


## On Earth or in Poems: The Many Lives of al-Andalus

Eric Calderwood (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023).  
Pp. 345. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780674980365

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Eric Calderwood's deeply engaging and richly illustrated *On Earth or in Poems: The Many Lives of al-Andalus* surveys the concept of al-Andalus in literary, musical, and scholarly explorations of the multiple identities—Arab, Amazigh (Berber), Muslim, feminist, Palestinian, Mediterranean, among others—associated with this seemingly inexhaustible choronotope of cultural identity. Harnessing a wealth of scholarship in multiple languages, Calderwood offers important insights into the multiple and often competing claims on the Andalusí legacy, revealing how they are “often as much (or more) about addressing the needs of the present as they are about understanding the past” (p. 2). In an introduction, five thematic chapters, and epilogue, he explores not only how but also *why* the legacy of al-Andalus—indeed, the very idea of an Andalusí legacy—has produced the many lives and afterlives of al-Andalus. It does so, he contends, because of its polysemous associations with so many populations, serving as a sort of “Swiss army knife” that has proven to be “useful and malleable for writers, scholars, artists, politicians, and business-people around the world” (pp. 3–4).

The Introduction spells out the main contours of the book and sets out the stakes for why we need to consider al-Andalus as a “mode of cultural memory” that both is positioned by and, in turn, positions authors, artists, and their audiences within an Andalusí frame (p. 4). Chapter 1 explores the construction of an “Arab al-Andalus” and how the Andalusí legacy has been utilized to support notions of (pan-)Arab ideas. Here, Calderwood conducts a close reading of early 20th-century writings on al-Andalus, especially those of Jurji Zaydan, and of late 20th-century filmic representations, in particular the Syrian television serial *Saqr Quraysh*. In both of these imaginings, al-Andalus is evoked by authors and artists as an *Arab* time-place through language and customs that reinforced a “two-way traffic” between the past and present (p. 153).

Chapter 2 tacks back to North Africa to explore the Amazigh associations of al-Andalus, from the origin story of Tariq Bin Ziyad to contemporary Moroccan and transnational cultural politics that celebrate Amazigh identities. Calderwood convincingly argues for an emergent and heterogenous “south-north loop” promoting a Berber-centric construction of al-Andalus and its legacies that operates in opposition to the east-west circuit characteristic of the more Arab-centric understandings (p. 81). The latter have formed the basis of most scholarship on al-Andalus, as well as popular imaginings of an *Arab-Andalusí* cultural space.

Among the more important chapters is the third, which focuses on “Feminist al-Andalus.” Here, Calderwood traces the genealogy and evolution of the idea of a feminist al-Andalus that allowed exceptional (for its time) “freedom, creativity, and cultural achievements for Muslim and Arab women” (p. 110). He explores feminist precursors in the so-called daughters of al-Andalus, from the 11th-century Wallada to ‘A’isha bint Ahmad and Buthayna, among others. While casting a critical eye on modern claims about medieval feminist precursors, Calderwood also proposes that they offer alternative histories that “circumvent the legacies and logics of colonialism” (p. 111). These alternatives are apparent in the works of diverse women authors, from Syrian Salma al-Haffar al-Kuzbari and Moroccan Fatima Mernissi to Emirati Saliha Ghabish and Egyptian Radwa ‘Ashur, who emplace the story of al-Andalus into broader narratives of the Arab and Muslim women. The outcome of these efforts is a feminist al-Andalus that transcends any single site, language, or genre.

Chapter 4, meanwhile, proposes a reading of a “Palestinian al-Andalus” as a “lost paradise” (*firdaws mafqūd*), perhaps the most important motif of the Andalusī legacy. The idea of Palestine as a lost paradise has found resonance in literary and other works post-1948, but, as the author shows, the idea of Palestine as a “new al-Andalus” emerged well before 1948 in British Mandatory print culture. During the 1920 and 1930s, the story of al-Andalus, its rise and fall, was a “cautionary tale” for Palestinian intellectuals and writers (p. 156). Calderwood traces the importance of the idea of al-Andalus in post-1948 Palestinian letters in the works of diverse authors, but focuses on the apotheosis of a Palestinian Andalusī cultural logic: the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish. Calderwood devotes significant space to a close reading of many of Darwish’s poems that evoke al-Andalus, especially his collection “Eleven stars over the last Andalusī scene” (*Ahad Ash‘ar Kawkaban ‘ala Akhir al-Mashshad al-Andalusī*), published in 1992 on the quincentennial of the fall of Granada. Calderwood explores the dualities of absence-presence, conquest-defeat, and past-present in Darwish’s poetry, and follows it with explorations of similar themes in the works of 21st-century Palestinian writers who carry the poet’s message forward. In an interesting, but important, twist, Calderwood concludes this chapter with reflections on “the Israeli al-Andalus,” especially through the lens of translation among Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews. As with Palestine, there are no doubt a multiplicity of Israeli (and non-Israeli Jewish) Andalusī imaginaries, let alone political and cultural projects. Here, Calderwood opens up portals for fruitful future study.

Chapter 5, “The Harmonious al-Andalus,” explores questions of identity, connection, and memory in music inspired by the idea of a shared Andalusī legacy. Calderwood asks what it might mean for performers to claim to embody or to represent al-Andalus through music, and what sorts of political projects those claims might enable in different contexts. Answers arise from his analysis of Andalusī musical “encounters” and “bridges” involving Spanish and Moroccan artists and audiences (p. 209). His focus is mainly on popular musical forms (*cante jondo* and flamenco) and their fusions with Arab-Andalusī musics (*al-ṭarab al-andalusī*), and through cross-cultural experiments in hip-hop. Calderwood argues that musical encounters and bridges, from Jalal Chekara’s “Flamenco Couscous” to Amina ‘Alaoui’s “Oh Andaluces,” lead artists and audiences through what Jonathan Glasser terms an “Andalusī archipelago” that stretches across the Western Mediterranean back to an ancestral home in al-Andalus that is imagined and performed. Whereas the politics of such a move are, at most, implicit in these works, they become far more explicit in hip-hop that moves across the Strait of Gibraltar, engaging in what Calderwood calls “Strait flow” (p. 236). Engaging the Spanish rapper Tote King and the Moroccan rapper H-Kayne, among others, Calderwood shows how al-Andalus in their work serves as a powerful medium for confronting the fraught relations between Spain and Morocco and the ongoing forms of social marginalization that bind hip-hop artists in these spaces. Calderwood’s concept of “Strait flow” reveals how the earlier emphasis on encounters and bridges could be understood as apolitical, whereas this other body of work confronts “uneven distributions of power and ongoing challenges to linguistic and cultural legibility” (p. 251).


In the Epilogue, Calderwood follows traces of Andalusī memory across time and space, traveling even to Urbana, Illinois. It’s a daily, visual reminder of the hold that this “vernacular al-Andalus” exercises over us in the present day (p. 252). Through an examination of the debates and controversies surrounding the Mezquita “Mosque-Cathedral” of Cordoba, the model of so many Andalusī-inspired buildings worldwide, Calderwood raises important questions. To whom do cultural heritage sites such as the Mezquita belong? Who decides? The author proposes a “phenomenology” of al-Andalus, that is, an examination of “how al-Andalus has manifested in diverse times and places to address different needs” (p. 269). It is precisely in engaging this question concerning the conceptual work of al-Andalus in the modern age, including its multifaced and contradictory afterlives, that *On Earth or in Poems* will serve as an important guide to future scholars.

*On Earth or in Poems* is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of al-Andalus and its enduring hold on the imagination of Arab and Muslim artists and thinkers in the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and beyond. One great benefit of this text is Calderwood's eschewing the methodological nationalism that marks most scholarship on al-Andalus (including the work of this reviewer). Instead, he traces themes that cut across national borders to suggest pan-regional and, one could argue, global imagined communities for whom al-Andalus has been, and often remains, a touchstone of authenticity, a well-spring of inspiration, and a beacon of hope for possible futures. It is hard to find fault in such a magnificent text. At times, I yearned for more quotidian texture to augment the rich textual explications. I also yearned for a separate bibliography rather than having to dive into the ample notes! Ultimately, one hopes that the numerous and important portals opened by Calderwood onto diverse Andalusí worlds will inspire continued work in the varied contexts in which the afterlives of al-Andalus resonate.

doi:10.1017/S0020743824000072

## The Accidental Palace: The Making of Yıldız in Nineteenth-Century Istanbul

**Deniz Türker (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2023). Pp. 272. \$114.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9780271093918**

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In *The Accidental Palace*, Deniz Türker proposes the first comprehensive study of the vast Yıldız Palace complex in Istanbul. Located in the Beşiktaş neighborhood, the site is hidden behind forbidding walls, and only partially accessible. As the author poignantly notes: "One scurries along beside its boundary walls, always fearing that one is trespassing in an area belonging to a governmental body; more often than not, guards appear to confirm that suspicion" (p. 18). Given access limits, Türker's task was not an easy one, yet she paints a detailed picture of a site that has not previously received much scholarly attention. This is also the first monograph in English on an Ottoman palace since Gülru Necipoğlu's study of Topkapı Palace.

Türker situates her work within two broad bodies of literature. The first are historical studies of the 19th-century Ottoman Empire, on Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) and his downfall at the hands of the Committee of Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terakkî, often referred to as the Young Turks). The second body of literature is concerned with Istanbul in the late 18th to early 20th century, a period that saw incisive changes with the construction of palaces such as Yıldız and Dolmabahçe, the involvement of new, post-Tanzimat elites in shaping Ottoman visual culture, and the creation of residential neighborhoods with European-style apartment buildings. Within these two broader contexts, Türker examines the history of the palace from 1795 to 1909.

Chapter 1 discusses Yıldız during Abdülhamid II's long reign, beginning with its end in 1909 when representatives of the Young Turks took over the site, inventoried its contents, and partially opened it to the public. Türker offers a critical assessment of texts written about the palace at this time, which are, as she notes, rife with fantasy based in the deposed sultan's negative image. Türker examines the site's longtime use as an imperial retreat