A COMPANION TO GLOBAL QUEENSHIP

Edited by
**ELENA
WOODACRE**

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CONTENTS

List of Illustrations.....	viii
Acknowledgements.....	ix
Contributors.....	ix
 Chapter 1. Introduction: Placing Queenship into a Global Context ELENA WOODACRE	 1
 Part I Perceptions of Regnant Queenship	
 Chapter 2. When the Emperor Is a Woman: The Case of Wu Zetian 武則天 (624–705), the “Emulator of Heaven” ELISABETTA COLLA	 13
 Chapter 3. Tamar of Georgia (1184–1213) and the Language of Female Power LOIS HUNEYCUTT	 27
 Chapter 4. Regnant Queenship and Royal Marriage between the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Nobility of Western Europe HAYLEY BASSETT	 39
 Chapter 5. Queenship and Female Authority in the Sultanate of Delhi (1206–1526) JYOTI PHULERA	 53
 Chapter 6. Anna Jagiellon: A Female Political Figure in the Early Modern Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth KATARZYNA KOSIOR	 67
 Chapter 7. Female Rule in Imperial Russia: Is Gender a Useful Category of Historical Analysis? OREL BEILINSON	 79

Chapter 8. The Transformation of an Island Queen: Queen Béti of Madagascar JANE HOOPER	95
---	----

Chapter 9. Female Rangatira in Aotearoa New Zealand AIDAN NORRIE	109
--	-----

Part II Practising Co-Rulership

Chapter 10. The Social–Political Roles of the Princess in Kyivan Rus', ca. 945–1240 TALIA ZAJAC	125
--	-----

Chapter 11. Impressions of Welsh Queenship in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries DANNA R. MESSER	147
---	-----

Chapter 12. Queen Zaynab al-Nafzawiyya and the Building of a Mediterranean Empire in the Eleventh-Century Maghreb INÊS LOURINHO	159
--	-----

Chapter 13. Al-Dalfa' and the Political Role of the <i>umm al-walad</i> in the Late Umayyad Caliphate of al-Andalus ANA MIRANDA	171
--	-----

Chapter 14. The Khitan Empress Dowagers Yingtian and Chengtian in Liao China, 907–1125 HANG LIN	183
--	-----

Chapter 15. Dowager Queens and Royal Succession in Premodern Korea SEOKYUNG HAN	195
--	-----

Chapter 16. The Ambiguities of Female Rule in Nayaka South India, Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries LENNART BES	209
--	-----

Part III Breaking Down Boundaries: Comparative Studies of Queenship

Chapter 17. Helena's Heirs: Two Eighth-Century Queens STEFANY WRAGG	233
---	-----

Chapter 18. The Hohenstaufen Women and the Differences between Aragonese and Greek Queenship Models LLEDÓ RUIZ DOMINGO	245
Chapter 19. The “Honourable Ladies” of Nasrid Granada: Female Power and Agency in the Alhambra (1400–1450) ANA ECHEVARRÍA and ROSER SALICRÚ I LLUCH	255
Chapter 20. Comparing the French Queen Regent and the Ottoman <i>Validé</i> Sultan during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries RENEÉ LANGLOIS	271
Chapter 21. Queens and Courtesans in Japan and Early Modern France TRACY ADAMS and IAN FOOKES	285
Chapter 22. The Figure of the Queen Mother in the European and African Monarchies, 1400–1800 DIANA PELAZ FLORES	299
Index	309

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

4.1	Family tree of the queens of Jerusalem.....	40
8.1	Eighteenth-century southwestern Indian Ocean.....	96
15.1	The queens and kings of the Koryō (918–1392).....	204
16.1	Geographical locations in early modern south India mentioned in the main text or footnotes.....	211
16.2	Genealogical chart of the Nayakas of Ikkeri showing the (probable) family relations of Queens Chennammaji and Virammaji, with rulers in capitals and dotted lines indicating adoptions.....	212
16.3	Genealogical chart of the Nayakas of Madurai showing the (probable) family relations of Queens Mangammal and Minakshi, with rulers in capitals and dotted lines indicating adoptions.	214
16.4	Details of murals depicting Queen Mangammal of Madurai receiving the royal sceptre from the local goddess, Minakshi, through a priest (left) and attending a divine wedding with her grandson, Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayaka (right); Unjal Mandapa (central ceiling), Minakshi Sundareshvara Temple, Madurai.....	218
16.5	Statues thought by some scholars to depict Queen Virammaji of Ikkeri and her adopted son, Somashekara Nayaka III; Rameshvara Temple, Keladi.	219
16.6	Book covers of (from left to right) Mahādēvi, <i>Vīra śīrōmaṇi keḷadi kannamma rāṇi</i> (in Kannada); Gayatri Madan Dutt and Souren Roy, <i>Chennamma of Keladi: The Queen Who Defied Aurangazeb</i> (in the Amar Chitra Katha series); Nāka Caṇmukam, <i>Rāṇi maṇkammā</i> (in Tamil).	225
19.1	Genealogical chart of the Nasrid dynasty in late medieval Granada.....	256

Tables

15.1	Queen dowagers of the Chosŏn (1392–1910).	200
15.2	Queen mothers of the Chosŏn (1392–1910).....	201

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THE “HONOURABLE LADIES” OF NASRID GRANADA: FEMALE POWER AND AGENCY IN THE ALHAMBRA (1400–1450)

ANA ECHEVARRÍA and ROSER SALICRÚ I LLUCH

The noble (*al-hurra*) and chaste (*al-tahira*) lady (*al-sultana*) Fatima—daughter of the Prince of the Muslims Abu ‘Abd Allah [Muhammad II], son of the Prince of the Muslims [Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad I] al-Ghalib bi-Llah,—was the relic of kings’ women, the guardian of the order of the emirate, a protection of family ties, link to sanctity, fulfillment with that which is good, shelter for the [noble] families, an emulation of her virtuous ancestors in the integrity of her spirit, her far-reaching aims, solid faith, the raising of the veil [from those things that separate men from God,] the effectuation of determination, and the realization of patience.¹

This beautiful eulogy, dedicated by Ibn al-Khatib to the honourable lady Fatima, mother of sultan² Isma‘il I (1314–1325) of Granada and regent of her grandsons Muhammad IV (1325–1333) and Yusuf I (1333–1354), is comparable to the words written by vizier Ibn ‘Asim for princess Umm al-Fath, Muhammad IX’s (1419–1427, 1429/30–1431/32, 1432–1445, 1447–1450, 1450–1453) wife, whose portrait emphasizes her sincerity, and her astounding knowledge in distinguishing and understanding social ranks and hierarchies.³ The fact that Fatima and Umm al-Fath

were daughters of the Nasrid bloodline, and therefore could transmit the rights to the throne, was one of the qualities praised by both authors.

Genealogy and Lineage

A number of powerful women had influence in Granadan politics during the first half of the fifteenth century. Of the seven princesses and ladies who assumed power in some guise in the emirate of Granada, the southernmost point of the Iberian Peninsula where Islam was still vibrant, most of them are known only by their first name. This poses an immense problem for unearthing information about those powerful but forgotten women. Since the 1990s research about the emirate of Granada—known in Christian sources in several languages as the “Kingdom of Granada”—has undergone a revolution both in primary sources and in their interpretation. Some sultans who had not yet been identified because of the absence of systematic sources for their reigns were set in context, and the critical genealogical trees of the Nasrid dynasty were drawn for the first time.⁴ However, dynastic history was not as generous with the female characters, who hardly appeared in Arabic chronicles and other genres,

¹ Ibn al-Khatib (*Ihata*, vol. 1, 379), cited in Boloix Gallardo, “Beyond the Haram,” 394–95.

² “Sultan” (“the one who has the power”) and emir (“amir al-muslimin,” “prince of the believers”) were the usual titles used by the Nasrid dynasty of Granada, the last Muslim dynasty in the Iberian Peninsula (1238–1492), in their records. Viguera Molins, “El soberano, visires y secretarios”; Alarcón y Santón and García de Linares, *Los documentos árabes diplomáticos*, 1–150.

³ Ibn ‘Asim, *Junnat al-rida* (translated into Spanish by Fernando Velázquez Basanta), cited in Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la*

Alhambra, 93–94; Marín, *Mujeres en al-Ándalus*, 591. For Ibn ‘Asim’s biography, see Morales Delgado, *Biblioteca de al-Andalus*, s.v. “Ibn ‘Asim al-Qaysi.”

⁴ Thanks to the records found mostly in the Archives of the Crown of Aragon (hereafter ACA), and studied by Salicrú i Lluch, *El sultanat de Granada i la Corona d’Aragó*, including the first almost complete genealogy (495–97); the study was completed with some Arabic sources by Vidal Castro, in “Historia política.” Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*, 279–80, includes the first genealogy with all female members of the dynasty, but it is still incomplete.

Figure 19.1 Genealogical chart of the Nasrid dynasty in late medieval Granada.

and whose letters and records had been lost to historians. Decades of research in the archives have now yielded results, and the figures of these women have begun to emerge. One of the difficulties is the use of a small number of first names for the princesses born in the Nasrid family in the fifteenth century, systematically called Fatima, Umm al-Fath ("mother of Victory"), and 'Aisha,⁵ without mentioning their filiation. Written renderings of these names could vary depending on the Arabic scribes, but also when they were transcribed into romance languages following a phonetic system that was strange to their uses: for instance, Umm al-Fath might be written "On Malfath"⁶ or "Omalfata." Only through a

comparative analysis of different sources can we finally locate these ladies and understand their position in the line of succession. Women coming from other lineages or countries were given more descriptive names related to nature (Zahr al-Riyad and Zoraya being the best known) but, again, we miss all the information about their origins in their names. Even the fact that names related to nature were used by wives and concubines of slave origin seems to fail in some cases.

The complicated genealogy of the Nasrid house, especially during the fifteenth century, is partly explained by the requirements of dynastic marriages. These had three main determining factors: the Islamic tradition of marrying the paternal cousin or uncle;⁷ parity between spouses, established by *maliki* tradition—that is, the need for a father to marry a daughter with a husband of the same social and economic status;⁸ and, finally, the extraordinary situation of Granada, almost isolated from other Islamic lands, which increased the need to establish alliances through marriage (*musahara*) with clans and lineages within the emirate, or

⁵ Other names, such as Maryam, Jadiya and Zaynab, also appear, but mostly for the previous century. Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*, 139–50. The use of names from the first century of Islam had already been noted by Arié, *L'Espagne musulmane au temps des Nasrides*, 368; and Marín, *Mujeres en al-Ándalus*, 61–65, 70–73.

⁶ Salicrú i Lluch, *Documents per a la història de Granada*, 188–93, 197–98, docs. 149, 151, 153, 157. This is an exception among the names: the first part of the *kunya* (*umm*) was often used, but seldom in combination with *al-Fath*, except among the Nasrids. Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*, 145.

⁷ Ladero Quesada, *Granada*, 51.

⁸ Marín, *Mujeres en al-Ándalus*, 418.

else, though only rarely, with other neighbouring sultanates. In this, Nasrid emirs differed from their subjects, who practised monogamy more and more, and who married outside the wider family quite often.⁹

Endogamy was widely practised since the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba (929–1031).¹⁰ Dynastic links occur in almost every generation of the Nasrid house, but even more so at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Emirs often married the daughters of other emirs from different branches of the Nasrid family: for instance, Muhammad VI (1360–1362), husband of Yusuf I's (1333–1354) daughter, tried to remove his brother-in-law, Muhammad V (1354–1359, 1362–1391), from the throne. Nasrid wives, in the same way as their predecessors and many of their Christian female contemporaries, took an active part in the fight for power, as we shall see, funding and counselling their sons and relatives.¹¹ The influence of Nasrid princesses within courtly circles came from their origin, from their fortune, and from their role as regents during minorities.

Marrying into the family guaranteed parity. But sometimes other relationships were more desirable, either for economic or for political reasons. At times of political upheaval the marriages of the daughters and sisters of the emirs had a higher political relevance than during the strong, peaceful days of the Umayyad Caliphate in order to ensure loyalties and support inside and outside the family.¹² Viziers and high-ranking officials of royal administration could be more powerful and even richer than the rulers themselves.¹³ Some of their lineages were traced back to the conquest, and some were older than the Nasrids; others were their clients, such as the Banu l-Sarraj, Banu l-Mawl, Banu Ashqilula, Mufarrij, and Venegas.¹⁴ The contact of these families with their Christian counterparts favoured the choice of their sons as prospective emirs when the Castilians chose to support a particular

branch of the Nasrid dynasty. Dowry and bridal gifts built up the heritage of these women, whose properties extended throughout the rich lowland area of Granada (la Vega) and within the capital city. Alternatively, sometimes the daughter of a vizier climbed in status to become one of the wives of the emir—never the first one, but important enough. If she bore him sons, she became almost as powerful as the Nasrid wife, and her son might eventually succeed his father. Her access to power was granted by her family ties, because she was the symbol of the relationship between the Granadan aristocratic elite and the emir. By the reign of Sa'd (1454/55–1462, 1463/64–1465) the involvement of the Nasrids with these families was so strong that most of the important families in the emirate, including the dynasty, were relatives.

The absence of marriage ties with the great Mediterranean emirates is notable in this period, except for the marriage of Yusuf II (1391–1392) with Khadija, daughter of Abu l-Abbas Ahmad II of Tunis, mentioned only in a dubious Castilian source, the *Historia de la Casa Real de Granada*.¹⁵ Exchanges of women were contemplated, as we read in the chronicle of Enrique III of Castile (1390–1406) that the sultan of Turkey had sent him a member of his household as a present.¹⁶ It is true that most members of the harem are unknown to us due to the lack of sources, but a Marinid, a Hafsid, a Mamluk or a Turkish princess might have made her way into local records, though none of them has been found for the moment.

Why would Nasrid princesses be invested with a particular role in the transmission of succession within an Islamic emirate? The issue does not relate to traditional ideologies of power in Western Islam, as succession from father to son—not necessarily the first-born—was widely accepted and did not need the female line to legitimize itself.¹⁷ Agnatic succession was the usual procedure in Granada. Those cases in which the female line prevailed are related to conflicting periods; although Fatima, Muhammad II's (1302–1309) daughter, seems to have been the reason for Isma'il I to be proclaimed, it should not be forgotten that Isma'il's father was also Muhammad's cousin, and a Nasrid prince by

⁹ Shatzmiller, *Her Day in Court*, 62, 68.

¹⁰ Marín, *Mujeres en al-Ándalus*, 539–42.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 589–90.

¹² *Ibid.*, 548–49; Rubiera, "La princesa Fatima bint al-Ahmar"; Echevarría, *Knights on the Frontier*, 22.

¹³ Especially important during this period were the Banu Sarraj, who eventually bought properties from the sultans during an economic crisis in Granada. Seco de Lucena, "Cortesianos nasrís del siglo XV"; Vidal Castro, "Historia política"; Echevarría, "Abencerrajes, nazaries y las fortalezas de la frontera granadina."

¹⁴ Seco de Lucena, "Cortesianos nasrís del siglo XV"; Viguera Molins, "El soberano, visires y secretarios," 330–31.

¹⁵ A discussion of this detail in Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*, 86.

¹⁶ After the battle against Tamerlane. "Y enbio una su muger del Morato al rey de Castilla, presentada con otras joyas que le enbio". López de Ayala, *Corónica de Enrique III*, 106.

¹⁷ Emphasis in the female lineage was already common from the time of the Hammudi caliphs, at the beginning of the eleventh century. Viguera Molins, "Estudio preliminar," 31.

blood, so in this case, when succession failed and the Castilian attacked the Granadan frontier, Isma'il was a natural choice without breaking the agnatic succession.¹⁸

However, by the fifteenth century the situation of the emirate had changed, and the female line had a new relevance in the context of the candidates chosen by Castile to be supported in the struggles between the Nasrid princes. Yusuf IV ibn al-Mawl (1431–1432) was the grandson of Muhammad VI (1360–1362), again from another branch of the Nasrid dynasty, but whose mother's name is never even mentioned. This time it is clear that the rights passed through this princess were enough to consider Yusuf as a legitimate candidate from the Castilian point of view—given that he swore the oath of allegiance to Juan II—but his lack of success in Granada confirms to some extent the prevalence of the agnatic line.¹⁹ While in Castile female rights to the throne were easily acknowledged, even if they were handled by the woman's closest male relative,²⁰ this was more difficult to achieve in Granada.

When the Castilians were to support Abu l-Hasan 'Ali, known as Muley Hacén (1462–1463, 1465–1482, 1483–1485), against his father, Sa'd, the double line of succession—from both a Nasrid prince and princess—makes the case very similar to that of Isma'il I.²¹ Therefore, it may be concluded that, despite the importance given to Nasrid motherhood in dynastic succession, female rights alone were never enough to justify the appointment of a particular prince.

Forgotten Biographies

"Becoming visible," "forgotten sultanas," and "emerging sultanas" are some of the expressions that have defined the absence or discovery of sources dealing with female rulers or consorts

¹⁸ Vidal Castro, "Historia política," 122–23. This seems to contradict Acien Almansa's statement about the coexistence of two different succession criteria in Granada, both agnatic and cognatic: Acien Almansa, "Reino de Granada," 52. This very attractive theory was advanced by Rubiera Mata, "El vínculo cognático en al-Andalus," and followed by Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*.

¹⁹ He descended from the prestigious Banu al-Mawl family on his father's side, but probably his best asset was being the brother-in-law of vizier Ridwan Venegas. Salicrú i Lluch, "Nuevos mitos de la frontera"; Echevarría, *Knights on the Frontier*, 21–22, 28–29.

²⁰ Ohara, "La formación de la memoria," 110–12.

²¹ He was a descendant of 'Ali, son of Yusuf II (1391–1392), through his father, and son of Fatima, Muhammad IX's daughter. Echevarría, "Ismael IV y Muley Hacén," 133–35.

in the Islamic world in the past decades.²² Literature on them is scarce, to the point that even their dates of birth and death are generally unknown. If they managed to yield political power in spite of the societal prohibitions, they were included in the dynastical or geographical histories of their polities. But, if they just had a secondary role as mothers of the rulers' children or mere consorts, they were ignored in general history books. Gender-related narratives often served a politico-dynastic discourse, without necessarily distinguishing fact from fiction. Literary conventions and how to interpret anecdotes and female models were left to the readers, but the underlying moral was clear.²³ A few exceptions correspond to a number of biographical genres and some devotional literature. Of the first type, Ibn al-Sa'i's *Consorts of the Caliphs*, written shortly before 1258, was a sort of biographical dictionary of concubines and wives of the Abbasid caliphs completed with an appendix of consorts of viziers and military commanders. Ibn al-Sa'i had also written a twin work, *Lives of those Gracious and Bounteous Consorts of Caliphs Who Lived to See Their Own Sons Become Caliph*, now lost. As historian and propagandist of the Abbasids, Ibn al-Sa'i praised the feminine virtues of the ladies in the caliph's household, especially their merits in the fields of culture and patronage. While the first entries are very brief—sometimes only a few sentences—the Saljuq princesses and late Abbasid ladies deserve longer biographies that speak of their qualities, their piety and good works, and especially their patronage of mosques, Sufi lodges, and burial places.²⁴ Some of these wives were relatives of important rulers, such as Qatr al-Nada (d. 900), granddaughter of the Egyptian ruler Ibn Tulun,²⁵ whose anecdote reveals that her origins were considered as advantageous as her marriage to caliph al-Mu'tadid, or the example of Saljuqi Khatun (d. 1188), daughter of the Anatolian Qilij Arslan and wife of the caliph al-Nasir, who built her own shrine and a Sufi lodging.²⁶

In al-Andalus, after the caliphate, women appear in the autobiography of the emir 'Abd Allah of Granada (end of the

²² The terms have been used by Hambly, *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, 3–27; Mernissi, in her famous but now superseded study about sultanas, *Sultanes oubliées*; and Salicrú i Lluch, "Sultanas emergentes."

²³ Cortese and Calderini, *Women and the Fatimids*, 4.

²⁴ Ibn al-Sa'i, *Consorts of the Caliphs*, xix–xxiii. Cortese and Calderini, *Women and the Fatimids*, 23, observe the same for Fatimid ladies.

²⁵ Ibn al-Sa'i, *Consorts of the Caliphs*, 98–99.

²⁶ Ibid., 116–19.

eleventh century). The succession of his ancestor Badis was decided by his female family entourage, who seem to have played an important role in the last years of Zirid rule in the city.²⁷ Three women (a cousin, the vizier's wife, and Badis's wife) rally the support of the Berbers, the palace staff, and the emiral family respectively. Their failure to promote the heir results in a disaster. A similar turn is found in the Arabic literature concerning the Nasrid princesses. The best known of them correspond to the fourteenth century and are included in Ibn al-Khatib's famous histories of the Nasrids entitled *Kitab A'mal al-a'lam* and *Ihata*, and other essays on government or health, as Bárbara Boloix Gallardo has recently studied.²⁸ The style resembles Ibn al-Sa'i's *Consorts of the Caliphs*, in that the biographies of thirteenth-century princesses are extremely brief, while those contemporary to Ibn al-Khatib receive more attention. His biography of Fatima, Muhammad II's (1273–1302) daughter and mother of Isma'il I, is the most extensive of this volume, according to the political role she had in Granada during the minorities of her two grandsons. The fact that she was a wise, elderly woman was underlined in the references to her advice to viziers and other courtly figures.²⁹ Other female members of the court are described at the time of their convenient marriages or as mothers of the following emirs, notoriously the pious Bahar, Isma'il I's concubine, mother of Yusuf I (1333–1354), or Yusuf I's concubine Rim, who plotted to overthrow her stepson, Muhammad V.³⁰

The chaos within the Nasrid dynasty during the fifteenth century undoubtedly affected literary patronage, and historical sources about the dynasty and its women become increasingly rare. Even so, the role of Nasrid ladies in the political scenery was as important as before, though many details are still unknown. Chronologically, we find Umm al-Fath (I), Yusuf III's (1408–1417) widow and mother of Muhammad VIII (1417–1419, 1427–1430); Umm al-Fath (II), sister of Yusuf III, and Zahr al-Riyad, wives of Muhammad IX; and Fatima, Muhammad IX's sister and mother of Yusuf V.

Finally, Muhammad IX had no known male heir, just three daughters: Umm al-Fath (III), married to Muhammad X (1453–1455/56); Fatima;³¹ and 'Aisha, married to Abu l-Hasan 'Ali.³² All their husbands became emirs in due time. Their biographies can be written only with a combination of romance and Arabic sources. Castilian chronicles, archival material from the Crown of Aragon, and Arabic literary works, including a couple of fragmentary chronicles, provide precious details about these princesses.

Diplomacy across the Frontier: A Gendered Issue?

Umm al-Fath (I) must have married Yusuf III in the last years of his life, for he spent most of it imprisoned in Salobreña by his younger brother, Muhammad VII (1392–1408). The emir must have sought a Nasrid marriage as well, in order to secure the allegiance of the other family members. Umm al-Fath (I), who started the traditional name patterns of the princesses of Granada, could well have been the daughter of one of his uncles or brothers. But this lady's activities really started only when her husband died, in order to support—together with the vizier, Yamin—the succession of her son, Muhammad VIII, who was only eight years old, and lost his throne only fourteen months later.³³ The efforts to replace her son took several years, which he spent in prison. But, once he succeeded, both his mother, Umm al-Fath, and his brother, 'Ali, started negotiations with the Crown of Aragon, directly with King Alfonso the Magnanimous (1416–1458) and his wife, Queen María. These contacts have left abundant correspondence about the attempt to win the royal family for Muhammad VIII, since relations between his rival, Muhammad IX, and the Crown of Aragon had been extremely good.³⁴ The contents of the embassies themselves are unknown, but the answers of

27 'Abd Allah bin Buluggin, *Al-Tibyan*; Martínez Gros, "Femmes et pouvoir," 376–77.

28 Boloix Gallardo, "Beyond the Haram".

29 This princess has deserved much attention due to her role as mother of Isma'il I and tutor of Muhammad IV. Rubiera, "La princesa Fátima bint al-Ahmar"; Boloix Gallardo, "Mujer y poder en el reino nazarí de Granada."

30 Note that these two were not legal wives. Boloix Gallardo, "Beyond the Haram," 395–99.

31 Following family traditions, she might have been married to Yusuf V, but for the moment there are no sources to confirm this. Such an alliance and link between Muhammad IX and Yusuf V would explain many of the reactions of the latter when he claimed the emirate in 1445. Echevarría, *Knights on the Frontier*, 30–32.

32 Seco de Lucena, "Más rectificaciones a la historia de los nasrís"; Echevarría, "Ismael IV y Muley Hacen," 130.

33 Salicrú i Lluch, *El sultanat de Granada i la Corona d'Aragó*, 141–64; Vidal Castro, "Historia política," 151–53. Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*, 100, mixes up Yusuf II and Yusuf III.

34 Salicrú i Lluch, *El sultanat de Granada i la Corona d'Aragó*, 213–25.

Queen María to Umm al-Fath are interesting from different points of view.³⁵

First, the *intitulatio* of the addressee: there is no such title as "queen" (*malika*) in the tradition of al-Andalus and Granada.³⁶ Women were only consorts of the rulers, and did not hold political power by themselves, even if they were part of the ruling dynasty, so therefore the concept of queen-ship as exercised by Christian queens can hardly be applied to them.³⁷ This may be the reason why the word "sultana," whose meaning involved the office of exerting power, was not used in Arabic sources for the Nasrid ladies of Granada except in the case of Fatima bint Abu 'Abd Allah.³⁸ The manoeuvres used by women—both official wives and concubines such as Rim—in the political sphere to promote their children to the throne have been described by María Jesús Viguera Molins as "motherly political hyper-performance," and by medieval sources as "power greediness" or "female conspiracies."³⁹ Attempts to direct the succession towards their sons have normally been seen as a negative, female attribute. But, in the context of succession to an Islamic polity, it was a game played not only by the ladies of the harem but also by many of the high-ranking officials in the court, and more so in Granada, where many of them were related. The titles used for women of the Nasrid dynasty as addressees of Christian diplomatic correspondence were similar to those employed for Christian queens, as "the highest princess" (*muḡt alta princessa*), combined with "the honourable lady"—literally,

"the free lady" (*sayyida al-hurra*).⁴⁰ The title *sayyida al-hurra* has been understood as referring primarily to the nobility of their status, and has been traced back to the Yemenite queens in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁴¹ In the Iberian context, the first mention of this title in combination with others dates only to some years later, in the epitaphs of al-Hurra al-Fadila (d. 1162), Ibn Mardanish's sister, and two ladies of the mid-twelfth-century Banu Ganiya family in Palma de Mallorca: al-Hurra al-Jalila (fragmentary) and al-Hurra al-Jalila Umm al-Imam.⁴² The fact that it was also used by other noblewomen in Granada⁴³ may indicate other meanings. It is possible to argue that, further than nobility, *al-hurra* referred to the legal capacities accorded to free women in Islamic law, among them education and, especially, the capacity to act—i.e. the individual's effective ability to carry out juridical acts, to exercise rights, and to assume obligations.⁴⁴

Once married, free Muslim women enjoyed substantial freedom subject to their husband's approval, limited only by their need to respect their home confinement.⁴⁵ When dealing with the wives or sisters of emirs, these limitations became

³⁵ This correspondence has been completely underestimated by Earenfight, *The King's Other Body*, who does not include relations with Granada among María's remarkable performance of royal duties.

³⁶ Other female titles, such as "sultana," "khatun" or "shahan," were confined to the eastern side of the Islamicate world. The rule of women was generally not accepted by maliki lawyers, on the grounds that masculinity (*dhukuriyya*) was necessary to undertake the roles of warrior or ruler. Viguera Molins, "A Borrowed Space," 167.

³⁷ Ibn Khaldun, probably quoting Ibn al-Khatib's *al-Ishara ila adab al-wizara*, states that, in several principles of the law, "women are considered among the entourage of men, they [women] are not addressed explicitly but implicitly, both because they don't have the right to command and because they are placed under the authority of men". Ibn Khaldun, *Muqqadimah*, vol. 1, book III, chap. 26. Ibn al-Khatib gave his opinion about the position of women in the court in several books: Boloix Gallardo, "Beyond the Haram," 390.

³⁸ See note 1.

³⁹ Viguera Molins, "A Borrowed Space," 172; and "Estudio preliminar," 27, 31.

⁴⁰ All the consorts who are mentioned in the correspondence of Queen María of Aragon are addressed with both titles, which is also mentioned in the Portuguese and Castilian chronicles, and in Arabic records and wills. Combination with "the highest princess" makes the difference between the Nasrid consorts and other noble ladies.

⁴¹ Daftary, "Sayyida Hurra"; Marín, *Mujeres en al-Ándalus*, 41, 44–45; and, following her, Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*, 209. One may wonder if this shi'ite queen and her name—not properly an honorific title—were known and wanted to be evoked in fifteenth-century Sunni Granada. Sources for the career of Sayyida Hurra were two historical works on the dynasty, by Naj al-Din 'Umara bin 'Ali al-hakami (d. 1174) and Idris 'Imad al-Din (d. 1468), but this is not strange because she was a ruler in her own right.

⁴² Martínez Núñez, "Mujeres y élites sociales en al-Andalus," 324–25.

⁴³ Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*, 202–12, mentions this title being used in the address of royal letters. Possibilities are given in *ibid.*, 216–18.

⁴⁴ De la Puente, "Juridical Sources for the Study of Women," 96–98. De la Puente establishes a difference between the free Muslim woman (*hurra*) and other attributes such as *muhsana*, which refer to a chaste (literal translation), respectable, pious and discreet woman who carefully observes the precepts of religion and is confined to her home's limits. Only the female relatives of Yusuf III were given this epithet. Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*, 215.

⁴⁵ This aspect was basic. Going out to carry out market transactions or other dealings was considered counterproductive for the honour of the dynasty, as al-Maqrizi pointed out when speaking of pre-Fatimid Egypt. Cortese and Calderini, *Women and the Fatimids*, 31.

almost non-existent, as their position was secured by their husbands' position and their marriage contract.⁴⁶ Women's property rights were widely respected in Granada, ranging from slaves to houses, commercial products, plantations, and orchards. Islamic inheritance laws played a major role in guaranteeing women's status as independent property holders,⁴⁷ so much more in the case of the powerful Nasrid princesses. Their capacity to act in legal matters was supported by the personnel of their household or their powerful relatives, who could act as their representatives, as shown in the different transactions in which they were involved.⁴⁸

The role of queens consort in the negotiation of family marriages is considered as one of the prerogatives of medieval Christian queens; at least their participation was common understanding. But, in Islamic polities, the formal arrangement of marriages corresponded to the father, and there is no apparent contradiction to this rule among the Nasrids. On the contrary, diplomatic correspondence was a field open to Nasrid princesses, although the extent to which we now analyze. Women were normally absent in political negotiations, which pertain to the activities that define the role of the head of state. Only in cases when a Christian queen acted as regent or lieutenant of the king, or as a ruler in her own right, do the sources show diplomatic action on her part. However, informal power or mediation vis-à-vis the king was more common, and regarded as an effective tool in diplomatic exchanges. Business conducted at the same time through diplomatic correspondence to the king, the queen, and the heir, and even sometimes to some of the most knowledgeable powerful men in government, was common in the Middle Ages. Identifying these interlocutors was one of the main activities of ambassadors, and all the members of the royal family might be engaged in negotiations depending on their rank and protocol. These arrangements worked both for Christian Iberian kingdoms and for Granada.

The earliest, most remarkable example of diplomacy appears in the context of the negotiation of truces. In 1411,

while Castile was leaving the fight against Granada to consolidate Fernando of Antequera's rights to the Crown of Aragon, all Iberian kingdoms except Portugal had signed truces with Granada. However, João I of Portugal (1385–1433), never having signed a truce, was starting preparations for the conquest of Ceuta in 1415, a stronghold on the south shore of the Strait of Gibraltar, vital for the expansion of the Portuguese in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Granada needed to ensure peace on this side. Muslim merchants wanted warrants to cross the areas patrolled by the Portuguese fleet. Such an important aim was sought by all means possible, and the royal chronicler Gomes Eanes de Zurara described negotiations between Yusuf III and João I, the ambassadors, and Prince Duarte, and, more importantly, between two royal ladies: Umm al-Fath and Philippa of Lancaster. Zurara's chronicle was certainly biased: the title, *Chronicle of the Capture of Ceuta*, already suggests an agenda against Islam. The depiction of João I and Philippa as a devout, zealous royal couple who placed religion before any other consideration has already been analyzed, and the scene describing the encounter of Umm al-Fath's ambassadors and Philippa only contributes to this image.⁴⁹

Umm al-Fath addressed the Christian queen in a familiar way—according to the *Chronicle*⁵⁰—explaining how she knew well how a wife's requirements could move her husband's heart, and she requested her help in securing peace from her husband. Umm al-Fath offered Philippa rich gifts as part of her daughter's trousseau: "As she had a daughter to marry soon, she could see [Umm al-Fath's] gratitude for her goodwill, for she promised to send [Philippa] the best and richest

⁴⁶ De la Puente, "Juridical Sources for the Study of Women," 100–102.

⁴⁷ Shatzmiller, *Her Day in Court*, 3–5, 10.

⁴⁸ Seco de Lucena, "La familia de Muhammad X el Cojo," 386–87. In this testimony of the distribution of Zahr al-Riyad's properties after her death, the mention of her daughter's and her own representatives, all members of the famous family of judges Banu Salmun, confirm that their business were taken care of by members of the courtly elite.

⁴⁹ Zurara, *Crónica da Tomada de Ceuta*, 132–34; cited by Silva, "Felipa de Lancáster," 219. It doesn't seem that Umm al-Fath was part of the embassy, as Silva maintains, but that she sent letters to the queen, headed by the same titles as the ones later preserved in the ACA, edited and studied by Salicrú i Lluch, *El sultanat de Granada i la Corona d'Aragó*; Salicrú i Lluch, *Documents per a la història de Granada*; Salicrú i Lluch, "Sultanas emergentes".

⁵⁰ This coincides with the friendly treatment used by Queen María of Aragon, as we shall see, who called the same Omm al-Fath "[l]a muyt alta princessa La Horra On Malfath, muller del muyt alto Albulhageg, rey de Granada, quondam relictas, nuestra muyt cara et muyt amada amiga": Salicrú i Lluch, *Documents per a la història de Granada*, 191, 193. As can be easily seen there, this is actually the usual rethoric language of "friendship" employed in diplomatic correspondence towards Islamic rulers and officers, similar to the language employed for Christian addressees. On the different treatments used by this Queen María for her addressees, see Narbona Cárceles, "Que de vostres letres nos vesitets," 4.

dowry that was ever given to any princess, be it Muslim or Christian."⁵¹ According to the chronicler, Philippa was offended by what she considered an attempt to buy her mediation. Her religious feelings, her national pride—England is said to be a nation that disdained all the infidels—and the wish not to interfere in her husband's policies moved her to respond rudely to the ambassadors, who left sure of the queen's bad feelings towards them:

I do not know, she said, what ways do your kings have with their wives but, among Christians, it has never been told of any queen, nor any other great princess, who interfered in her husband's deeds, as for those cases, they have their own councils where they decide their actions according to their will. And their wives are best when they choose to ignore those matters that don't correspond to them, as they know that their husbands, together with their councillors, take good care of everything that attains to the state's honour, more than they [the queens] may know. It is true that they are not so removed from everything that they cannot ask for anything they feel like, but these requirements should be so, that their husbands should have no reason to reject them. And those who do otherwise are not wise, nor discreet.⁵²

Finally, Philippa proudly rejected the gifts that she had been offered for her daughter.

Was the informal power of a Christian queen really so different from that of a wife of the emir of Granada?

The understanding of the role as mediator that Umm al-Fath acknowledged responds to the same principles as were

outlined by Lois Huneycutt in her groundbreaking study about Matilda of England: "The power of a medieval queen rested on the perception of influence, rather than any institutional base ... The queen who had no income of her own and no influence over her husband could have no allies at court and thus little control over her own fate."⁵³ In Portugal, consort queens operated on the same premises, and, even in England, Philippa's namesake, her grandmother Philippa of Hainaut, was conceived as a model of a "persuasive wife and good counselor" to Edward III, according to Earenfight.⁵⁴

Other attitudes were more realistic, such as the behaviour of Philippa's sister, Catherine of Lancaster, who, being sole regent of Castile on behalf of her son Juan II (1406–1454) after Fernando I of Aragon's (1412–1416) death, had to negotiate truces with Yusuf III, Umm al-Fath's husband, in 1417. Some months later she had to correspond with Yusuf III on behalf of two knights.⁵⁵ But, of course, in this case the Castilian queen really was a political figure in her own right. Unfortunately, the disappearance of the chancery letters prevents us from knowing whether they were addressed only to the minor King Juan II or also to his mother, as regent and head of the Castilian royal council.

Apart from the Portuguese chronicler's agenda, the scene speaks of certain practices, which were confirmed in subsequent messages from Umm al-Fath to María, queen of Aragon. In the correspondence they exchanged in 1427 the former was already a widow, writing on behalf of her son, Muhammad VIII, while María was the lieutenant of the kingdom.⁵⁶

The exchange of gifts as a common diplomatic practice was naturally acknowledged by both ladies. María supported the Granadan ambassadors, who were working on behalf of the young emir, who was trying to recover his throne. However, the letters exchanged between Umm al-Fath and María were not directly related to political businesses but, rather, to more practical issues: one provided safe conducts

51 "Pois que ela tinha uma filha para casar em breve tempo poderia ver o agradecimento pela sua boa vontade, pois lhe garantia enviar-lhe o melhor e mais rico enxoval que nunca fora dado a nenhuma princesa moura ou cristã." Zurara, *Crónica da Tomada de Ceuta*, 134.

52 "Eu não sei, respondeu ela, a maneira que os vossos rex têm com suas mulheres, mas, entre os cristãos, não é bem contado a nenhuma rainha, nem a outra nenhuma grande princesa de se tremeter nos feitos de seu marido, quanto em semelhantes casos, para os quais eles têm seus conselhos onde determinam seus feitos, segundo entendem. E as suas mulheres quanto melhores são, tanto com maior diligência se guardam de quererem saber o que a elas não pertence, cá conhecem certamente que seus maridos, com seus conselheiros têm maior cuidado do que à honra de seu estado pertence, do que o que elas podem conhecer. Verdade é que elas não são assim afastadas de todo, que lhe não fique poder de requerer o que lhes praz mas estes requerimientos são tais, que os maridos não hão razão de lhes negar. E algumas, que ocontrario fazem, não são havidas por ensinadas, nem discretas." Zurara, *Crónica da Tomada de Ceuta*, 134.

53 Huneycutt, "Intercession and the High-Medieval Queen," 138.

54 Rodrigues, "The Queen Consort in Late Medieval Portugal"; Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe*, 206.

55 García de Santamaría, *Le parti inedite della "Crónica de Juan II,"* 373.

56 For the troubled situation of Muhammad VIII, see Salicrú i Lluç, *El sultanat de Granada i la Corona d'Aragó*, 213–29; for María's office as lieutenant in this period, see Earenfight, *The King's Other Body*, 43–70. The letters are published in Salicrú i Lluç, *Documents per a la història de Granada*, 188–93, 197–98; see also Salicrú i Lluç, "Sultanas emergentes."

for the ambassadors crossing Valencia and Castile; others dealt with captives and payments in which Catalan-Aragonese subjects were involved; and only the third mentions the real state matters that had been the core of the exchanges. In the latter, María congratulates Umm al-Fath for her son's success in retrieving his throne, and also mentions some gifts that Umm al-Fath had offered for her sister-in-law (she did not specify whether it was the queen of Castile, María, or the infant, Catalina). The gifts, this time accepted by the Catalan-Aragonese monarchs, had never arrived, but were duly appreciated. In exchange, María offered any goods that the widowed lady might want from Aragon.⁵⁷

Some presents from Umm al-Fath and his son to the kings of Aragon, Alfonso and María, arrived in fact during the following year, when the major Castilian royal frontier official had to give instructions to the local ones not to charge taxes to the messenger who was carrying them to the Crown of Aragon through the kingdom of Castile.⁵⁸ The exchange of gifts between Christian and Muslim ladies was, therefore, duly accepted in the Castilian and Aragonese courts, in contrast to Portugal.⁵⁹

Another distinctive feature of this correspondence is the acknowledgement of religious difference. María Narbona Cárceles has already noted Queen María of Aragon's farewells, in which she usually commended the other person to the Trinity or the Holy Spirit.⁶⁰ Obviously, given the polemic implications of such a sentence in the discourse between a Christian lady and a Muslim lady, in the letters for Umm al-Fath this goodwill is changed into a mention of God the Almighty, as it would be for any Islamic addressee.⁶¹

Further correspondence and new Arabic sources speak of the other branch of the Nasrids, that of Muhammad IX. Two wives of this emir are known to us: another Nasrid princess, also called Umm al-Fath (II), daughter of Yusuf II and therefore her cousin; and the vizier Abu Surur Mufarrij's daughter,

Zahr al-Riyad. Umm al-Fath (II)'s biography appears as part of her husband's political propaganda in Ibn 'Asim's *Junnat al-rida fi l-taslim li-ma qaddara Allah wa-qada*. This work, written around 1450, is a spiritual treatise following the tradition of a genre called "relief in the aftermath of misfortune" (*al-faraj ba'da al-shidda*). It is composed of exemplars on how to handle misfortune, trials, and tribulations, which happen around the figure of Emir Muhammad IX, Ibn 'Asim's patron. This kind of exemplary literature is used as a panegyric of the Nasrid ruler, who is presented as the innocent victim of the trials and tribulations, and therefore a worthy, legitimate sovereign. After a number of afflictions, present or future, in the sixth and last chapter of the book, Muhammad IX was punished for some sins, and, because of his patience in enduring those times, was given his wife Umm al-Fath. It is there that the image of the lady appears, in a similarly eulogistic style to the text by Ibn al-Khatib at the beginning of this chapter.⁶²

Umm al-Fath (II), daughter of Yusuf II, and therefore Yusuf III and Muhammad VII's sister, had been married to her cousin, according to Ibn 'Asim, and enjoyed the greatest honour among her husband's wives and relatives. Ibn 'Asim remarks that their relationship was much closer than was usual among cousins, and stresses the influence that each spouse had on the other, and how this lady gave advice not only to her husband but also to her brother Yusuf III, and even Muhammad VII. In the case of Muhammad IX this emphasis is especially significant, because he had deprived his nephew of the throne—Yusuf's III own son by the other Umm al-Fath (I)—so Umm al-Fath (II)'s acquiescence had a legitimizing effect, as a kind of sanction from the former branch of the family. To stress this continuity, Ibn 'Asim states that both honour and happiness derived from their common, illustrious ancestry. The same Nasrid spirit could be defined by firm beliefs, generous judgement, intelligence, and distinction. This first part of her description is clearly intended as a praise of the women of the dynasty, or, even more, of the dynasty itself.⁶³

The second part is devoted to her religious qualities, especially her charity and patronage of the religious sciences,

⁵⁷ Salicrú i Lluch, *Documents per a la història de Granada*, 192–93.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 217–18.

⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the destruction of the Castilian chancery records makes it impossible to contrast these practices. However, the nature of the goods given or lent by Catherine of Lancaster to her relatives—nuns in the convent of Saint Dominic in Toledo—confirms that the trousseau of Castilian ladies included a great number of Moorish-inspired textiles and household objects. *Colección diplomática de Santo Domingo*, 105–06. It is not necessary to say that the exchange of gifts between Christian and Muslim kings was diffused; for the Iberian Peninsula, see Salicrú i Lluch, "La diplomacia y las embajadas."

⁶⁰ Narbona Cárceles, "Que de vostres letres nos vesitets," 5.

⁶¹ Salicrú i Lluch, *Documents per a la història de Granada*, 198.

⁶² Jones, "Compassion and Cruelty," 38–39, 46, 48–49, 52–53, 68–69. The first to call attention to this source for the study of Nasrid princesses was Charouiti Hasnaoui, "La intervención de la mujer en la vida política granadina."

⁶³ Umm al-Fath's biography has been translated into Spanish by Velázquez Basanta in Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*, 94–95.

which she herself had studied. Patronage of mosques and religious endowments was a typical activity for the women of the ruling family, as it was in the Christian context too. As a model, the author chose Zubayda, wife of the Abbasid caliph al-Rashid, who had been considered a primary example of piety and patronage since the ninth century.⁶⁴ The time of Umm al-Fath's death is not recorded, but Muhammad IX's affliction and the memory of his first wife are again at the centre of the account.

The exemplary portrait of Umm al-Fath (II) contrasts with the image of Muhammad IX's second wife, Zahr al-Riyad, and what we know of her political endeavours. Zahr al-Riyad was the daughter of vizier Abu l-Surur Mufarrij—member of the famous clan of the Banu Sarraj ("Abencerrajes") clients of Yusuf III, and later his chancellor (*hajib*) and counsellor—and of another Nasrid princess (*sayyida al-hurra*), Gayat al-Munya, whose descent is still unclear.⁶⁵ Her marriage possibly was part of the alliance between Muhammad IX and the Banu Sarraj, who helped the former in the dethronement of young Muhammad VIII (1419) after releasing him from Salobreña. According to a Castilian chronicle, after this episode the former vizier of Muhammad VIII was executed by order of the emir's wife, so that Muhammad IX did not have to break his safe conduct. Although this is usually considered as the first mention of Zahr al-Riyad supporting her family network, the Banu Sarraj, inside the royal household, the fact

is that it could also have been an order issued by Umm al-Fath (II).⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the degree of political involvement demonstrated in this episode shows the real possibilities of agency on the part of a legal wife when it was required.

Zahr al-Riyad continued to exercise political influence in the court of Granada, though Christian sources show her as an intermediary between her husband or her family clan, the Banu Sarraj, and the Christian authorities. In this respect, it is important to distinguish which matters were considered in the letters between Nasrid ladies and Christian kings and queens. Princesses were the interlocutors chosen by kings only when the emir was away from Granada, or when a regency occurred; then the male counterpart of the widowed lady was a member of her own family, normally a vizier or a *hajib* (as is the case for Muhammad VIII and Umm al-Fath). In these two cases, going beyond the lady's possible influence in the courtly entourage, a secondary effect would be communication with the lineages that held the effective reins of power in Granada. The princess, then, had nothing to say about real politics, her role being intermediary, as Philippa of Lancaster rightly pointed out to Umm al-Fath.

The only case in which direct correspondence took place between a king—not a queen—and a Nasrid princess was in the exchange of embassies between Alfonso the Magnanimous and Zahr al-Riyad in 1430/31, in one of the most troubled periods of her husband's reign, and also at a time when Muhammad IX was facing war with Castile.⁶⁷ This exchange took place around September/October 1430, before the Battle of La Higuera (1431), when Muhammad IX was facing the Castilian candidate Yusuf ibn al-Mawl. Embassies were travelling between Muhammad, Alfonso, and Zahr al-Riyad, but the letters do not reflect the most secret

⁶⁴ Ibn al-Sa'i, *Consorts of the Caliphs*, 39, mentions her last pilgrimage out of the five she is supposed to have undertaken. Zubayda's biography does not appear in this work because it must have been part of the lost biographies of mothers of the caliphs. Abbott, *Two Queens of Baghdad*, 239–42, mentions her endowments for pilgrim hostels, mosques and more interestingly, her waterworks in Mecca and Medina. It would be interesting to know if Ibn 'Asim was referring only to genealogical similarities, or also to parallel charities in Granada.

⁶⁵ The suggestions of both Seco de Lucena, "La familia de Muhammad X el Cojo," 382, and "Nuevas noticias acerca de las Mufarrij," 300–302, and Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*, 96, of her being the daughter of Yusuf III should be taken with caution, because of the dates. If Yusuf III was in prison until 1408, and could not have children in order not to hinder his brother's family line of inheritance, it is difficult to see how Gayat al-Munya may have had a daughter who could marry Muhammad IX before 1419. It is also difficult to know whether Zahr al-Riyad was married to Muhammad IX before Umm al-Fath died. Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*, 94, suggests so, but there are no dates mentioned nor records to confirm this. Peláez Rovira, "La política de alianzas matrimoniales en el reino nazarí," adds very little to Seco de Lucena's research.

⁶⁶ See García de Santamaría, *Le parti inédite della "Crónica de Juan II,"* 213–14; Seco de Lucena, "Nuevas rectificaciones a la historia de los nasrís," 394–95, quoting another version of the same chronicle, which gives a much more important role to Muhammad IX's wife; and Salicrú i Lluch, *El sultanat de Granada i la Corona d'Aragó*, 166–67, who realizes that the two chronicles differed. Peláez Rovira, "La política de alianzas matrimoniales en el reino nazarí," 211–12, follows an outdated reading of the chronicle by Carriazo, showing the problems that the wrong identification of the Nasrid genealogy has brought for scholars. Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*, 100–101, discusses the problem but does not give a solution.

⁶⁷ For the context, see Salicrú i Lluch, *El sultanat de Granada i la Corona d'Aragó*, 276–79; Salicrú i Lluch, *Documents per a la història de Granada*, 275; Salicrú i Lluch, "Sultanas emergentes," 481; Echevarría, *Knights on the Frontier*, 47–56; and Vidal Castro, "Historia política," 160–65.

state issues. Another element should be taken into consideration: despite being a formal wife, Zahr al-Riyad did not have the same rank as Umm al-Fath, as her father was a convert, client of the Nasrids. Although Luis Seco de Lucena supposed that she had been manumitted and was a convert herself, there is no documentary evidence of this, and she may have still been a Christian. The Banu Sarraj themselves also kept a close relationship with Christians across the frontier. The letters by Alfonso were written as family letters between equals; in fact, the greetings exchanged with the lady used exactly the same formula as was used for members (kings and queens) of the Castilian royal family: "*Salut e amor, assín como a reyna para quien deseamos muyta salut e buena ventura.*"⁶⁸

The same treatment appears in a second set of letters written in the spring of the following year. In this case, Zahr al-Riyad was asking King Alfonso to intercede for her brothers, who had been imprisoned during a raid and taken to Xàtiva. Again, the embassy included letters and ambassadors from both Muhammad IX, who was negotiating a truce, and Zahr al-Riyad. Following her petition her brothers were released and sent to Granada without any ransom being paid.⁶⁹

Zahr al-Riyad died soon afterwards, probably in the wake of the events of December 1431, when her husband had to flee Granada for Málaga after Yusuf ibn al-Mawl had captured the city. Her inheritance gives us another glance at the female part of the family, but also tells us about her capacities to bestow her own properties on her daughter, another Umm al-Fath (III). As recent research shows, most of the Nasrid princesses owned properties around Granada. Zahr al-Riyad was no exception, and her daughter would inherit a hamlet called Sukhaira in this area, which probably served for the maintenance of her household. Her grandmother and uncles guaranteed that the inheritance would be settled.⁷⁰

The last Nasrid princess to appear in this generation was Fatima bint Nasr, or Fatima la Horra, Muhammad IX's sister, married to her cousin, Ahmad, Yusuf II's last son—again, a double Nasrid match. Fatima owned a number of orchards beside the Gate of the Potters (Bab al-Fakhkharin), one of the areas where the properties of the Nasrid families were concentrated.⁷¹ Fatima was trusted by her brother Muhammad IX, as he showed during his life, and her son, Yusuf, was chosen as one of the plausible successors because of this love between brother and sister.⁷² In 1431 Muhammad IX had fled Granada with Yusuf's sister and other members of the family; in 1438 Fatima had interceded between her brother and son to avoid armed confrontation. But, overall, she was a rich landowner, always vigilant about her businesses. Her correspondence with Queen María of Aragon in 1443 shows that Fatima was perhaps involved in business, possibly trading affairs, with Mudejars (Muslims living under Christian rule) in Valencia.⁷³ On the one hand, if there was an economic conflict, such as over payments or merchandise, Nasrid ladies could act as the free women they were, though they looked for the female agency of their Christian counterparts, an easier tactic in their cultural milieu. In choosing the Aragonese queen as an arbiter, she could avoid using a *wali* or legal representative, because both of them were free noblewomen. But, on the other hand, at that time Queen María was the lieutenant of the Catalan-Aragonese kingdom, as her husband, King Alfonso, was residing permanently in Naples, and her proximity would also expedite this business.⁷⁴ In this case, then, probably this choice of interlocutor was due to gender reasons, to the habit of Nasrid princesses to appeal to the Catalan-Aragonese queen—following Umm al-Fath (I)'s habit—but also to practical reasons in terms of the governing of the kingdom.

⁶⁸ Salicrú i Lluch, *Documents per a la història de Granada*, 260. Compare with the letter addressed to his aunt, Catherine of Lancaster, in 1418: "Reyna muyt cara e muyt amada madre senyora. Nos el Rey de Aragon e de Siçilia vos enviamos muyto a saludar como aquella por quien querriamos muyta salut, honor e buena ventura." Echevarría, *Catalina de Lancaster*, 198.

⁶⁹ Salicrú i Lluch, *El sultanat de Granada i la Corona d'Aragó*, 276; Salicrú i Lluch, *Documents per a la història de Granada*, 272–77. The treatment for Muhammad IX was also "nuestro caro amigo," and similar greetings were sent in very affectionate letters.

⁷⁰ Seco de Lucena, "La familia de Muhammad X el Cojo," 384–87; Peláez Rovira, "La política de alianzas matrimoniales en el reino nazarí," 209.

⁷¹ She bought it from the son of vizier Abu l-Hasan 'Ali ibn Salim in 1425. Seco de Lucena, "Documentos árabes granadinos II," 133–40; Seco had not yet identified this princess when this article appeared, in 1944.

⁷² He is mentioned as so in Ibn 'Asim's *Junnat al-rida*, vol. 1, 34. Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*, 90.

⁷³ Salicrú i Lluch, *El sultanat de Granada i la Corona d'Aragó*, 371–413; Salicrú i Lluch, *Documents per a la història de Granada*, 410–11. A possible trade debtor of hers was linked with Alexandria, which suggests a possible connection with the Ripoll family, as one of his members, Galip, conducted business in Egypt. For the Ripolls' contacts in Alexandria, see Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta, "Vassall del rei, mercader del soldà."

⁷⁴ Salicrú i Lluch, "Sultanas emergentes," 482.

Part of Muhammad IX's conflictive reigns and succession arose because he had fathered only daughters, whom he married to the potential candidates to the throne. While Umm al Fath (III) was married to Muhammad X (1453–1455/56), Muhammad VIII's legitimate heir, two more princesses, Fatima and 'Aisha, were ready for useful alliances. Although they are usually considered daughters of Umm al-Fath (II), it is not impossible that their father had other wives. Fatima lived long enough to be married to another member of the family, or of the Banu Sarraj. Although there is no evidence on this point, the usual practice would speak in favour of her marriage to Yusuf V (1445–1446/47), Fatima bint Nasr's son, thus supporting his claims to the succession as well.⁷⁵ Finally, 'Aisha was married to Abu l-Hasan 'Ali (Muley Hacén), who would also become emir of Granada.⁷⁶ The sisters, Fatima and 'Aisha, shared the ownership of several pieces of land, some of them bought or inherited from other female members of their family.⁷⁷ The descent into civil wars, first during Muhammad IX's reign—Yusuf V's rebellion in 1445—and, after his death, between Muhammad X, Sa'd, and Abu l-Hasan 'Ali, shows that the traditional Nasrid system of marriage alliances had failed to secure a peaceful succession.

Conclusion

At this point it is legitimate to ask whether Muslim and Christian consorts were able to exercise the same kind of formal power or informal agency, or if the religious component of law mattered when power was concerned. We hope to have shown that Nasrid princesses in Granada had their capacities restricted by their sole role as consorts, with very few exceptions, such as the regency of Fatima bint Abu 'Abd Allah. The fact that they did not use the feminine title of any of the words used for their male partners speaks of their lower rank in the courtly hierarchy, even in the cases when they were daughters of the dynasty themselves. In that case, their prestige was linked to their male relatives, as we have seen.

Succession did not consider the cognatic line, as has been demonstrated. Normally, when mothers were considered, it was through a double bloodline, and only some of the emirs supported by the Castilian kings, who had different

legal premises, legitimized their claims through their female ancestry. Female excellence constituted praise to the honour of the Nasrid dynasty, just as it had under the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs; the models of women portrayed in dynastic histories and other courtly literary genres are repeated from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries.

A number of features that characterized medieval queens consort in the European kingdoms were shared by the Nasrid consorts.⁷⁸ Having Nasrid blood granted the first place in the ranking of the wives of an emir. They could exercise informal political influence at court and be transmitters of dynastic claims, or even sanction the succession in different branches of their dynasty. They gave birth to the legitimate children who would ensure the perpetuation of their dynasty and educate them during their first years. They could act as intermediaries and peacemakers in conflicts between parents and sons (or nephews), which were quite common due to the stress that polygamy exerted over the Islamic system of succession. They could eventually augment their intercessory role by engaging in diplomatic activities. And, of course, they had a role as examples of piety: being generous to the poor, founders and protectors of religious and welfare institutions, and patrons of the arts. All this generosity was possible because they owned great estates and valuable rents, which they could manage personally.

However, other tasks were impossible for Nasrid princesses, due to the different ideologies of power. Concerning government, they were not considered at the same level of their husbands, nor did they receive the homage (*bay'a*) equivalent to the royal consecration; they could not participate publicly in the council, sign royal charters issued by the emir, nor publicly perform political functions while the ruler was absent. Although they could give some of their slaves as concubines to their sons, they could not negotiate marriages for their children, not even with their husband's consent, because Islamic law gave that privilege to the father. And, more importantly, it is still too early to assume that they had the same powers of commanding, judging, punishing, and taxing the inhabitants of their lands as the Christian queens could exert over their vassals, or even if they could select the officials who ruled or managed their properties.

The correspondence between the Nasrid princesses and the Portuguese and Catalan-Aragonese queens shows

⁷⁵ Echevarría, *Knights on the Frontier*, 30.

⁷⁶ Echevarría, "Ismael IV y Muley Hacén," 130–31, 136.

⁷⁷ Seco de Lucena, "La sultana madre de Boabdil"; discussed by Boloix Gallardo, *Las sultanas de la Alhambra*, 92.

⁷⁸ For these features, we follow Rodrigues, "The Queen Consort in Late Medieval Portugal," 135–45; and Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe*, 187, 194, 206.

a deliberate choice of their gender counterparts as the preferred interlocutors, notwithstanding the times when their mediation was important to the diplomatic action of their husbands.⁷⁹

Gender complicity was a diplomatic tool to exploit. But the real question is whether these Nasrid “honourable ladies”

were sufficiently empowered to exploit it by their means, or whether they had to collaborate to shape the diplomatic strategies in which they were involved. The examples that we have been able to present demonstrate that invisibility did not mean impossibility; and that, even under the shade of the Alhambra, there were real possibilities for female agency.

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⁷⁹ Salicrú i Lluçh, “Sultanas emergentes.”

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