

THE SEARCH FOR KNOWLEDGE: ANDALUSI SCHOLARS AND THEIR TRAVELS TO THE ISLAMIC EAST

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In Andalusí biographical dictionaries, the portrait of the individual scholar follows a pre-established outline, centered upon his place of birth, the names of his masters and disciples, the places he visited during his "period of formation" and his career and, eventually, his positions in the administration. Information about his personal attitudes or family ties is nearly always absent in these sources, mainly interested as they were, in the position of scholars as transmitters of knowledge.

For Andalusí scholars, traveling to the Islamic East was an essential step in their period of formation, at least during the first centuries of the history of al-Andalus. Biographers, then, dutifully recorded the names of Eastern masters and places visited by scholars during these journeys to the East, coupled also with the pilgrimage to Mecca. This kind of biographical information offers a prosopographical material of outstanding interest, the analysis of which sheds a welcome light on the formative years and study patterns of Andalusí scholars.

On this occasion I will restrict the analysis to the oldest of Andalusí biographical dictionaries, that of Ibn Harith al-Khushani, known as *Akhbar al-fuqaha, wa-l-muhaddithin*,¹ a basic source for the study of intellectual life in al-Andalus during the ninth and tenth centuries.² Through the study of the prosopographical material in this dictionary I intend to establish, first, the age at which scholars began their period of formation; second, when the travel to the East (the *riḥla*) was usually undertaken, and, finally, how long these scholars stayed in the East. This will help us to arrive at a better understanding of how academic careers in al-Andalus were constructed.

Previous work in this field goes back to the pioneering study by Julián Ribera,³ but for the purposes of the present research, mention has to be made of two more recent works, by L. Molina and M. Marín, focused on the places visited in the East by Andalusí scholars and the masters with whom they studied.⁴ S. I. Gellens, for his part, has paid attention to the relationships between Andalusí scholars and Egypt.⁵ Of particular interest is the article by R. W. Bulliet on the age at which scholars began their formation, centering on Nisabur in the tenth and

¹ Edited by M. L. Ávila and Luis Molina, 1992. The book is also rich in anecdotes and short stories about Andalusí scholars, as can be seen in the paper by L. Molina in this present volume.

² The earliest date of death mentioned in this dictionary is 180/796 (no. 432). However, only three of the scholars mentioned by *Akhbar* died before 200/815. The latest date of death is 343/954.

³ *La enseñanza entre los musulmanes españoles: bibliófilos y bibliotecas en la España musulmana*, Córdoba, 1925.

⁴ Molina, "Lugares de destino", and Marín, "Los ulemas de al-Andalus". See also M. Marín, *Individuo y sociedad*, on a general view about pilgrimage to Mecca from al-Andalus.

⁵ A chapter of his *Scholars and Travellers* is dedicated to "The external perspective: *ṭalab al-‘ilm*, the Spanish *‘ulama’* and Egypt". See also his "Search for Knowledge".

eleventh centuries and based upon the birth and death dates of both masters and disciples.⁶ Unfortunately, Bulliet's methodology is difficult to apply to al-Andalus, where dates of birth were rarely recorded. But Ibn Harith's data allow us, in some cases, to establish some conclusions about these issues, as we shall presently see.

There are 527 biographies of scholars in the *Akhbar*, and in 225 it is explicitly said that they traveled to the East. In 202 cases, the expressions used to establish this are of this sort: "he traveled to the East" (*raḥala ila l-Mashriq*), "he made the pilgrimage" (*raḥala ḥajjan*), or, simply, "he traveled" (*raḥala, kanat la-hu riḥla*). This last usage implies the journey to the East, because when the scholar travels to a place inside al-Andalus, the name of the city is always quoted. When the travel takes the scholar to a specific place in the East, the term used is *dakhala*, as in "he made the pilgrimage and went into Iraq" (*wa-kana qad ḥajja wa-dakhala l-'Iraq*).⁷ In some cases, only the pilgrimage to Mecca is recorded, with no mention of the journey (*riḥla*), which can be inferred from the context.

Taking into account the difficulties and financial cost of the journey, the ratio of travelers (202 from a total of 527, 38 percent) is quite high. Moreover, it is important to note that Ibn Harith's omission of information does not necessarily mean that the scholar did not travel to the East. It may simply be that Ibn Harith did not know about the journey. As a consequence, only when it is clearly stated in a biography that "he never traveled to the East" (*lam takun la-hu riḥla*) can we be sure of the fact, recorded in this way in seventeen biographies.⁸ As the journey was considered a fundamental stage in the academic career, when Ibn Harith informs us that such an important scholar as Muhammad b. 'Umar b. Lubaba (225-314/839-926) did not do it, he feels compelled to emphasize Ibn Lubaba's other accomplishments, emphasizing the large number of his masters in al-Andalus and his wide and deep knowledge of the leading legal works of this period (Malik's *Muwaṭṭa'*, Sahnun's *Mudawwana* and al-'Utbi's *Mustakhraya*).⁹ Perhaps Ibn Harith was also acknowledging his debt as a biographer to Ibn Lubaba, who was one of his main sources of information.

Another interesting case of a "non-traveling" scholar is that of Sa'dun b. Isma'il al-Judhami, from Algeciras.¹⁰ His biography is rich in material about his education and training as a scholar. Sa'dun was the son of a humble man, and it was his mother who took care of Sa'dun's career.¹¹ He left Algeciras for Cordoba, where he studied qur'anic sciences and Arabic, and he spent some time in Rayya continuing his studies. At this point it was to be expected that Sa'dun would undertake a journey to the East, but instead he went back to Cordoba, where he lived in a hostel located in the Safflower Suq. Completely dedicated to scientific pursuits, Sa'dun neither married nor took a concubine.

Traveling to the East was fraught with difficulties, and cases are known of scholars dying during the journey or shortly after their return to al-Andalus. Khalid b. Ayyub,¹² after initiating

⁶ Bulliet, "Age Structure of Medieval Islamic Education."

⁷ *Akhbar*, no. 30.

⁸ Numbers 6, 49, 66, the son of no. 77, 92, 115, 124, 154, 166, 189, 226, 240, 256, 326, 351, 503 and 507.

⁹ See A. Fernández Félix, "Biografías de alfaquíes".

¹⁰ *Akhbar*, no. 460; Marín, "Nómina", no. 524.

¹¹ See Marín, *Mujeres en al-Andalus*, p. 415.

¹² *Akhbar*, nº 92; Marín, "Nómina", no. 433.

his trip, renounced to it for fear of dangers at sea. He would probably have heard about the not infrequent shipwrecks, one of which is recorded by Ibn Harith: `Abd Allah b. Ibrahim¹³ had been stranded on the North African shore, and it was only three years after his first journey that, in a second attempt, he was able to arrive to Egypt, whence he went to Mecca and Medina.

Attacks on pilgrims' caravans constituted another danger scholars had to face, as appears in the following account by Ibn Harith:

Ahmad b. Maysara came back to al-Andalus before the year 290 [902], when Ibrahim b. Ahmad b. al-Aghlab was ruling over Ifriqiya.¹⁴ In the same caravan was also traveling `Ubayd Allah al-Shi'i,¹⁵ and it was Ahmad b. Maysara who advised him to behave more humbly and to abandon his mighty ways. Ahmad b. Maysara told `Ubayd Allah, "In the Maghreb, this behavior is dangerous and I fear for your safety, because of the Berber thieves. You will be ruined and be the cause of our ruin." `Ubayd Allah accepted this advice and became more subdued, but it was not long before the caravan was attacked by a party of Berbers, who looted and plundered it. `Ubayd Allah was left with only a couple of loads of flax, with which he was able to arrive in Tripoli.¹⁶

Some of the scholars who traveled to the East died there. Ahmad, one of the sons of Shabtun,¹⁷ was a judge and directed communal prayer in Cordoba. After being demoted from these tasks, he left al-Andalus to make the pilgrimage. He lived in Egypt, (where he died in 205/829), before making his way to Mecca. Kulayb b. Muhammad also died in Egypt, as did Ahmad b. Ghadrūn, who was thirty-eight years old at the time of his death in 318/930.¹⁸ Returning from the pilgrimage to Mecca, Ibn Munfalit died in Alexandria.¹⁹ Death far from one's birthplace was for Andalusi scholars one of the hazards of the journey, although we do not know the precise circumstances of these deaths.

In direct contrast to those who did not leave al-Andalus, some scholars undertook more than one journey, either because they wished to enlarge the scope of their intellectual interests, or because they wished to accomplish more than one pilgrimage. Baqi b. Makhlad spent many years in the East on two different occasions.²⁰ The very rich and mighty judge of Tudela, Hawshab b. Salama, returned to the East because he missed a slave girl whom he had sold in Egypt. Once there, he bought her again and brought her to al-Andalus, where she became the mother of his children. It is also said that during this second trip Hawshab b. Salama acquired great scientific knowledge.²¹

¹³ *Akhbar*, no. 315; Marín, "Nómina", no. 691.

¹⁴ Ibrahim II ruled from 261/875 to 389/902. See M. Talbi, *L'émirat aghlabide*, p. 86ff.

¹⁵ Later the first of the Fatimid caliphs, he ruled from 297/909 to 322/934. This journey should be placed in the final stage of the Aghlabid period, when the Shi'ite revolt headed by Abu `Abd Allah al-Da'i was well underway. See *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2:850, "Faṭimids" (M: Canard); Halm, *Empire of the Mahdi*, and Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids*, pp. 100ff.

¹⁶ *Akhbar*, no. 14; Marín, "Nómina", no. 198.

¹⁷ *Akhbar*, no. 104, p. 98; Marín, "Nómina", no. 122.

¹⁸ *Akhbar*, nos. 123 and 33; Marín, "Nómina", nos. 1084 and 1339.

¹⁹ *Akhbar*, no. 194.

²⁰ *Akhbar*, no. 58. See Marín, "Baqi b. Majlad".

²¹ *Akhbar*, no. 89; Marín, "Nómina", no. 426.

Muhammad b. Waddah, competitor of Baqi b. Makhlad in the intellectual field, journeyed twice, first in 220/835 and secondly after the year 230/844.²²

On his first journey, ‘Abd al-Wahid b. Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Rahman b. Dinar²³ was accompanied by his father and his brother. Later, he went to the East by himself, studying intensively in Iraq, where he specialized in law and eventually became the most distinguished member of his family in this field.

‘Abd Allah b. Masarra²⁴ journeyed at a young age, accompanied by his brother Ibrahim.²⁵ A merchant by trade, ‘Abd Allah undertook a second trip later in life, when his son Muhammad was already grown and, according to some sources, because he was running away from his debts in al-Andalus.

Scholars traveled with other members of their families, as in the cases just mentioned, or with friends and fellow students. Qasim b. Ahmad b. Jahdar,²⁶ from Toledo, traveled to the East with Wasim b. Sa’dun and Ahmad b. Khalid. The three of them studied in Egypt and, afterwards, Ahmad b. Khalid and Qasim b. Ahmad b. Jahdar -according to Ibn al-Faradi- went to Yemen. Qasim b. Ahmad b. Jahdar, after his return to al-Andalus, made a second trip in 291/903 and he established himself in Mecca, where he died in 311/923.²⁷

Finally, Qasim b. Muhammad, from Cordoba,²⁸ spent twelve years on his first journey and six on the second.

Biographies also record the fact that sometimes a scholar, although he had traveled to the East, did not take advantage of it to enlarge his knowledge. This happened in a small but noticeable number of cases, those of Ahmad b. Dhi l-Qarnayn, Muhammad b. Sabiq and Sabra b. Mudhkir, all of them from Elvira; ‘Umar b. Mugith, from Toledo, and ‘Uthman b. ‘Abd al-Rahman. The biographer explains that this ‘Uthman traveled when he was very young, and that he began his studies on his return to al-Andalus.²⁹

SCHOLARS’ AGES AT THE BEGINNING OF THEIR TRAINING

The comment offered by the biographer of ‘Uthman b. ‘Abd al-Rahman on his youth at the time of his journey brings us back to the main purpose of this paper: When did the Andalusí scholars begin their scholarly training? When did they undertake the journey to the East? Was this journey a requirement to reach a certain academic status or its crowning step? A careful inquiry into the biographical material may help to answer these questions.

²² *Akhbar*, no. 137; Marín, “Nómina”, no.1351. See also Ibn Waḍḍah, *Bida’*.

²³ *Akhbar*, no. 344; Marín, “Nómina”, no. 879.

²⁴ *Akhbar*, no. 279; Marín, “Nómina”, no. 826.

²⁵ This information is also found in Ibn Ḥayyan, *Muqtabas* V, p. 35 and Ibn al-Faradi, *Ta’rikh*, no. 650.

²⁶ *Akhbar*, no. 418; Marín, “Nómina”, no. 1044.

²⁷ Information about Qasim b. Ahmad b. Jahdar is also supplied by Ibn al-Faradi, *Ta’rikh*, no. 1057.

²⁸ *Akhbar*, no. 411; Marín, “Nómina”, no. 1066.

²⁹ *Akhbar*, nos. 29, 220, 463, 361 and 379; Marín, “Nómina”, nos. 1613, 1244, 515, 964 and 911, respectively.

The precise age at which Andalusī began his scientific training is rarely recorded, but there are some very detailed accounts of this process, such as that of Ahmad b. Khalid al-Jabbab, from Cordoba.³⁰ In his own words,

I began to study with my brother, when I was still a child. At this time I was mostly interested in legal questions, but once I grew up I became inclined to piety and increasingly disliked material pursuits. Therefore, I abandoned my business and devoted myself solely to fast and prayer. Later on I began to attend the classes of Abu Ishaq Muhammad b. Ibrahim b. Baz, finding in him such sweetness, rightness of behavior and virtue, that I longed again for the pursuit of scientific knowledge. To the satisfaction of my master, I learnt easily the legal questions, to the extent that he assumed that I had studied with another master, because of my excellence and great capacity for learning. On a particular occasion, the master asked his disciples: "You already know by heart the Qur'an and you have studied the law. What can you say about God's words: "There shall be for divorced women provision honourable"³¹? In which part of the Book is there a reference for divorced women without provision? The disciples, among whom there were some qur'anic experts, remained silent, but I said: "The reference is in the verse "If you divorce women while as yet you have not touched them nor appointed any marriage-portion for them"³²". The master was pleased, as well as astonished, by my answer, and he asked me, "How old are you?", and I said: "I am nearly sixteen".

It should be noted that Ibn Khalid's training was supported, at least partly, by his mother, who bought parchment and books for him out of her earnings as a spinner.³³ According to other biographical sources, Ibn Khalid traveled to the East, lived in Mecca and visited Yemen, Crete and Ifriqiya.

‘Ali b. Hasan al-Mari,³⁴ from Pechina, was very young (*saghir*) when he began his studies with his master Abu l-‘Ala' b. al-Mu‘alla. He was fifty when he made the pilgrimage in 292/904; four years later he was teaching in al-Qayrawan, probably on his way back to al-Andalus.

Muhammad b. ‘Umar b. Lubaba, mentioned above as a scholar who did not travel to the East, began his training when he was a teenager. His biography in *Akhbar* is fragmentary, but according to other sources he was around fifteen or sixteen when he began to attend the classes of al-‘Utbi in June of 242/856.³⁵

‘Abd al-Jabbar b. Fath b. Muntasir al-Balawi, from Cordoba, began his studies at the age of fifteen, but Sa‘id b. ‘Uthman al-A‘naqi, also from Cordoba, was only fourteen, as he himself acknowledged: "I was born in 233 [847] and I began my training in 247 [861]".³⁶ Al-A‘naqi, before leaving al-Andalus for the East, took lessons from Muhammad b. Waddah and other Andalusī masters, a fact that allow us to place his journey at some years after 247/861.

³⁰ *Akhbar*, no. 15. The fact that Islamic years are shorter than Christian should be taken into account when scholars's ages are given.

³¹ Qur'an, 2:242 (Trans. Arberry)

³² Qur'an, 2:237 (Trans. Arberry)

³³ This information is found in ‘Iyad, *Tartīb*, V, 177. See Marín, *Mujeres en al-Andalus*, p. 268.

³⁴ *Akhbar*, no. 388; Marín, "Nómina", no. 935.

³⁵ Ibn al-Farādi, *Ta'rikh*, no. 1187.

³⁶ *Akhbar*, no. 336; Marín, "Nómina", no. 680. See also Ibn al-Farādi, *Ta'rikh*, no. 484.

The precocity of these scholars is striking, and this probably explains why their ages were recorded. Others, began their careers somewhat later, like Yahya b. Zakariya' Ibn al-Shamma, from Cordoba, who was eighteen when he became a disciple of Ibn Muzayn in 258/871. Likewise, Ayyub b. Sulayman al-Ma'afiri, also from Cordoba, was twenty at the beginning of his scholarly career.³⁷

YOUNG TRAVELERS

Andalusi scholars traveled to the East at very different periods of their lives. We know that Ibn al-Qallas³⁸ was only thirteen at the time, but others could have been as old as seventy-one.³⁹ Two age groups seem to appear in *Akhbar*, reflecting this difference. In the first we find young men, who traveled with their fathers or other relatives, and who may even not attended any master's classes. If they later become interested in scientific pursuits, they would engage in a second journey, which would allow them to complete their scientific formation. The second group, is that of mature scholars, as will be shown below.

Among young travelers, a well-documented case is that of Ibn al-Qallas. As is mentioned above, he was only thirteen when he began, in 283/896, a journey to the East which was to last for seven years in the company of his father, as must be assumed due to the fact that, being in Egypt, both of them undertook a trip to India. Ibn al-Qallas' own account of his extraordinary journey was recorded by Ibn Harith and it can be considered the first autobiographical testimony of an Andalusi scholar's wanderings in the Islamic East.⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, the bulk of the text is devoted to places visited and masters whose classes were attended by Ibn al-Qallas, but there is also mention of a shipwreck in which Ibn al-Qallas lost the majority of the books he had acquired in the East. Many years later, Ibn al-Faradi accused Ibn al-Qallas of being a liar (*kadhhab*), doubting that he really had studied the lost books. We can not be sure whether this accusation should be extended to the whole account of Ibn al-Qallas's journey, which would be in this case an imagined representation of the model expected to be followed by Andalusi scholars in their wanderings in the East.

Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Salam al-Khushani⁴¹ was nineteen when he left al-Andalus, prior to 240/854. He visited Basra, where he, among others, studied with Bundar.⁴² Muhammad b. Waddah was of a similar age when he undertook his first journey in 220/835, being thirty at his second.⁴³ Ibn Waddah, Ibn al-Qallas and Baqi b. Makhlad, who were young at the time of their first trips, each made a second journey later on.

³⁷ *Akhbar*, nos. 505 and 38; Marín, "Nómina", nos. 1543 and 298.

³⁸ *Akhbar*, no. 208; Marín, "Nómina", no. 1290.

³⁹ *Akhbar*, no. 63; Marín, "Nómina", no. 330.

⁴⁰ See the translation and study of this text in Marín, "Rihla y biografías de Ibn al-Qallas".

⁴¹ *Akhbar*, no. 138; Marín, "Nómina", no. 1225.

⁴² See more details about his journey in Molina, "An Arab among Muwallads".

⁴³ According to M. Fierro (*Bida'*, p. 21), the precise dates of both travels are 218/833 and 231/845-846. In this case, Ibn Waddah was a couple of years younger in his first journey than what is indicated by Ibn Harith.

Biographies do not always give the precise age at which scholars traveled, but the fact that they were "young" is occasionally mentioned. Muslim b. Ahmad b. Abi 'Ubayda al-Laythi,⁴⁴ from Cordoba, journeyed in 259/872 and, according to Ibn al-Faraḍi, died in 295/907. If these dates are correct,⁴⁵ it can be assumed that he traveled thirty-six years before his death, being then a young man. This could be a quite common case among Andalusī scholars, but not one that can be deduced exclusively from Ibn Harīth's data.

The poet 'Abbas b. Nasih,⁴⁶ from Algeciras, traveled to the East with his father, while he was still a child (*sabī*). He grew up in Egypt and studied Arabic in the Hijaz. Afterwards he went, also with his father, to Iraq, where he met al-Asma'i and other scholars from Basra. 'Abbas b. Nasih returned finally to al-Andalus and established himself in his birthplace, Algeciras.

The above mentioned 'Abd Allah b. Masarra was also a young man when he traveled to the East in the company of his brother Ibrahim.

In some biographies, *Akhbar* emphasizes the fact that a scholar traveled *qadiman*. Besides its usual meaning as "old", "ancient", I understand this expression to mean, in these cases, is "prematurely" or "early", as is attested by other instances, such as *wa-huwwa qadim al-mawt*,⁴⁷ or *tuwuffiya qadiman wa-huwwa gayr musinn*⁴⁸: "he died prematurely early", "he died early, in his youthful years". Of Harun b. Salim⁴⁹ it is said, using the same words, that he died young, when he was forty.⁵⁰ For Ibn Harīth, as for other biographers, *qadim* in this context meant an early or precocious event.

Scholars who traveled *qadiman*, therefore, were young men, traveling abroad before reaching maturity. 'Uthman b. 'Abd al-Rahman⁵¹ was one of those, and although he made the pilgrimage to Mecca, he did not attend any master's classes there. On his return to Cordoba he became a disciple of Muhammad b. Waddah, Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Salam al-Khushani and Sa'id b. Khumayr.

The same label of "precocity" is attached to other Andalusī scholars who were young when they became disciples of famous masters or when they began their scholarly training. Among them, Ibn Harīth signals Ahmad b. 'Amr b. Mansur, 'Abd al-A'la b. Wahb, Walid b. 'Umar, Sa'dun b. Mu'awiya, and Hisham al-Mu'addib.⁵²

⁴⁴ *Akhbar*, no. 244; Marín, "Nómina", no. 1387.

⁴⁵ Other biographers (al-Humaydi, *Jadhwa*, no. 822, and al-Dabbi, *Bughya*, no. 1371) give his date of death as 304/916.

⁴⁶ *Akhbar*, no. 382; Marín, "Nómina", no. 671. See also E. Terés, "'Abbas b. Naṣīḥ".

⁴⁷ *Akhbar*, no. 6, 84 and 96.

⁴⁸ *Akhbar*, no. 475.

⁴⁹ See M. Marín, "Nómina", no. 1475.

⁵⁰ 'Iyāḍ, *Tartīb*, 4:142.

⁵¹ *Akhbar*, no. 379.

⁵² *Akhbar*, no. 12, 333, 484, 458 and 478; Marín, "Nómina", nos. 158, 676, 1503, 523 and 1489, respectively.

MATURE TRAVELLERS

Of course, it was also possible for Andalusī scholars to travel to the East at a mature age. In this case, the journey would expand their scientific interests, already awakened by the contact with Andalusī masters. Ahmad b. 'Ubada b. 'Alkada,⁵³ from Cordoba, took lessons from such famous Andalusī scholars as Ibn Waddah, Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Salam al-Khushani and Ayyub b. Sulayman, before leaving al-Andalus in 311/923, at the age of forty-three. During his travels to the East, he stayed in al-Qayrawan, Mecca, Egypt, and Jerusalem, and he spent some time in Ifriqiya in a *ribat* (a fortress in which pious men gathered in order to defend the frontiers of the Islamic territory).

When Ahmad b. Duhaym b. Khalid⁵⁴ began his journey, in 315/927, he was thirty-seven years old. He arrived in Baghdad in 316/928 and he stayed nine months in the Abbasid capital. Four years and ten months after his departure from al-Andalus he returned to his country, where he became judge of Elvira.

Ahmad b. Ghadrūn⁵⁵ was thirty-eight when he died in Egypt. It is not known whether he was in his way to the East or returning to al-Andalus, but it can be assumed that he was in his thirties when he undertook his journey.

Aslam b. 'Abd al-'Aziz⁵⁶ is said to have died in al-Andalus at the old age of eighty-seven.⁵⁷ If we are to accept this, knowing that he traveled to the East in 260/873, his age at the time of his journey would have been around twenty-eight. Muhammad b. Qasim b. Muhammad⁵⁸ was thirty-one in 294/906, the year in which he traveled to the East, where he stayed for four years and four months. Both Aslam and Muhammad b. Qasim were, then, slightly younger than the cases mentioned above, but they can not be included in the category of "young travellers".

In two interesting cases, scholars who began their training at a young age, and therefore were designated as "precocious", left al-Andalus for the East when they were mature men: Ibn al-Shamma was fifty-one when he began his travels in 290/902, and 'Ali b. Hasan was fifty.⁵⁹

Thabit b. Hazm was, the oldest of the Andalusī scholars mentioned by Ibn Harīth; he left al-Andalus in 288/900, and stayed in the East until 294/906. According to other biographical sources, Thabit was born in 217/832, and that means that he was sixty-nine when he began his journey, in the company of his son Qasim, who was then thirty-three. However, information about his date of birth should be viewed with caution, as it would mean that Thabit died at ninety-three, something not impossible but extremely unlikely.⁶⁰

⁵³ *Akhbar*, no. 27; Marín, "Nómina", no. 133.

⁵⁴ *Akhbar*, no. 31; Marín, "Nómina", no. 118.

⁵⁵ *Akhbar*, no. 33; Marín, "Nómina", no. 132.

⁵⁶ *Akhbar*, no. 52; Marín, "Nómina", no. 248.

⁵⁷ On the average age of death for Andalusī scholars, see Zanón, "Demografía y sociedad".

⁵⁸ *Akhbar*, no. 203; Marín, "Nómina", no. 1318.

⁵⁹ *Akhbar*, no. 505 and 388; Marín, "Nómina", nos. 1543 and 935.

⁶⁰ See J. Zanón, "Demografía y sociedad".

The biographies of `Abd Allah b. Muhammad b. Badrun and Qasim b. Asbag raise some doubts with regard to their ages at the time of their travel to the East. According to Ibn Harith, `Abd Allah b. Muhammad b. Badrun⁶¹ died at ninety-six, in the year 301/913, and he traveled to the East in 205/820, that is, in the very year he was born! Ibn al-Faradi, for his part, says that `Abd Allah traveled in 250/864,⁶² which would mean that he was then forty-four years old. This seems more plausible, although the age he is said to have reached at the time of his death remains difficult to explain. As for Qasim b. Asbag, the dates mentioned in his biography by Ibn Harith are related to his birth (247/862) and his stay in Baghdad (276/890). Other sources, give different dates for his journey, and it is difficult to ascertain when he left al-Andalus. He made his journey in the company of two fellow scholars, Muhammad b. `Abd al-Malik b. Ayman⁶³, who was then twenty-four, and Muhammad b. Abi `Abd al-A`la. Qasim b. Asbag was probably twenty-seven when he left al-Andalus, if we accept his date of birth as it is given by Ibn Harith.⁶⁴

HOW LONG DID THEY STAY IN THE EAST?

For the most part, Andalusí scholars remained in the East an average of four to seven years. Some of them extended their stay up to twelve years and, in exceptional cases, we know of scholars who remained away from al-Andalus for twenty-four or twenty-five years.

Although the dates of Qasim b. Asbag's journey are not completely certain, his biographers agree that he spent two or three years in the East. This is one of the shortest stays we know of. A similar case is that of Yahya b. `Abd al-`Aziz al-Khazzar, from Cordoba,⁶⁵ who began his journey in 252/866 and who, in 253/867, was studying the *Muwatta`* with Yunus b. `Abd al-A`la in Egypt. For reasons not explained in his biography, Yahya was obliged to leave his lessons and return to al-Andalus.

After performing the pilgrimage to Mecca, `Abd al-Malik b. al-`Asi⁶⁶ arrived in 318/930 in Baghdad where he spent nearly three years. He was a judge in Hims, Syria, in 320/932 and in Jerusalem in 322/934. Born in 286/899, he was thirty-two at the time of his journey, which lasted for at least four years.

The already mentioned `Ali b. Hasan al-Mari,⁶⁷ from Pechina, began his journey in 292/904, when he was fifty. In 296/908 he was in al-Qayrawan, probably on his way back to al-Andalus, which means that he had spent, at least, four years in the East.

Ahmad b. `Amr b. Mansur Ibn `Amril,⁶⁸ from Elvira, was traveling for five years. Between six and seven years was the time employed for the same purpose by Thabit b. Hazm al-`Awfi, his son Qasim, Ibn al-Qallas and Sa`id b. Hassan.⁶⁹

⁶¹ *Akhbar*, no. 289; Marín, "Nómina", no. 819.

⁶² Ibn al-Faradi, *Ta`rikh*, no. 656. The same date is recorded by `Iyaq, *Tartib*, 5:242.

⁶³ *Akhbar*, no. 175; Marín, "Nómina", no. 1265.

⁶⁴ See, on Qasim b. Asbag, R. Pinilla, "El filólogo y tradicionista".

⁶⁵ *Akhbar*, no. 499; Marín, "Nómina", no. 1555.

⁶⁶ *Akhbar*, no. 330; Marín, "Nómina", no. 864.

⁶⁷ *Akhbar*, no. 388; Marín, "Nómina", no. 935.

⁶⁸ *Akhbar*, no. 12; Marín, "Nómina", no. 158.

⁶⁹ *Akhbar*, nos. 63, 208 and 434; Marín, "Nómina", nos. 330, 1290 and 537.

Longer stays may be explained by reasons not directly related to scholarly ends. It must be remembered that trade and scholarship were not infrequently practiced by the same person, as was the case of Ibn al-Qallas. Information about the economic background of scholars is frequently omitted by the biographer, who mentions, however that the scholar Dawud b. Hudhayl b. Mannan⁷⁰ spent twelve years traveling in the East devoting his time exclusively to his studies. It would seem that Dawud's personal wealth allowed him to live without material worries while staying in the East for such a long time. Dawud's case is not unique. Ibn Jahdar, mentioned above, stayed in Mecca for ten years.

Two Andalusí scholars stand out in this setting because they both spent the greater part of their lives in the East. 'Isa b. Ishaq b. Shudhaniq, from Algeciras, stayed there for twenty-four years, and Ibn al-Raqqā, for twenty-five, visiting such places as al-Qayrawan, Egypt, Medina, Mecca and Yemen.⁷¹ Finally, mention should be made of Qasim b. Muhammad and especially Baqi b. Makhlad, who traveled twice to the East and spent long years there.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have analyzed biographical information concerning Andalusí scholars who traveled to the East as a part of their academic training, focusing on the ages at which they undertook their journeys, which closely relates to their ages at the beginning of their studies.

Youth is a outstanding characteristic of these scholars, many of whom began their training before the age of twenty. It is difficult, however, to decide to what extent this was a general trend, because the biographer could have merely called attention to the unusual. When Ibn Harith records the fact that so-and-so began his training at the early age of fourteen, fifteen, or sixteen, is he simply quoting information known to him, without further intention, or is he stressing the brightness of this young and precocious scholar?

As for the ages at which scholars undertook the journey to the East, information is somewhat more abundant. Out of the 225 scholars who traveled to the East, we know at which age twenty-five of them began the journey, and only eight of these were under twenty. A quantitative approach is limited by the lack of data, but it would seem that a journey at an early age was, if not exceptional, hardly commonplace.

Traveling youths would be accompanied by parents, relatives or friends. Moreover, even if they attended the lessons of Eastern masters, they could not pass on Eastern knowledge on their return to al-Andalus. Lacking in maturity and academic training, these young scholars-to-be could not claim to be "transmitters" of science. The prestige accorded to those who had been disciples of the great Eastern masters was not open to the very young, and this was perhaps the reason for the second and later trip, undertaken after a period of serious study in al-Andalus.

A more common pattern was to begin with local training as a first step. The young scholar would attend lessons in al-Andalus, going to such places as Cordoba and Elvira, and leave his country for the East after reaching the age of thirty. Only in exceptional cases was travel undertaken after the age of fifty.

The period of study outside al-Andalus normally ran from four to seven years. Part of this time was simply spent in reaching the objective of the trip, that is, places like Mecca and Medina. Along the way, Andalusí scholars frequently spent time in Ifriqiya and Egypt, where

⁷⁰ *Akhbar*, no. 103; Marín, "Nómina", no. 468.

⁷¹ *Akhbar*, no. 356 and 171. Marín, "Nómina", nos. 995 and 1168.

they attended famous masters' classes. Staying in the East for more than twenty years was somewhat exceptional, and deserving to be noted in a biography, while in the standard cases, usually attested by documents, the biographer simply notes the dates of leaving and returning to al-Andalus.

A comparison of these conclusions, which were drawn from Ibn Harith's prosopographical material, with conclusions gleaned from other biographical dictionaries would undoubtedly be of interest. It is improbable that the general trends noticed in Ibn Harith's *Akhbar* would be seriously challenged or altered by such a comparison.

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