share a common plant-based decorative scheme, whose meaning is ambiguous for the contemporary viewer. In the Roman and Byzantine world the vegetal repertory was used frequently in luxury objects carried out on different materials. In al-Andalus it appeared during the caliphate not only to decorate ivory pieces and metalworks,[12] but also to ornament religious spaces associated with the caliph (such as the *maqṣūra*[13] and facade of the *miḥrāb* of the Great Mosque of Córdoba) as well as to improve the appearance of civil scenarios of special symbolic relevance, as is the case of the Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III in Madīnat al-Zahrā'.[14] In view of this, the interpretation related to the

[9]Makariou and Martinez Gros, "Arte y política," 76.

[10]The archetypal example of this group is the pyxis dedicated to Ziyād b. Aflaḥ (Victoria and Albert Museum, London), given by al-Ḥakam II to the *ṣāḥib al-shurṭa* or head of Córdoba's judicial police, an important position forming part of the Umayyad civil administration. See Silva, *La eboraria andalusí*, 219–23.

[11]For the concept of "maker" applied to the recipient of a gift, see Martin, "Exceptions and Assumptions," esp. 6; Caviness, "Patron or Matron?"

[12]In addition to metal boxes, one specimen has been preserved: a silver gilt pyxis with plant-based decoration at the Real Colegiata of San Isidoro, León (no. IIC-3-089-002-0019), dated in the tenth century or beginning of the eleventh. See Calvo, "Bote [Pyxis]."

[13]The structure, by way of screen-walls, of this space is covered by a sprawling plant-based decoration similar to that used on ivories.

[14]The caliph was the political and religious leader of the community. It was not uncommon for a similar ornamental theme to be chosen to decorate the two representative spaces where he would be seen in public, probably in an attempt to homogenize the caliphal scenographic stage. It is also possible that a transfer or reinterpretation of the court architectural typology in the religious sphere may be seen in the case of the expansion by al-Ḥakam II in the Córdoba Mosque, by incorporating a luminous facade with three entry cupolas (of which only two have been preserved) that would evoke the space of the three naves preceded by a portico of the hall of the caliphal city. See Ruiz Souza, "La fachada luminosa de al-Hakam II," 441. For an interpretation of the plant-based decoration of the Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III and the assimilation of Madīnat al-Zahrā' palace with Paradise, see Ewert, "Elementos de la decoración vegetal"; Acién, "Materiales e hipótesis"; Vallejo, *La ciudad califal*; Fierro, "Madīnat al-Zahrā'."

concepts of fertility and reproduction that Prado-Vilar attributed to the arabesque on all of the ivory pieces intended for women is questionable,[15] as the use of this element is not exclusive to a woman's milieu. Rather, it is present in a great deal of the official artistic manifestations of the new Umayyad state as well, including those objects issued from the royal workshops and intended for distinguished members of the court. Such an emblematic piece as the small embossed silver casket given as a gift to the caliph Hishām II in 976 for his swearing-in as heir (*bay'a*) (Figure 1), is likewise decorated with a plant-based lattice which in no way differs from the one appearing on the pieces given as gifts to women.[16] Even boxes that expressly state in the ivory's inscription that they are gifts for men are completely covered by a background of a similar plant-based decoration, although the latter is camouflaged by figurative themes of propagandistic nature inserted into medallions. From this we can assume that the presence of vegetal decoration cannot be considered gendered per se, neither denoting the exclusively feminine nor, as a consequence, conveying circumscribed concepts such as fertility. Recognizing the flexible nature of the vegetal ornament increases the possibility of correctly interpreting arabesque-decorated ivory objects which lack a commemorative inscription or which do not have any mention of a concrete recipient. Thus, the pyxis from the Hispanic Society of America (Figure 2) and other such objects may not necessarily be associated with women.

The neutral and versatile nature of floral subject matter was successfully adapted and called upon in these boxes as a prestigious element that would allegorically allude to the sovereign's magnificent and lavish surroundings, thereby functioning as a small-scale reflection of that scenographic decoration simultaneously developed in the courtly and sacred environments. It is a codified and recurrent theme that would apparently refer to the representative scenario surrounding the caliph during his appearances.

The sumptuousness and richness associated with the royal figure, essential to the visual culture of the Western Umayyad caliphate, would also be evoked in the case of some of these objects when small encrusted rectangular beads simulating gems or precious stones were incorporated in the borders.[17] We find the clearest case of this on the front panels of the small casket from the Victoria and Albert[18] (Figure 3), closely related to the glass beads bordering the figurative band of the veil of Hishām II (Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid) or some of the strips of plasterwork that frame the entry arch to the *miḥrāb* of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, which in turn emulate Byzantine precious metalworks or the lavish embroidered fabrics that made up the imperial *loros*.[19] Likewise, the Qur'anic description of Islamic Heaven frequently mentions the presence of jewels and pearls with which the Blessed shall adorn themselves or that shall cover the objects used by them.[20] On the cover of the box in London and on others such as the box

[15]See Prado Vilar, "Circular Visions," 21.

[16]Its flowers are identical to those that appear on the pyxis from the Hispanic Society of America in New York (whose inscription, unfortunately, does not indicate to whom it was to be given as a gift), and which in turn are closely related to the small chests from Fitero and the Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, intended for the Umayyad princess Wallāda.

[17]Jewels as a means of flaunting the sovereign's wealth are recorded in numerous contemporary Islamic sources, notably some treatises dedicated to precious stones, such as the treatise by al-Bīrūnī, deceased in Ghazna in 1048, according to whom gems must only be possessed by leaders as gems are a sign of power and magnificence. See Calvo, "La ampliación califal," 94–5.

[18]Museum no. 301–1866.

[19]Evoking the description of the Temple of Solomon made by al-Nuwayrī (fourteenth century) in his *Nihāyat al-'Arab*, the refulgent splendor, the color and the jewels or precious stones, usually in the form of plasterwork or mosaics, were also present on Islamic religious buildings (Calvo, "La ampliación califal," 95).

[20]Qur'ān 22:23; 37:49; 52:24; 56:15 and 56:23. See Fierro, "Madīnat al-Zahrā'," 312.

Figure 1. Silver casket for Hishām II, Museu de la Catedral de Girona (photo: Dodds, *Al-Andalus*, 209).

from the parish church of Fitero (Navarre) (Figures 4–5), another element should be noted, consisting of a series of diacritic marks or commas arranged in the form of a band that might also suggest this type of luxurious components.

Figure 2. Pyxis. Hispanic Society of America, New York (photo: Lenaghan, *Hispanic Society of America*, 127).

Figure 3. Casket for a daughter of ʻAbd al-Raḥmān III. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Museum number 301-1866 (photo: Victoria and Albert Museum).

Figure 4. Casket dedicated to Princess Wallāda, front. Parish Church of Santa María, Fitero, Navarra (photo: Servicio de Patrimonio Histórico, Gobierno de Navarra).

We should also note a group of objects in which the sculpted arabesque blends with small animal motifs – birds, gazelles, quadrupeds – which are arranged facing each other around plant-based axes of symmetry. The presence of birds of different species is mentioned in some of the descriptions of the Heavenly Paradise,[21] although the same does not occur with the rest of the animals represented on the ivory pieces. The most notable example of this is the pyxis of Zamora (Figure 6), which was designed, as the inscription indicates, as a woman's gift, ordered by the Cordoban caliph for the concubine mother of his first-born son. Its decoration does not, however, constitute any peculiarity, as two pixides of similar date, currently at the Metropolitan Museum of New York,[22] present ornamentation analogous to the type, which includes stylistic and technical similarities in the case of the first of these specimens. Unfortunately, the covers

[21] ʻAbd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws*, par. 90.
[22] Museum nos. 1970.324.5 and 30.95.175. See Silva, *La eboraria andalusí*, 202–3, no. 5 and 212–3, no. 11.

Figure 5. Casket dedicated to Princess Wallāda, rear. Parish Church of Santa María, Fitero, Navarra (photo: Servicio de Patrimonio Histórico, Gobierno de Navarra).

that would contain their dedicatory inscriptions have not been preserved, which prevents us from knowing whether the recipients of these gifts were also women.

The oldest surviving ivory object from al-Andalus is a cylindrical case with conical ends that opens up as a diptych, in two symmetrical halves linked by hinges, from the Monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos, and now held by the Museum of Burgos[23] (Figure 7). Smoothly curved on the outside, the inside of each half of the case is flat, containing five matching hemispherical cavities. There are also matching squared notches in the center of the ends. These ends bear inscriptions confirming that the piece originated from the state workshop. Only one of the inscriptions has survived intact, that on the lower right-hand side, which allows us to reconstruct the other three, now badly deteriorated. The short commemorative text informs us that the case was made for the daughter of the first caliph of Córdoba, ʻAbd al-Raḥmān III; her name is not mentioned.[24]

We know that ʻAbd al-Raḥmān had many offspring. References mention eleven or twelve sons, as well as another seven who died prematurely, and sixteen daughters.[25] In his chronicle, Ibn Ḥayyān gives names to four of these princesses: Saniyya, Salama, Wallāda and Hind,[26] allowing us to speculate that one of these ladies may have been the recipient of this magnificent gift.

[23]Museum no. 244.

[24]"This is what was made [for] Noble [Daughter], the daughter of ʻAbd al-Rahmān, Commander of the Faithful" (Holod, "Game Box," 190). Caliphal ivory objects adopt a set form, where the amount of information provided is in proportion to the space available on the vessel. Short inscriptions such as this have highly synthetic texts which ignore introductory formulas (*basmala* and blessings for the caliph), and use the expression "This is what was made for … " followed by the recipient's name. This detail is typical of personal *objets d'art*, and is not found in architectural elements or decorative friezes (Martínez Núñez, "Epígrafes a nombre de al-Ḥakam," 94–5, no. 45).

[25]Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica del Califa Abdarraḥmān III*, 13 n. 2.

[26]The text lists the nine males and five females who inherited from ʻAbd al-Raḥmān III. Unfortunately, the passage containing the female names is damaged in the original manuscript, which deprives us of the name of the fifth daughter (Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica del Califa Abdarraḥmān III*, 24).

Figure 6. Pyxis dedicated to Ṣubḥ. Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid (photo: Museo Arqueológico Nacional).

This solid and unusually large piece[27] is believed to have been made during the final years of the reign of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III (950–61)[28] in the official ivory workshop, after its establishment in Madīnat al-Zahrā’ as an integral part of the official craft center (*dār al-ṣinā‘a*).[29] The piece is comprised of a section of elephant tusk about 9 cm in diameter, which was cut in half along its length, as shown by the natural curvature of the outside of the object.[30] The inner surfaces were then flattened and partially hollowed out to make the cavities. Although the historiography of the first half of the twentieth century described it as a cosmetics box or a case for keeping

[27]Measurements: width, 46.5 cm; depth when open, 19.8 cm; maximum diameter, 9 cm.
[28]The casket was probably made prior to the death of the caliph in 960–1, because, when compared with the casket from the Victoria and Albert Museum (no. 301–1866), the former bears an inscription in which the plea for mercy for the caliph is absent. It is also possible, however, that the end of this inscription was omitted for lack of space.
[29]The ivory workshop, together with the administrative and governmental bodies, was transferred from Córdoba to the recently founded palace city in about 950. See Silva, “Talleres estatales de marfil,” 284–5 and *La eboraria andalusí*, 118.
[30]Cutler, “Ivory Working in Umayyad Cordoba,” 37. As this author has noted, both halves formed part of the same tusk, as can be deduced from the continuity of the cracks visible on the better-preserved end of the case, as well as the shape of the grain, interrupted by the carver’s saw, but restored and perfectly visible when the case is closed.

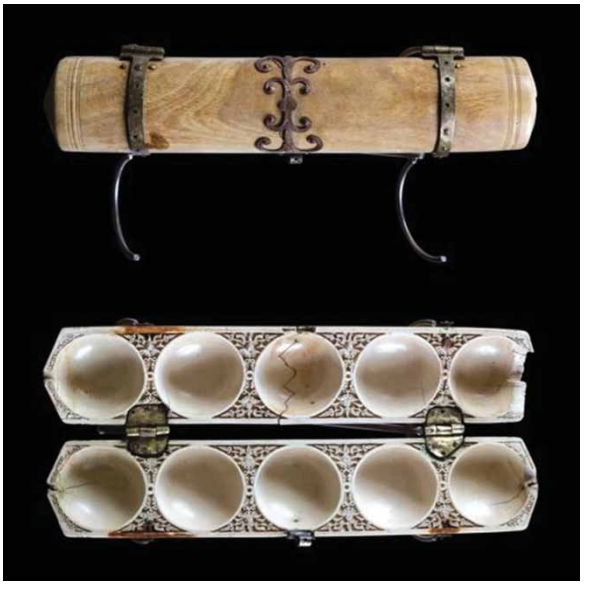

Figure 7. Mancala game dedicated to a daughter of ʻAbd al-Raḥmān III, Museo de Burgos (photo: Museo de Burgos).

perfume bottles,[31] it is now identified as a portable board associated with the game known as mancala.

This game, whose generic name encompasses many local varieties within the family of so-called "sowing games,"[32] was already being played in Pharaonic Egypt and in pre-Islamic Arabia, and it spread during the medieval period throughout the territories comprising the Dār al-Islām, including al-Andalus.[33] Its popularity continued and even increased in successive centuries. Mancala is still played today in Syria and West Africa, where it is generally played separately by men and women. On the other hand, in the south of India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines, it is a game exclusively reserved for women.[34] Like chess, we have here an intellectual pastime in which intelligence, strategy and tactical calculations are paramount, the only element of chance being the choice of which player begins the game. The board, essential for the playing of the game, was normally made of wood or stone; however, it was also possible, as evidenced by the crude examples found in the fortress of Vascos (Navalmoralejo, Toledo, ninth–eleventh centuries), for the holes to be carved into the living rock, out of doors, improvising the board on the ground.[35]

[31]This was the opinion of Gómez Moreno, "Los marfiles cordobeses," 236; Migeon, *Manuel d'art musulman*, 346, and Beckwith, *Caskets from Cordoba*, 6. Other authors, on the other hand, correctly identified it as a games case, although without identifying the type. See Leguina, *Arquetas hispano-árabes*, 83, or Ferrandis, *Marfiles árabes de Occidente*, 52.

[32]Some of the many versions are included in Bell, *Board and Table Games*, 111ff.

[33]The oldest known mancala is located in a necropolis in el-Mahasna (Upper Egypt) from the fourth millennium BC (Cosín and García Aparicio, "Alquerque, mancala y dados," 40). Its use was first attested in documentary form in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, written in the tenth century (Rosenthal, *Gambling in Islam*, 43–4).

[34]Cosín and García Aparicio, "Testimonio arqueológico," 590.

[35]It would have served as entertainment for the military detachment posted there. See Izquierdo et al., *Vascos: La vida cotidiana en una ciudad fronteriza*, 84–5; Cosín and García Aparicio, "Alquerque, mancala y dados," and "Testimonio arqueológico."

Although the means of play is quite similar in all variants,[36] the number of rows, as well as the number of holes in each of them, differentiates one type of mancala from another. The case belonging to the daughter of ʻAbd al-Raḥmān III has two facing lines of holes, which puts it into the group mancala II or *awari*,[37] although it lacks the spaces at the ends, usual in this variant, meant to store the pieces won from the opponent. These individual features may be due to a local variation of the game developed in al-Andalus.

When closed the diptych is austere and smooth, decorated only by the metal fittings that articulated the two halves (now replaced by modern pieces) and by a small engraved decoration at the ends of the cylinder, consisting of two parallel strips of four incised lines each. The perfection and accuracy of these concentric incisions suggest that they were made by turning the object on a lathe.[38]

The inside is profusely decorated, which indicates that the piece was designed to be seen and used open, being closed only to protect the board and to be carried around. The concave compartments of the halves are linked by a continuous flat fillet, joining the cavities together by means of tiny pierced circles. The spaces between the cavities are completely decorated with detailed plant motifs, deeply carved and based on branched and intertwined palmettes, along a symmetrically vertical axis.

The preservation of this luxurious portable ivory case containing a board game is extremely important, since it is a unique testimony to the recreational activities that entertained the women from the privileged classes in al-Andalus.

Very closely related to this piece is a small rectangular casket with a flat lid from the Victoria and Albert Museum, London[39] (Figure 3), also given as a gift to a daughter of ʻAbd al-Raḥmān III.[40] Again, the dedicatory text avoids any explicit mention of the recipient's name. As a result, it is impossible to determine whether this was the same person for whom the said game case was made or, on the contrary, the casket was produced for one of her sisters, another Andalusi royal princess. The great similarity in the wording of the inscriptions, which essentially repeat the same formula, leads me to suspect that both gifts may have been intended for the same lady, perhaps forming a single set to be presented to her to mark some important social event in her life. However, the overall tone of the inscription changes completely with the inclusion at the end of a plea for mercy for the caliph ("May God's mercy and goodwill be upon him!"); this expression, as Holod reminds us, is used in Arabic literature as a reference to a person who is already deceased.[41] With this information in mind, the object must be dated after the death of ʻAbd al-Raḥmān III, perhaps immediately after 961.[42]

The precision of the carving, together with the decorative style of these two pieces – where we can see similar designs of arabesques worked with great skill and subtlety – suggests that they were made, if not by the same craftsman, at least in the same palace workshop and over a

[36]A detailed description of the rules of the game in Bell, *Board and Table Games*, 111–2, and Ruiz Souza, "Mancala," 615.
[37]Bell, *Board and Table Games*, 119–21.
[38]Similar lines appear on some southern Italian oliphants. Shalem has suggested that they were made using this tool (Shalem, *Oliphant*, 43). Ruiz Souza likewise suggests that the tusk was turned before being cut in two, in view of the recesses in the ivory which can be seen on the end slots when the game is closed, or in the central part of the four inscriptions when the diptych is open (Ruiz Souza, "Mancala," 616 n. 3).
[39]Museum no. 301–1866.
[40]Height, 4.3 cm; length, 9.5 cm; width, 6 cm.
[41]"Bismillāh, this is what was made [for] the Noble Daughter, daughter of ʻAbd al-Rahmān, Commander of the Faithful, may God's mercy and goodwill be upon him" (Holod, "Casket," 192).
[42]While for Beckwith it must have been made no later than 962 (*Caskets from Cordoba*, 7), Williamson, on the other hand, accepts a wider margin for its production, between 961–5 (Williamson, "Caskets"). Galán opts for a chronology close to the caliph's death, about 961 (*Marfiles medievales del Islam*, II: 16).

Figure 8. Casket for a daughter of ʻAbd al-Raḥmān III. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Museum number A580-1910 (photo: Victoria and Albert Museum).

short space of time,[43] at the period when the industrial complex at Madīnat al-Zahrā' was fully operative.

Notably larger than the previous casket and with a truncated pyramidal lid, another box held by the Victoria and Albert Museum has a practically identical inscription, also including the phrase asking for mercy for the caliph (Figure 8).[44] This has quite recently been returned to the catalogue of original Umayyad pieces, after years of debate over its authenticity.

Although both Gómez Moreno[45] and Kühnel[46] unhesitatingly included it in their respective lists, the casket was for decades catalogued as a high-quality reproduction from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Its authenticity was first questioned by Ferrandis,[47] who considered it to be a modern copy of the other casket dedicated to the daughter of ʻAbd al-Raḥmān III, which was also kept in the London museum. Beckwith later judged it to be a production attributable to the Valencian workshop of Francisco Pallás y Puig (1859–1926).[48] Recognizing the doubts that hung over it, the Victoria and Albert Museum itself classified it as a copy, keeping the box apart from the group of genuine caliphal ivory that it owned and for some years displaying it separately.[49] In 2003 the piece was subjected to carbon-14 testing, which showed that it was made of an elephant tusk dating from the medieval period.[50] The scientific evidence, coupled with the high quality of the carving and its stylistic consistency with the arabesques of other contemporary ivories, have returned it to the corpus of caliphal pieces.

[43]Beckwith, Caskets from Cordoba, 7.
[44]Museum number no. A.580–1910; height, 8.5 cm; length, 13 cm; width, 8.5 cm.
[45]Gómez Moreno, *Los marfiles cordobeses*, 236.
[46]Kühnel, *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen*, 33, no. 21.
[47]Ferrandis, *Marfiles árabes de Occidente*, I: 55–6, no. 3.
[48]Beckwith, *Caskets from Cordoba*, 34.
[49]As such it appeared in the exhibition *Fake? The Art of Deception*, held at the British Museum in 1990, and was similarly catalogued in 1997. See Jones, Craddock, and Barker, *Fake*, 179, n. 187. Williamson, "Caskets," 165.
[50]The analysis was carried out in the Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit in Oxford. See Rosser-Owen, "Questions of Authenticity," 263.

As Ferrandis pointed out,[51] the main irregularities affecting the piece lay in the inscription, which shows some orthographical anomalies.[52] However, these errors are a common feature in other Cordoban pieces whose authenticity has been accepted without question.[53] As Rosser-Owen pointed out, here the carver partially reproduced the inscription from the other casket dedicated to the daughter of al-Nāṣir, although, since the strip provided for the inscription on the base of the cover was one-third longer than the model (43 cm instead of 33 cm), he needed to increase the size of the text. To that end he extended the *basmala* by adding to it a few uncommon extra words, and inserted a unique decoration of trefoil arches at the end of the characters whose aim was to fill the remaining space.[54]

Given the coincidence of the epigraphic terms, it seems that this casket and the one mentioned above – both of different sizes, perhaps so that the smaller one could be kept inside the other[55] – must have formed a part of the same set of gifts destined for one of the daughters of ʻAbd al-Raḥmān III. This set must have been presented to the lady in about 962–65, and it may also have included the portable mancala game board.

In the year 966 the Umayyad princess Wallāda, another of al-Nāṣir's daughters – the daughter of the mother of the reigning caliph, al-Ḥakam II (961–76) – received a similar set of ivory containers, consisting of a pair of small caskets, almost identical.[56] These are now held in the parish church of Santa María la Real in Fitero (Navarra)[57] (Figures 4–5) and in the Instituto Valencia de Don Juan (Madrid)[58] (Figure 9). These objects appear to have been made by the same hand and, like the previous ones, may go together, with one intended to fit inside the other, in view of the larger size of the piece in Navarra. Their commemorative inscriptions repeat the identical date and place of manufacture (966, the Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ workshop); but only in the epigraphic band of the first and larger of them is the name of the craftsman included.[59] Master Khalaf, who is documented thanks to this signature and that on the pyxis held by the Hispanic Society of America (*c.* 968),[60] is one of the few highly qualified heads of the ivory workshop attached to the caliph's *dār al-ṣināʻa* of whom we have any details; he was active around the third quarter of the tenth century.

The outstanding quality of this pair of containers, as well as those discussed above, is evident in their unusual and refined construction techniques. They are monolithic pieces, made from solid blocks of ivory, one for the body and one for the lid. Made directly from the hollowed-out elephant tusks, they form one-piece containers. Solid, although small in size: blocks obtained

[51]Ferrandis, *Marfiles árabes de Occidente*, I: 55.

[52]These anomalies, studied by Blair, have to do with the unusual configuration of the basmala, quoting it in full, as well as the disappearance of the second syllable of the word al-rahīm. Suspicion is also aroused by the excessive attention to the deployment of the script, which consciously avoids arbitrary segmentation of words (Blair, "Ivories and Inscriptions," 379–81).

[53]It is no wonder the inscriptions sometimes have misspellings. Most carvers must have been illiterate, merely reproducing a written text coming from the official chancery that was given to them on a piece of parchment or paper (Blair, "What the Inscriptions Tell Us," 79–80).

[54]Rosser-Owen, "Questions of Authenticity," 263.

[55]I have verified the dimensions of both caskets and, indeed, the smaller one (no. 301–1866) can fit comfortably inside the other (no. 580–1910). In fact, from the front view there is approximately 1 cm clearance on either side, taking into account the thickness of each wall.

[56]Concerning the identification of the recipient as Wallāda in the sources, see Silva, "Nuevos datos," and *La eboraria andalusí*, 204–5, 207. Also see Bariani, "¿Fue Ṣubḥ 'la plus chère'?" and "Cajita de Fitero."

[57]Height 8.9 cm; length, 12.8 cm; width, 8.3 cm.

[58]Museum no. 4860; height, 4.3 cm; length: 8 cm; width: 5.5 cm.

[59]The Fitero casket is the only surviving Andalusi caliphal example that includes the craftsman's name carved in relief and forming part of the inscription after the expression '*amal* ("the work of"). The rare names of craftsmen that we know tend to appear in engraved characters in hidden places. See Blair, "What the Inscriptions Tell Us," 83; Blair and Bloom, "Signatures."

[60]Silva, *La eboraria andalusí*, 208–10.

Figure 9. Casket dedicated to Princess Wallāda. Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid (photo: Municio).

from tusks using this procedure are necessarily of limited dimensions, depending on the diameter of the raw material. Here the artist seems to revel in the exaggerated, almost extravagant, use of raw material as a way of achieving a dense lattice of foliage in high relief, with tactile features and plastic expressiveness, which covers the object completely.[61]

Once these gifts were presented to their recipient, they probably went on to form part of the household furnishings of the palace. Except for the mancala case, which is clearly confined to the sphere of courtly pastimes, the rest of the items mentioned are related to dress and personal adornment. They are linked to the use of jewels and exquisite perfumes, the latter coming into fashion in al-Andalus after the arrival at court of the Iraqi musician Ziryāb in the time of the emir ʻAbd al-Raḥmān II.[62] Here it is important to recall that the concealment of women in Islam was a sign of distinction, especially in the privileged classes. Their behavior, as expressed in the Qur'ān, was controlled by a prohibition of any public (although not private) display of any attribute or ornament that showed off or enhanced their sexual charms. The wearing of jewelry, cosmetics or fragrances was thus limited to the privacy of the home.[63]

Both the casket, known in Arabic as *safaṭ*, plural *asfāṭ*,[64] and the pyxis (*ḥuqq*, pl. *ḥiqāq*),[65] to which I shall refer later, had a double purpose. They were used interchangeably, as we learn from

[61]The lavish use of raw material was largely possible thanks to the privileged access to African sources of ivory supplies enjoyed by the Umayyad dynasty of al-Andalus. The policy of intervention promoted in the Maghreb, aimed at curbing the territorial expansion of the rival Fatimid empire, gave the caliphs of Córdoba indirect economic control over this area through their collaboration with Berber tribes belonging to the Zanata group. In addition to monitoring and protecting commercial activity in this area, which allowed them direct access to elephant tusks which they transported to al-Andalus through a land route before crossing the Strait of Gibraltar, the establishment of a system of vassalage and patronage involving these princes also favored the reception of significant amounts of ivory as tribute. For African politics developed by the caliphate of Córdoba, see Lévi Provençal, "España musulmana," 303–21, 385–97, 430–7, and Lirola, *El poder naval de al-Andalus*, 174–212, 277–9. For the arrival of ivory as tribute, see Shalem, *Oliphant*, 28–34.

[62]Cortés, "Ziryāb," 240–3. See also Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica de los emires Alḥakam I y Abdarraḥmān II*, 206–7. Concerning the widespread use of perfume in Andalusi culture, see Silva, *La eboraria andalusí*, Chap. II.4, 41–7.

[63]Marín, "Corán XXIV, 60 y XXXIII, 33."

[64]The term is documented in some medieval Islamic sources (*Books of Gifts*, 248 nn. 11 and 436; Mesa Fernández, *El lenguaje de la indumentaria*, 401). See also *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. *safat*. It is also attested in the classification that Sadan makes of Islamic household furnishings (Sadan, *Le mobilier au Proche-Orient médiéval*, 148–50). Another possible term applied to these containers would be *durj*, pl. *adraj*; see *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. *durj*.

[65]See *Book of Gifts*, pars. 11, 102, 225.

Arab sources, as luxurious containers for perfume or jewels. These functions were not exclusive but complementary or interchangeable: some examples, originally conceived as containers for perfumes, might serve a different purpose once their merchandise was consumed, going on to house pieces of jewelry and gems, or vice versa. The design of these gifts meant not only that the container or packaging would be of comparable value to the object or substance it contained, but also it often tried to maintain the suspense and even feed the imagination and enthusiasm of the receiver. By closing the container with locks or bolts, even incorporating additional containers inside the main one so that it would take longer to open, the design increased the anticipation and excitement at the gift's discovery. Probably the pairs of *asfāṭ* for the daughter of ʻAbd al-Raḥmān III and princess Wallāda mentioned above fitted together in this way; this is also the case of the present that Umm Jaʻfar, the wife of the Abbasid caliph al-Hādī, sent to Abū Yūsuf, which consisted of "a silver box which held two other silver boxes, each containing a different scent."[66]

While such boxes could thus belong to men or women, the existence of gifts in sets destined for ladies of royal blood suggests orders from the caliph to the royal workshops on the occasions of important social events in their lives, perhaps weddings or birthdays. It is in the context of marriage and maternity that the ivory objects we have discussed acquire additional significance.

The celebration of a wedding was a highlight for these high-ranking women. The marriage ceremony was a legal act, focusing on the signing of the contract whereby the woman passed from the custody of a parent or guardian to that of her husband. This had a parallel public side, consisting of a series of celebrations that included gifts, decorations, splendid banquets, etc.[67] In addition, the acquisition and preparation by the bride's family of her trousseau, both personal and for the marital home, using the economic contributions of the contracting party and of his father or protector, were prerequisites for the celebration of the alliance.[68] The marriage of a royal princess often went far beyond the family context itself to become an authentic matter of state. Political marriages were assiduously practiced by the emirs and caliphs of al-Andalus involving women of their lineage as a strategy to enable them to establish bonds of friendship or lasting alliances by means of kinship ties.[69]

The daughters or sisters of the caliph could have received these splendid ivory containers produced by the official workshop as royal gifts on the occasion of their wedding, especially if it had a political impact, or they may have received one on giving birth to a son. The Qur'ān refers to children as wealth and honor.[70] The wedding festivities themselves involved not only rites of protection and propitiation but also an obvious component of the exaltation of woman's reproductive capacity.[71] Moreover, the birth of a child was also accompanied by ritual practices in which perfume was used, as in the ceremony of the *ʻaqīqa* or sacrifice of a seven-day-old goat or sheep, when it was obligatory to put saffron perfume (*khalūq*) on the head of the new-born instead of blood, which had been the custom in pre-Islamic times.[72]

The ability to bear children was one of the most exalted feminine virtues in medieval Islam, sanctioned by religious, social, and political circles. The power to give birth was the quintessential "creative act," especially valued in the case of high-born ladies and royal concubines or wives,

[66]Shalem, "Performance of the Object," 111–2.
[67]Marín, *Individuo y sociedad en al-Andalus*, 182–3.
[68]Marín, *Mujeres en al-Andalus*, 432–3.
[69]See Marín, "Las mujeres," 109–11. Some sources include this type of political marriage. As an example, and related to the emir al-Ḥakam I and the arranged marriages of his sisters, see Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica de los emires Alḥakam I y Abdarraḥmān II*, 29.
[70]Qur'ān XVIII, 39, 46; XXV, 74 and XXXIV, 35.
[71]Marín, *Mujeres en al-Andalus*, 433.
[72]Arcas, "El reflejo de la sociedad," 80.

since they were directly responsible for dynastic continuity by helping to perpetuate the Umayyad genealogy. Giving birth to sons was a happy family event, confined, of course, to the private sphere; but in reality it affected the essence of the public institution of the caliphate, for it constituted the core of genealogical transmission, giving women a key role, which in some cases made them particularly powerful.[73]

One pyxis from Zamora Cathedral (now in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid)[74] (Figure 6) invites a maternal interpretation, even one with sensual or erotic overtones, which might be related to the personal and romantic entourage of the caliph al-Ḥakam II (961–76). The pyxis has an ornamental pattern created from two different designs of stylized vegetal forms, in which symmetrically vertical axes are flanked by small zoomorphic elements; these repeat alternately and are inspired by a decorative model from eastern Islam,[75] a model that was codified and frequently used in the caliphal workshop.[76]

Thanks to the information supplied by the epigraphic band,[77] we know that the piece was commissioned in the year 964 by the second caliph of Córdoba to present to his favorite concubine (*ḥazīya*), Princess Ṣubḥ,[78] whom the monarch called by the masculine name of Ja'far, since she used to dress like a young boy in the fashion of Baghdad.[79] This woman was a slave singer (*jāriya*) of Rūmī origin,[80] with whom, according to the sources, al-Ḥakam was passionately in love. The poet Ibn Ḥazm, in his famous treatise *The Ring of the Dove*, states that "al-Ḥakam al-Mustanṣir [was] blinded by love for Ṣubḥ […] to the point that he paid no attention to the sons he had by other women […]."[81]

When al-Ḥakam II came to the throne in 961 he still had no direct male descendants, which was a cause of concern in view of his advanced age (about 46).[82] The birth of an heir was, therefore, an urgent need to ensure the continuity of the dynasty. In the year 962, Ṣubḥ acquired the status of *sayyida walīda* (mother of the heir to the throne) when she gave the monarch a firstborn son, Prince 'Abd al-Raḥmān. Alas, this child was to die soon afterwards in 969–70 at only eight years of age.[83] In 965, Ṣubḥ had another son by the monarch, Prince Abū al-Walīd Hishām, who as a result of the death of his brother would become the heir, eventually succeeding his father.

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[73]Marín, *Vidas de mujeres andalusíes*, 142.
[74]Museum no. 52.113; height, 17.7 cm; diameter, 11 cm.
[75]Similar designs are already traceable on eastern Umayyad ivory plaques from the eighth century now in the Benaki Museum, Athens, inv. no. 10.411 (Bernus-Taylor, "Placa con follaje," 32; Galán, *Marfiles medievales del Islam*, II: 347) and the David Collection, Copenhagen, inv. no. 20.1978 (Pinder-Wilson, "Ivory Working," 14, fig. 3).
[76]For other ivory boxes with the same imagery, see above, n. 22.
[77]"The blessing of Allāh upon the Imām, the servant of Allāh, al-Ḥakam al-Mustanṣir billāh, Commander of the Faithful. This is what he ordered to be made for the noble lady, the mother of 'Abd al-Raḥmān under the direction of Durrī as-Saghīr in the year 353 (964)" (Lévi Provençal, *Inscriptions arabes d'Espagne*, I: 186–87, no. 196).
[78]For a view of the figure of Ṣubḥ from the dual point of view of Arabic sources and contemporary historiography, see Marín, "Una vida de mujer: Ṣubḥ."
[79]Marín, "Una vida de mujer: Ṣubḥ," 433–4.
[80]The Rūmī slaves were of Christian origin, bought or captured in the north of the Iberian Peninsula (Marín, *Mujeres en al-Andalus*, 129). Ṣubḥ must have received a very sophisticated education to become a singer-slave (*mughanniyya*), being trained in the difficult art of Arabic music and poetry. It is not known whether she received this education from her childhood in Córdoba, or if she was acquired by the caliph as an adult, once her training was complete.
[81]Ibn Ḥazm, *El collar de la paloma*, I: 100.
[82]Concerning this situation, see García Sanjuan, "Legalidad islámica," 47.
[83]Marín, "Una vida de mujer: Ṣubḥ," 434–5; Blair, "What the Inscriptions Tell Us," 90.

The short time span, only two years between the birth of the first-born and the execution of the ivory gift intended for Ṣubḥ, suggests that it might have been a gift made in connection with this birth, or to celebrate the boy's proper rearing. It is even possible that al-Ḥakam II intended to celebrate his lady's second pregnancy, which would produce the future caliph, Hishām II.

Although this pyxis may indeed be a gift linked to a birth, I am inclined, rather, to interpret it as a gift of a romantic or intimate nature between lovers, inasmuch as it carries a sensual, almost erotic tone connected with the hemispherical top, which, as pointed out by contemporary literature, emulates the domed shape of a woman's breast. It is in this way that the verses of the famous Baghdad poet Ibn al-Rūmī (836–96) uses the simile of ivory when referring to a woman:

> Her breasts are like curved caskets of ivory,
> And she has teeth made lovelier by the beauty of their perfect order
> When those who always walk about and talk saw them
> They said: There you have the pearls from those little caskets.[84]

This recurrent theme lends itself to the poetry of Umayyad Spain, as the Cordoban savant Ibn al-Kattānī expresses in his work *Kitāb al-tashbīhāt*,[85] an anthology of comparisons based on a corpus of Andalusi poetry:

> We were running, shy gazelles, as two species, beauties with eyes both dark and fair.
> With magnificent breasts, refined like ivory caskets, and narrow hips.
> (Gazelles) with a swaying gait, along which twigs bend under moons.[86]

Likewise it appears in the poetic inscription of the pyxis from the Hispanic Society of America:

> The sight I offer is of the fairest, the firm breast of a delicate maiden.
> Beauty has invested me with splendid raiment which makes a display of jewels … [87]

This visual metaphor is accentuated by the similarity between ivory and the fairness of a woman's delicate skin, invoked since Antiquity in both secular and sacred works (*Odyssey* 18, 196; *Song of Songs* 7:5 and 5:14), and which continued in medieval Islam in some *qaṣidas* taken from *jāhiliyya* or pre-Islamic poetry.[88]

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[84]Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Libro de la magia y de la poesía*, 149, no. 585. This poem shows in addition that pyxides already existed in 'Abbasid ivories of the mid-ninth century.

[85]Ibn al-Kattānī, *Dichterische Vergleiche der Andalus-Araber* and Mouffok, *Estudio y traducción del Kitāb al-tashbīhāt de Ibn al-Kattānī*.

[86]In this case the metaphor between breast and container depends more on their shared features of refinement and delicacy. See Bauer, "Dissimulation et sensualité," 409.

[87]" … I am a receptacle for musk, camphor and ambergris" (Caskell, *Arabic Inscriptions*, 35–6). This pyxis is an interesting object. Created *c*. 968, it might have been dedicated to a woman, yet it is perhaps more likely that it was given as an erotic gift to a man within the caliph's milieu. It lacks a personal dedication and instead incorporates an original inscription in verse, in which the container acquires the capacity to speak by and of itself in the first person, thus revealing the obvious similarity that exists between its cupola-shaped top and the domed appearance of a woman's breast. What's more, it displays itself as a vessel for containing luxurious aromatic substances, a fact that provides one of the few pieces of firsthand information on the original purpose of these objects.

[88]Shalem, *Oliphant*, 82–4.

In this regard, it is also important to emphasize how the inscription on Ṣubḥ's casket refers to her not by name but as "the lady, mother of 'Abd al-Raḥmān" (*al-sayyida umm 'Abd al-Raḥmān*),[89] celebrating her newly acquired status as *sayyida walīda*, mother of the heir to the throne.[90] The fact that a concubine gave birth to a son of the reigning caliph radically changed her legal and economic status in the harem. It enabled her to achieve the prized rank of *umm walad* or mother of a royal prince,[91] a category that brought numerous privileges and differentiated her from the rest of the favorites. As well as receiving gifts of great value from the reigning monarch, which gave her an exalted economic situation,[92] she ceased to be a slave as a consequence of an act of manumission by her master; she would, however, still depend on him as a free woman until he died.[93] Within this female hierarchy the highest social position was held by the *sayyida walīda*; as in the case of Ṣubḥ, they could even acquire a notable behind-the-scenes political role.[94]

The palace provenance of Ṣubḥ's box is confirmed by the insertion into the inscription, after the Arabic phrase *'alā yaday* ("under the direction of … "), of the name of the state functionary responsible for the honorific supervision of the work. This was Durrī, whose *laqab* or nickname was *al-Saghīr* ("the little one").[95] He would have had maximum jurisdiction over the products coming from the state ivory workshop since he held a position of nominal "high authority" over them.[96] A member of the Banū Durrī, an influential family of Slavic origins,[97] which

[89]Blair, "What the Inscriptions Tell Us," 90.

[90]Ṣubḥ is also named in the sources with the title of *al-sayyida al-kubrā*, granted by the caliph and held only by the mother of the first-born son. Concerning the different ranks and distinctions of the women in the harem, see Marín, "Notas sobre onomástica," 50–2, and López de la Plaza, *Al-Andalus: Mujeres, sociedad*, 73–4.

[91]Marín, "Las mujeres," 119.

[92]The high economic status of women in the royal environment, receiving substantial gifts and donations from their husbands, and probably a fixed annual income from the caliphal treasury, is proved by their frequent activity as sponsors of religious buildings or civil works. Another important sign of this is that the royal princesses had administrators responsible for the management of their assets. The most notable in this regard is al-Manṣūr, who began his meteoric career as administrator of the property (*wakīl*) of Ṣubḥ, in charge of her considerable monetary assets and estates (López de la Plaza, *Al-Andalus: Mujeres, sociedad*, 67–9).

[93]López de la Plaza, *Al-Andalus: Mujeres, sociedad*, 69–74.

[94]Ṣubḥ fought hard to defend the rights to the throne of her son Hishām against the claims to accession of the younger brother of al-Ḥakam II, Prince al-Mughīra. She also assumed the regency on Hishām's behalf, the first time in the history of al-Andalus that a woman acted as regent (López de la Plaza, *Al-Andalus: Mujeres, sociedad*, 69–70). Concerning the decisive intervention of Ṣubḥ as a central element of power in Córdoba for more than twenty years, and her personal and political relationships with al-Manṣūr, see Bariani, "De las relaciones entre Ṣubḥ y Muḥammad b. Abī 'Āmir." Marín, "Una vida de mujer: Ṣubḥ," esp. 438–42, and Puente, "La caracterización de Almanzor," 376–7 and 386–7. Al-Maqqarī mentions Ṣubḥ as the receiver of a magnificent gift from al-Manṣūr, which favored the latter's rise at court, consisting of a silver palace so large that it had to be carried on the heads of several men (Al-Maqqarī, *History of the Mohammedan Dynasties*, Vol. II, Book VI, Chapter VII, 179).

[95]His name also appears in the dedicatory inscription of the decorated pyxis in the Victoria and Albert Museum (no. 217/1865), destined for the personal use of al-Ḥakam and made in *c*. 970–6. See Silva, *La eboraria andalusí*, 225–7.

[96]This official would not take any specific decisions of an artistic nature on ivory pieces; rather, his function was to represent the institution of the caliphate. In relation to the post of governmental inspector in charge of supervising ivory production in Córdoba, see Silva, "Talleres estatales de marfil," 289.

[97]The Slavs (*ṣaqlab* or *ṣiqlabī*, pl. *ṣaqāliba*) were foreign slaves from Europe who gained enormous importance within the Umayyad administration as managers of the palace services. See Sato, "Slave Elites," and "Los *saqaliba* y la corte," as well as Meouak, *Ṣaqāliba*.

provided the caliph's administration with some leading functionaries,[98] he worked for al-Ḥakam II, forming part of his close circle of "private" servants.[99] Ibn Ḥayyān mentions him repeatedly in the *Muqtabis* as occupying in about 972–73, a date quite close to that of the manufacture of the box for Hishām's mother, the distinguished post of treasurer (*al-khāzin*) and *fatā al-kabīr* or high official, the highest rank reached by non-free male elites. The same author tells of Durrī's fall from grace in April 973,[100] as well as his subsequent pardon by the caliph, to whom he presented, probably in order to ingratiate himself, an *almunia* or country estate that he had in Guadarromán[101] and all the goods that it contained.

The figure of Ṣubḥ also gives us insight into two aspects regarding the involvement of women in the artistic activity of the Andalusian Umayyad court. On the one hand, these aristocratic women participated privately as consumers and recipients of ivories produced on the sovereign's initiative to commemorate their marriage or reward their maternal or sexual role. The close relationship between concubines and royal princesses and the *ṣaqāliba* of the court, many of whom were the heads of major state workshops of luxury goods, could have eased communication and the exchange of ideas between the women and the craftsmen working there,[102] perhaps favoring their participation in decisions about the design of the pieces the caliph commissioned for them.[103] On the other hand, these high-ranking women, often in parallel, carried out creative public activity through their sponsorship of architectural works, which contributed to their greater social visibility. In the year 977, Ṣubḥ built a water-wheel for public use in the city of Écija, both a functional gift and one intended for propaganda and for the glorification of the Umayyad dynasty.[104]

The sumptuous ivory pieces here discussed, although decontextualized and scattered, allow us a glimpse into the generally inaccessible private universe of the Andalusi female elites. They are testimony to how, in many cases, the princely practice of luxury gift-giving transcended the official and diplomatic sphere to enter into a universe of personal, emotional, and even romantic relationships. We can identify two clearly defined groups of gifts in ivory relating to these ladies. The first, consisting of five pieces, was intended for members of the Umayyad family, the daughters, sisters and wives of the caliph, where the gifts from the sovereign may have corresponded to maternity or marriage celebrations. And the second, of which only the example for

[98]For more on this family, see Meouak, "Deux familles," 186–8, and *Pouvoir souverain*, 199–200 and 215–6.

[99]He even became an adopted son of the caliph, incorporating the *nisba* al-Ḥakamī into his name: Meouak, *Ṣaqāliba*, 180.

[100]Ibn Ḥayyān, *El Califato de Córdoba*, 132 and 136–7. For more information on this figure see Puente, "Eunucos en al-Andalus," 176–7; Meouak, *Ṣaqāliba*, 182–3; Blair, "What the Inscriptions Tell Us," 86; Arnold, Canto and Vallejo, "La almunia de al-Rummaniyya," 183–4; Makariou, "Al-Mughīra Pyxis," 328–30; Silva, "Talleres estatales de marfil," 293–4, and Anderson, "Concubines, Eunuchs and Patronage," 653.

[101]This country residence was identified by Ocaña Jiménez as the *almunia* of al-Rummaniyya, corresponding with the remains partly excavated in 1910 by Velázquez Bosco in El Moroquil. It is a recreational estate, located to the west of Córdoba on the slopes of the hills, and organized into terraces like Madīnat al-Zahrā'. See Arnold, Canto and Vallejo, "La almunia de al-Rummaniyya"; Vallejo, *La ciudad califal*, 75–8, and Anderson, *Islamic Villa*, 50–61.

[102]On this relationship, see Anderson, "Concubines, Eunuchs, and Patronage," 651–61, 666.

[103]The case of Ṣubḥ is a clear example. She was the sister of Fā'iq al-Mustarini al-Niẓāmī, one of the Slav high officials freed from slavery and adopted by al-Ḥakam II, and involved in the administrative structure of the royal factories as director of the *ṭirāz*. See Marín, "Una vida de mujer: Ṣubḥ," 436–7; Meouak, *Pouvoir souverain*, 216–7 and *Ṣaqāliba*, 184; Makariou, "Al-Mughīra Pyxis," 330.

[104]Lévi Provençal, *Inscriptions arabes d'Espagne*, I: 37–8, no. 30, and Souto, "Las inscripciones árabes," 241–61.

Ṣubḥ has survived, encompasses containers for women of the royal harem and where in addition to its bridal or maternal value the gift might also include passionate, amorous, or even manifestly sexual overtones, being assigned to one of the caliph's concubines or the mothers of his children. Some of these objects also allow us to glimpse the intricate administrative and organizational hierarchy of the official luxury workshops. The top rung is occupied by the caliph himself as patron. Next follows the senior palace official in charge of honorific management on the monarch's behalf. At the lowest rung stood the craftsman, almost always anonymous.

Although it has been traditionally underestimated and eclipsed by this male majority involvement and presence, the contribution by the women in the royal milieu to artistic creation emerges in Andalusi caliphal art both in the financing of architectural works and in the manufacturing of luxury goods linked to their performance as recipients. This is a manifestation of the versatile and broad concept of "maker" identifiable within medieval Islam, which acknowledges these recipients as a determining factor in the design and final character of the products from the official ivory workshop.

Regarding the decoration choice of these pieces, the traditional symbolic connection of plant–woman–fertility does not work exclusively, since, as has been pointed out, the arabesque was indiscriminately used in Umayyad Córdoba as part of the decorative schemes of works commissioned by the caliph, whether they were prominent civil or religious buildings, and on luxury objects intended for recipients of both sexes. Even in those ivory caskets related to the commemoration of marriages or births there is a dichotomy between the social exaltation of women's reproductive ability linked to these events and the imagery selected to decorate the objects, which are conventional and devoid of specific symbolic value. The plant-based repertoire would act, therefore, as a codified, genderless theme referring to the caliph's symbolic and courtly surroundings, its exclusivity of manufacture, and, its royal prerogative.

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