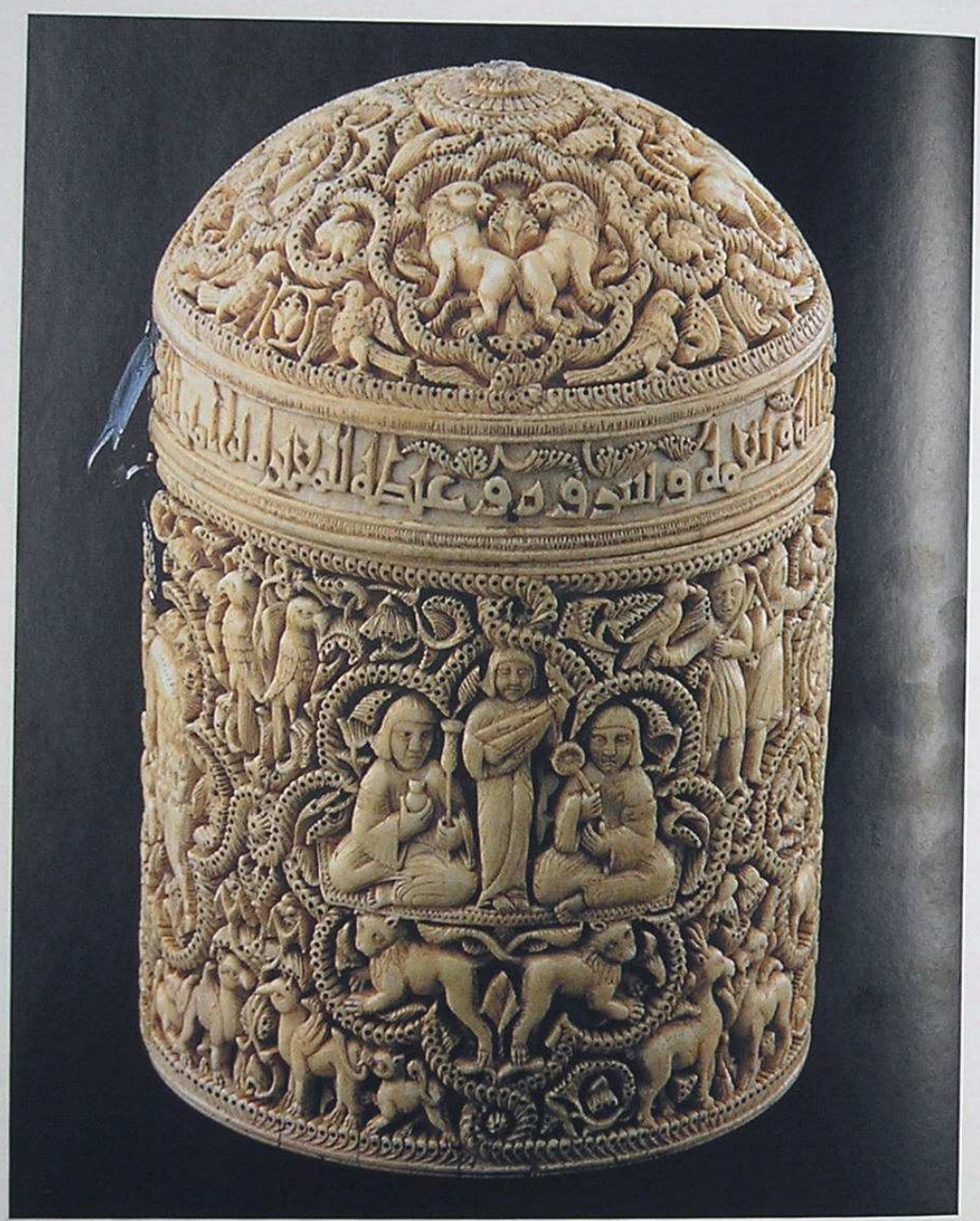

Fig. 74. The al-Mughira pyxis (cat. no. 11).

Enclosed in Ivory: The Miseducation of al-Mughira

FRANCISCO PRADO-VILAR

"It cannot be too often repeated, that the person who gives up his time to the study of this book, must not be satisfied with the superficial beauties of the images by which it may attract, but must search out the depth and hidden tendency of its fables, extracting from every proverbial expression the truth which it conceals, and giving to every word its moral import. … [A] treasure awaits the researches of the person who carries his inquiries deeper than the superficial examination."

(Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Kalila wa Dimna*)[1]

٣٥٧

In the general dynamics of the history of al-Andalus, there is nothing particularly eventful about the year 357 / 967-968. The caliph al-Hakam II (r. 961-976), who had remained without an heir until his mid-forties, by then had two little sons: 'Abd al-Rahman, aged six, and Hisham, aged three. Around the time of their birth, the caliph had presented their mother – his favorite concubine (*haziya*) named Subh – with several ivory boxes in celebration of her fertility.[2] One of them, now in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid, bears an inscription that specifically mentions the heir to the throne (cat. no. 4): "The blessing of Allah upon the Imam, the servant of Allah, al-Hakam al-Mustansir billah, Commander of the Faithful. This is what he ordered to be made for the noble lady, the mother of Abd ar-Rahman, under the direction of Durri as-Saghir in the year 353 [964]."[3]

As mother of the future caliph (*umm walad, umm 'Abd al-Rahman*), Subh was a powerful figure at court. She had among her closest allies the vizier Ya'far ibn 'Uthman al-Mushafi and a young personal administrator (*wakil*), Ibn Abi 'Amir, better known to history as al-Mansur, who a year earlier, in 967, had been appointed guardian of 'Abd al-Rahman and director of the mint.[4] Not everyone, however, rejoiced at Subh's fertility and political influence. During the long period of dynastic uncertainty brought about by al-Hakam II's inability to produce an heir, a group of high officials seemed to have placed their preferences for the succession on his younger brother, al-Mughira, then aged 18. Even after the birth of 'Abd al-Rahman and Hisham, the supporters of al-Mughira continued to harbor hope that al-Hakam II, who was afflicted with chronic health problems, would die before the coming of age of either of his sons, thus opening the possibility for an insurrection in favor of his brother. At this historical juncture, an ivory pyxis was crafted for al-Mughira at the workshops of Madinat al-Zahra (fig. 74).[5] Around its lid runs the following inscription:

"Blessings from God, goodwill, happiness, and prosperity to al-Mughira, son of the Commander of the Faithful, may God's mercy be upon him; made in the year three hundred and fifty-seven."[6]

Both for its formal virtuosity and for its conceptual sophistication, this work is one of the most magnificent pieces of ivory carving ever produced. Uneventful as it might have been, the year 357 / 967-968 becomes noteworthy in the history of al-Andalus just because of the creation of the al-Mughira pyxis.[7]

A remarkable document contained in Ibn Hayyan's *Muqtabis*, the *Annals of al-Hakam II* by Isa al-Razi, opens a window into the life of the Andalusian court just three years after the date of the pyxis. Two main political themes emerge from the mass of court events, public ceremonies, diplomatic reports, correspondence, and panegyrics compiled by al-Razi: the question of succession and, in more general terms, the exaltation of the Umayyad Caliphate of al-Andalus above its eastern rivals. By far the greatest concern within palace walls was the assertion of al-Hakam II's legitimate line of succession, which, after

the premature death in 970 of his first-born son, 'Abd al-Rahman, was solely embodied by Hisham.[8] The constant mention and praise of Hisham in the *Annals* of al-Razi betray the necessity to address an unstable situation – one that was made even more precarious by Hisham's poor health and the presence of supporters of al-Mughira within the circle of power.[9] The rhetoric of court poets was enlisted to strengthen the position of the young heir in verses that were clearly directed at an internal audience of possible dissenters:

"Intelligence made him transcend childhood when
he hadn't even reached eight years of age,
And, before he grew up, he deserved to be called
'mature.'
Why wouldn't he be able to become the heir while
still a child, if he was bestowed with Divine favors
and his father nominated him?
Let us honor him who has the imam as his father!
Let us honor him who has the imam as his son!"[10]

The privileged ceremonial context for the performance of these panegyrics was the celebration of the *'Id* festivals, especially the *'Id al-Fitr* (Festival of the Breaking of the Fast). On those occasions, the caliph held sumptuous and elaborate receptions attended – in carefully choreographed order according to rank – by all the members of the royal family, government officials, military commanders, foreign tributaries, and, sometimes, the defeated enemies of the caliphate. The *'Id* ceremonies constituted universal public oaths of allegiance to the caliph in which all the attendants who gathered around him extolled his unique religious status, dynastic heritage, and military might. The panegyrics composed by court poets for those events amplified these themes in beautiful metaphors – veritable works of art, which could be considered, as Stetkevych has observed, "part of the lavish decoration and splendid ornament that contributed to the magnificent spectacle of the caliph's *Id* and victory celebration…[and] part of the royal insignia and the iconography of power."[11] Among the rituals performed during the *'Id al-Fitr* were the exchanging of gifts among relatives and friends and the presentation of important gifts to the ruler.[12] One day in 357 / 967-968, al-Mughira was presented with a precious object that reflected in ivory many of the themes and imagery he had heard in the voices of poets and had seen around him during the *'Id* ceremonies. Like the figures interwoven in the poetic fabric of panegyrics, the images inscribed on this gift carried a political message – one that combined general themes with others of a more personal nature, and masterfully deployed metaphor and simile to create multiple levels of meaning.

This pyxis is a small object meant to be held and attentively perused at close range. The inscription circumscribing the lid directs the eye to wend its way sequentially, from right to left, through the four large medallions carved around its body. Starting from the court scene – above which the inscription probably began in the original position of the lid – images increase in dynamism and narrative specificity, evolving from emblematic and metaphorical modes of signification to narrative and allegorical ones.[13] The visual program thus conceived presents the fluid structure and evocative power of a *qasida* in which standard poetic images, while maintaining their generic meanings, are welded into specific discourses to address a particular audience and event.[14]

Princes and Lions

"Prince Hisham was sitting in the western hall, known as the hall of the princes, and this was the first time that he held a reception … This reception was similar to that of his father, the caliph. He had a demeanor of profound gravity and appeared to be relaxed. He looked like his father on the day on which he had held his first public reception at the beginning of the reign of his own father [ʿAbd al-Rahman III] on the *Id al-Adha*."[15]

Flanking a musician and sitting on a throne sustained by lions are two characters of identical body type and similarly dressed in the *tiraz* that marks their social rank (fig. 74 and cat. no. 11b). Only the objects they carry differentiate them: the one occupying the right side of the throne holds the symbolic attributes of the caliph – a branch and a bottle – yet the absence of a beard renders him as someone who has not yet reached adulthood.[16] A study of the ceremonial practices of the Andalusian court allows us to identify this character as al-Hakam II's designated heir at the time the pyxis was created, 'Abd al-Rahman. To his left sits a figure that appears to be his younger brother, Hisham, who is cast here in a supporting role holding a ceremonial flabellum.[17] In featuring the enthroned heirs without the presence of the caliph, this composition closely reflects the staging of a particular type of ceremony that was regularly performed at the court of al-Hakam II, the dual reception. Al-Razi reports that in 974, on the occasion of the celebrations of the *'Id al-Adha* (Festival of Sacrifice), the caliph held a lavish reception in the eastern hall of Madinat al-Zahara, while simultaneously, his designated heir, the nine-year-old Hisham, held a similar reception in the western hall.[18] According to the chronicler, the protocol of dual receptions had become customary at the Andalusian court by that time. Al-Hakam II himself had been introduced publicly by his father 'Abd al-Rahman III (r. 912-991) in a similar fashion.

The reception held by the prince replicated closely, in form and meaning, the one held by the caliph, the main difference being that the former was performed in the western hall primarily by the children of high officials. After the adult officials finished paying their respects to the caliph in the eastern hall, they proceeded to the western hall in order to show their allegiance to the prince. Al-Razi describes this processional sequence:

"Then they came to salute Abu-l-Walid Hisham, son of the Commander of the Faithful, group after group and class after class. Even his paternal uncles, the Brothers, and all their entourage [came to salute him]."[19]

Among the Brothers mentioned here by the chronicler was al-Mughira. We can imagine him moving to the western hall to pay tribute to his nephew, who appeared there enthroned in full regalia mimicking his father. In the passage quoted at the beginning of this section, al-Razi describes the scene of the enthroned heir in a fashion that provides a perfect textual gloss for the court scene in the medallion. Taking into account that Al-Razi's text refers to Hisham's first public reception, one could speculate that the scene on the pyxis similarly commemorates in ivory 'Abd al-Rahman's own first public reception, held a few years earlier. When al-Mughira contemplated this scene on the pyxis, he would have recalled the political meaning of the ceremony it represented, along the lines stated by J. Safran: "The caliph formally identified his heir and secured his recognition through the device of a dual reception. … The Id ceremonies provided a perfect opportunity to establish the next line for the dynastic inheritance of the caliphate since they already serve as a forum for the affirmation of allegiance to the caliph and, by extension, to the dynasty."[20]

In light of these texts, we can conclude that the court scene in the pyxis is an iconic representation of one of these receptions, inscribed here in ivory as a permanent reminder to al-Mughira of the stability of the dynasty ensured by the caliph's sons and of the oath of allegiance he had sworn to them on those occasions. Framed by a medallion, 'Abd al-Rahman and Hisham appear dignified, gazing eye to eye as if to compose a dynastic tandem that conveys visually the unity and endurance of the line of succession.

But the political impact of the dual receptions was not only visual, but also aural. Poets intensified the symbolic power of these ceremonies by creating metaphorical glosses that commented on their meaning. A *qasida* recited by a poet during the aforementioned *'Id al-Adha* of 974 glorifies the scene of Hisham on the throne with a series of metaphorical amplifications.

"Then, they proceed to visit the heir to the throne
… [the Prince] extended towards them the hand of
the lineage of al-Hakam,
a hand to which both nobility and glory are
subjected,
and they hastened to kiss it rejoicing greatly.

like thirsty beasts approaching a pond.
Their submission before such majesty was
Like that of cranes staring at a hawk."[21]

This double register through which political propaganda is publicly articulated – the ceremonial image and the panegyric voice – is embodied by the pyxis. The object offers al-Mughira a visual reminder not only of what he saw, but also of what he heard, that is, not only the political image, which is described by the chronicler, but also the panegyric voice, which was uttered by the poet. The latter is reflected primarily in the motif of the lions. The small lions supporting the throne that appear axially connected to the caliph's sons link this scene with the emblematic lion-bull combat of the contiguous medallion (cat. no. 11c), visually recalling the metaphors employed by poets during the *'Id* ceremonies to refer to the strength of the ruler and his heirs:

"He is a caliph who begets brave lions,
whom he brings as honorable successors.
May sovereignty over the earth ever remain
with them!"

This is what a poet said in the late 9th century about the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil on the occasion of the celebration of the circumcision of one of his sons.[22] Similes of this kind were also developed by poets at the court of al-Hakam II, where the caliph was often compared to a lion that cannot be "awakened by hyenas" or that "buries its claws into the jugular vein" of its enemies – a poetic image that is beautifully rendered on the pyxis with the deeply carved teeth of the lions tearing energetically through the skin of the bulls (fig. 75).[23] Al-Razi reproduces a composition recited during the *'Id al-Fitr* of 974 that brings this imagery to the fore:

"Your Lord gave you the possession of their land,
With all its goods, and riches.
His lions killed their lions,
His cubs killed theirs."[24]

Fig. 75. The al-Mughira pyxis (cat. no. 11), detail featuring lion-bull combat.

In the pyxis, the cubs that support and signify the caliph's sons become, in the contiguous medallion, mighty lions that bury their claws into their enemies. According to al-Razi, these verses – which constitute a forceful exaltation of the dynastic continuity and military might of al-Hakam II's lineage – were recited in the presence of al-Mughira. On that particular occasion, they were directed against the enemies of the Andalusian Umayyad Caliphate.[25] We might presume that through the pyxis given to al-Mughira a few years earlier, a similar message had been addressed personally to him, carved in ivory.[26]

The Lion and the Bull

"The caliph al-Hakam was so filled with anticipation ... that, on that day, he came to the hall where the class was taking place to contemplate his son receiving instruction. When he saw him there so elegantly seated, with a smile on his face, so attentive and peaceful, he rejoiced greatly."[27]

Descriptions of the education of the young prince in the *Annals of al-Hakam II* offer endearing snapshots of courtly life. Al-Razi reports how the caliph carefully planned the instruction of Hisham, selecting teachers and even overseeing the renovation of the chambers where classes were to be held.[28] An avid intellectual in his own right, al-Hakam II had also benefited, alongside his younger brother al-Mughira, from the elite education provided by the prominent scholars assembled at the court of their father, 'Abd al-Rahman III. Hadith, law, and literature were among the subjects taught to the young princes, mostly with the aid of dictionaries and anthologies written by their preceptors.[29] The most celebrated anthology produced in Córdoba at the time of 'Abd al-Rahman III was Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's *al-'Iqd* (The Necklace) – a monumental work composed of twenty-five books dealing with a wide variety of subjects such as "the qualities and duties of the ruler," "generosity and the bestowing of gifts," "wisdom contained in proverbs," and "the psychology of man and his relation to the animal world."[30] *Al-'Iqd al-farid*, as it came to be known, represented the culmination of the constant flow of Eastern literature to the Andalusian court – a transfer of learning that was actively promoted by the Umayyads in order to place themselves as the rightful inheritors, protectors, and patrons of Islamic culture.[31] Fittingly, although most of the literary sources gleaned by Ibn 'Abd Rabbih to compose *al-'Iqd al-farid* were of eastern origin, he added to them a panegyric history of the Andalusian Umayyads that explicitly transformed the work into a celebration of their patronage. For its encyclopedic character, as a compendium of the wisdom found in Arabic literature, and for its exaltation of Umayyad history, with the famous *urjuza* dedicated to the military triumphs of 'Abd al-Rahman III, *al-'Iqd al-farid* was likely one of the resources used for the instruction of the caliph's sons, namely the future al-Hakam II and al-Mughira. In fact, among the books sought out by Ibn 'Abd Rabbih to gather didactic stories for *al-'Iqd al-farid* were several "mirrors" for princes, notably *Kalila wa Dimna*, the most popular book of this kind in the Islamic world.[32]

Anyone acquainted with the fables of *Kalila wa Dimna*, as al-Mughira probably was, would find very familiar motifs in the pyxis that was given to him when he turned 18. Seen through the mind of a prince, the apparently random decorative animal imagery of the pyxis can be framed in more specific terms, revealing on its surface several emblematic images commonly associated with the cycle of illustrations in *Kalila wa Dimna*: the lion and the bull (figs. 75 and 76), the affronted goats (figs. 77 and 78), the parrots and the falconer (cat. no. 11b, upper interstices of central medallion).[33] Like the generic illustrations of the tales found in manuscripts and on murals, the images on the pyxis serve as visual tokens to recall specific episodes. They are what Ernst J. Grube, in his study of the early illustrations of *Kalila wa Dimna*, aptly termed core-images: "We know that the core-images for the stories ... have survived practically unchanged for over a thousand years ... Just as religious doctrine makes use of a precise set of instantly recognizable images, the animal fables use images to communicate clearly and instantly, 'political' or 'didactic' points. And just as with religious iconography, the substance of the message is clear. If one knows the text or the story, one instantly recognizes a pictorial interpretation of a given story, the image becoming a symbol rather than being a mere illustration."[34]

The tales of *Kalila wa Dimna* teach princes lessons on how to tackle situations of misguided political ambition, intrigue, and deceit at court. Some of the politically delicate scenarios outlined in the stories would have sounded quite familiar to those acquainted with the recent history of the Andalusian Umayyad dynasty, thus making them especially effective from a pedagogical point of view.[35] The longest fable in the collection of Ibn al-Muqaffa' –

Fig. 76. Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Kalila wa Dimna*, lion killing the bull. c. 1350. – Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS. Persan 376, fol. 74v.

"the story of two friends, whose mutual esteem and unreserved familiarity a false and designing companion succeeded in changing into sentiments of hatred and revenge"– seems to be particularly pertinent in this context.[36] It relates how a lion king and his comrade the bull respected each other and maintained a balanced supremacy over the animal world. But the lion's court advisor, a jackal called Dimna, became jealous of the bull and started to spread rumors about the bull's intentions to kill the lion. These rumors fueled an increasing suspicion between the two former friends that led to a fight and the eventual murder of the bull by the lion (figs. 75 and 76). If al-Mughira had been educated at court listening to the parables of *Kalila wa Dimna* and seeing illustrations of it, this episode would probably have come to his mind when he observed the medallion with the lion-bull combat – one of the most ubiquitous core-images associated with *Kalila wa Dimna* from the 8th century on. By representing the violent outcome of this fable of ambition and deception, the designer of the pyxis could have intended to show young al-Mughira the tragic consequences of listening to the evil advice of those plotting to have him conspire against his brother's lineage.

Recalling this tale, the caliph's brother could also have pondered the subtle implications of the dangerous political game in which he was enmeshed. Like al-Mughira in 968, the bull presented no immediate danger to the lion, only a latent one, which could eventually escalate through the intervention of conspirators. In the tale, the lion decides to kill the bull, not because of the bull's direct actions, but because of the rumors spread by a counselor who told the lion:

"I conclude, that, if he has not really the project of deposing you by treachery or violence, he is at least preparing the way for mounting the throne at your death; indeed his whole conduct furnishes strong evidence that he has this in view. Now it is an old saying, that a sovereign, who is surrounded by dangerous subjects, if he does not by a bold stroke put an end at once to the conspiracies which are forming against him, will at last fall victim to his own timidity and want of resolution."[37]

Prudently, the lion told Dimna that despite this warning, he did not think that the bull would attempt any direct action, to which the counselor responded that "it would be right, if not to take immediate and open precautions against [the bull], at least to be on your guard against that which he will excite others to do."[38] In conclusion, from the perspective of al-Mughira, this tale could have provided a powerful lesson about the necessity to thwart any conspiracy that was gathering, even indirectly, around him.

The figural hierarchy of the decoration of the pyxis – with the lion-bull combat as a central motif framed within a medallion, and smaller peripheral animal groups relegated to the interstices – visually recalls the narrative subdivisions of the tales in *Kalila wa Dimna*. In fact, the fable of the lion and the bull contains several shorter stories within its narrative frame that are recounted by characters as didactic anecdotes to illustrate specific moral teachings. Among them is the story of the ascetic and the robe, illustrated by the core-image of the two goats fighting (figs. 77 and 78) – a tale that serves to warn of the danger of interfering in quarrels that do not concern one.[39] The story of the parrots and the falconer, which teaches that "falsehood is severely punished as well in this world as in the next," could be recalled by the affronted parrots and falconers that appear on both sides of the medallion with the court scene (cat. no. 11b).[40]

The combination of dynastic iconography and moralizing imagery derived from *Kalila wa Dimna* that appears in the al-Mughira pyxis is not without precedents. We find the same fable of the lion and the bull in a cycle of frescoes from an 8th-century palace in Panjikent, the capital of the Sogdian Empire. As in the case of the al-Mughira pyxis, the rhetoric of the frescoes combines the representation of animal fables from *Kalila wa Dimna* with heroic and dynastic events – a programmatic strategy that surely spread later to other courtly commissions, both in monumental painting and in the portable arts.[41]

Furthermore, the imput of *Kalila wa Dimna* as a model for the visual configuration of the pyxis might

Fig. 77. The al-Mughira pyxis (cat. no. 11), detail featuring two affronted goats.

Fig. 78. Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Kalila wa Dimna*. Affronted goats illustrating the story of the ascetic and the robe. c. 1350. – Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS. Arabe 3467, fol. 15v.

have been, not only thematic and structural, but also hermeneutic. In addition to the idea of using animal imagery to convey a moralizing lesson to a young prince, *Kalila wa Dimna* might have inspired another aspect of the codification of the pyxis. As I have discussed in my earlier work, consideration of the semantic and structural relationship between the different units of the visual discourse of the pyxis is fundamental in order to gain insight into the subtle nuances of meaning within individual scenes and their complex allusions, even if at first sight they appear to be mere decorative stock imagery that can be found on other portable objects. In this respect, the frame of interpretation demanded by the pyxis constitutes a visual parallel to heuristic theories of textual interpretation that were widespread in the Arabic literary world and are clearly expounded by Ibn al-Muqaffa' in the preface to *Kalila wa Dimna*. He advises the reader to search for "the depth and hidden tendency of its fables," by paying close attention to context and detail:

"The reading of this book, without attending to its scope and aim, which often lying deep do not obtrude themselves on the mind's eye at first view, is as unproductive as the nut which has not been broken; or as the pains of a young scholar who … [wanted to know the secrets of language so he went to a friend who then directed him to a book]. He returned home and pored over the volume, but without paying any regard to the connection between its different parts, by which alone the various acceptations of the same word could be ascertained."[42]

The Palm Tree and the Eagle

"Oh palm, you solitary one, like myself, grow
In a land where you are distant from your kindred:
You weep, while your leaves inarticulately whisper,
Not being human in species, not able to speak:
Were you endowed with mind, you would weep recalling
Euphrates and the homeland of the palm tree grooves!
But you cannot return, and I was driven away
By the 'Abbasids' hatred, from my kindred!"[43]
('Abd al-Rahman I al-Dakhil)

With the delicate framing of a single luscious palm tree furnishing the center of the composition, the next medallion offers an evocative visual counterpart to the famous verses that 'Abd al-Rahman I al-Dakhil (r. 756-788), the founder of the Umayyad dynasty of al-Andalus, recited at the sight of the solitary palm tree growing in the middle of his garden (cat. no. 11d).[44] Transplanted from the East to al-Andalus, the palm tree became a symbol of the destiny of the Umayyads and an emblematic image of the legitimate transfer of caliphal power to the new land where it was to take root.[45]

More than any other composition on the pyxis, this image is directly dependent on the rhetoric of panegyrics in its sophisticated use of symbol, history, and legend to form an emblem of the political claims of the Andalusian Umayyads. Historical reelaborations of caliphal history from the perspective of the Andalusian dynasty were actively promoted in Córdoba at the time of 'Abd al-Rahman III, in order to give historical legitimacy to his bold political move of adopting the caliphal title in 929.[46] One of the chronicles commonly thought to have been composed at that time, known as *Akhbar majmua fi fath al-Andalus*, contains the first-person narrative of the fateful moment at which the first Andalusian Umayyad, 'Abd al-Rahman I, was recognized as the savior of the dynasty and the inheritor of caliphal authority. As the story goes, when 'Abd al-Rahman was only ten years old, he and his brothers were taken to see their grandfather, the caliph Hisham, at the Syrian palace of al-Rusafa. The siblings were received by Maslama, Hisham's brother, who upon seeing 'Abd al-Rahman, ignored the rest of the group and began to kiss him, weeping. Maslama then placed 'Abd al-Rahman on his saddle and at that moment, the caliph Hisham appeared and asked who the little boy was. "The event draws near, this is he," Maslama responded prophetically, to which the caliph replied, "Yes, I have observed the distinctive signs on his face and neck."[47]

This founding legend of Andalusian Umayyad genealogy seems to be visually recreated in this medallion, where al-Hakam II's offspring, 'Abd al-Rahman and Hisham, appear lifted on horses, recalling the prophetic moment at which the first 'Abd al-Rahman of al-Andalus was recognized by the caliph Hisham as the legitimate continuator of caliphal power. The original eastern al-Rusafa, where the prophetic anointment took place, and the new al-Rusafa founded in al-Andalus by 'Abd al-Rahman I as a sign of the fulfillment of the destiny foreseen by his grandfather, overlap in this scene, where al-Hakam II's sons, legitimate continuators of the dynastic line, extend their arms to grasp the "fruits of the caliphate." To be sure, their action points to a metaphor that gained currency in historical accounts of the disputes over succession that followed the death of the Prophet. Al-Tabari, for instance, puts in the mouth of some of the Companions of the Prophet references to the caliphate as a tree whose fruits needed to be collected at the right time, when they were ripe, and not before.[48] Considering al-Hakam II's uncertain succession, this analogy was especially fitting in two respects: on the one hand, because it involved the image of the palm tree, a symbol of the caliphal power that had been transplanted to al-Andalus by the founder of the dynasty, and, on the other, for its implicit warning against "plucking fruit" before it was ripe, a warning that could be understood as addressing those who might conspire against the caliph's infant heirs. The *Annals* of al-Razi give testimony to the use of the image of the "tree of the Caliphate" in the context of the panegyrics composed around the issue of succession. On the occasion of the *'Id al-Fitr* of 972, the poet Muhammad ibn Hasam al-Tubni recited the following verses in praise of Prince Hisham:

"Everyone wants to confirm him as heir to the throne; but, even if they did not want to do it, swearing allegiance to him would be their utmost duty. The branch of the Prophecy and that of the Caliphate are his trunk of origin: the shaft grows from these intertwined roots."[49]

Poets used the image of the tree in connection with the metaphor of the natural growing cycle in order to refer to the figure of the caliph in both its dynastic and its cosmic dimensions. In fact, not only did

the palm tree become part of the legacy of the Andalusian dynasty; so did 'Abd al-Rahman I's wish to nourish it and spread its seeds in order to recreate, in his new homeland, the luxurious eastern gardens he had left behind.[50] Following this tradition, the poets of the court of al-Hakam II celebrated the caliph as the source and guarantor of the fertility of the land by invoking images of growth and regeneration. The panegyrics composed on the occasion of the *'Id al-Fitr* ceremonies cast the figure of the caliph and his military victories within a cosmic cyclical pattern of decay and renewal, chaos and order. As Stetkevych points out, "The military-political situation … is aligned with and mythically incorporated into the agricultural (solar) seasonal cycle, so that the invigoration of the realm through military conquest is identified with agricultural or vegetable fertility."[51]

This is the metaphorical context that aids us in understanding the connections between the medallion of the palm tree and the adjacent medallion with the eagles (cat. no. 11d and 11a). In both, attempts to interrupt the natural cycle of growth are prevented. In the medallion of the palm tree, two quadrupeds are pulling two birds down by biting their tails in order to prevent them from eating the seeds of the tree, that is, from thwarting the growth of fruit. By contrast, the riders picking dates show the beneficial results of protecting the seeds and letting them fully mature into fruit. Correspondingly, in the next medallion, two youths are trying to steal eggs from three eagles' nests as dogs drag them down. The image of the eagle constitutes the heraldic counterpart to the palm tree in the mythology of the Andalusian Umayyads. The founder of the dynasty, 'Abd al-Rahman I al-Dakhil, was known as *Saqr Quraish* (the Eagle of the Quraish).[52] 'Abd al-Rahman III, who, as I have shown, appropriated and disseminated the legend of his ancestor to promote his newly adopted caliphal status, took up the eagle as his heraldic symbol. In the *Muqtabis*, Ibn Hayyan credits 'Abd al-Rahman III with the introduction of the figure of the eagle on banners at the time of the Osma military campaign in 934:

"In order to increase the virtuosity of the display, he multiplied the types of equipment and introduced a great variety of features on flags and banners, all of them formidable and beautiful. On that occasion, the eagle appeared for the first time on his banners. This was his invention because no sultan had it before. The populace looked at it with curiosity and delight, and it became the subject of unending commentaries."[53]

Continuing the tradition initiated by his father, al-Hakam II kept the eagle as his preeminent emblem, and had it featured profusely on his military banners and ivory boxes.[54]

If the medallion of the palm tree puts al-Hakam II's dynastic line in a historical/prophetic context, the medallion with the eagles frames it specifically within the problematic issue of succession that concerned the receiver of the pyxis. As is typical in didactic tales, this scene seems to construct its meaning by involving the reader/viewer (al-Mughira) in the dynamics of representation through the depiction of internal surrogates. Their actions relate to one aspect of al-Mughira's political position in the power struggle of the court, that is, his threatening potential to break the natural line of succession of the reigning caliph and take over the throne. *Kalila wa Dimna* again offers an interesting parallel for the understanding both of the didactic construction of this scene and of its political message. Another short story contained within the tale of the lion and the bull deals with a situation similar to the one visualized in this medallion. It relates how "a crow had made her nest in a tree upon a mountain, at no great distance from which was the hole of a serpent; and the serpent, as soon as the crow had hatched her young, came and took them away, and ate them."[55] Distressed by the situation, the crow sought the advice of a jackal friend and confided in him her plan to kill the serpent while it was asleep. But the jackal discouraged the crow, warning her that she might endanger her life with her impulsive attempt. "I will point to you a method," continued the jackal, "by which you may infallibly destroy the serpent, without any danger to yourself."[56] In the pyxis, the crow of the fable becomes the eagle, signifying the caliph, while the rapacious serpent becomes a youth reaching for eggs.[57] This story presents a delicate situation that was surely familiar to anyone at the Andalusian court in 968, when the line of succession was being threatened by the stealthy presence of an individual, the brother of the caliph, who could not be eliminated through direct action. Young al-Mughira could, however, be educated concerning the pitfalls of misguided ambition and courtly intrigue, and persuaded into warding off the conspirators around him, by using the most effective didactic tools available for the instruction of princes. In this spirit, he could have been handed an illustrated copy of *Kalila wa Dimna* and he could have been presented with this beautiful ivory pyxis.[58]

But if the pyxis shows the influence of *Kalila wa Dimna* in its effective employment of the rhetoric of didactic imagery, in the case of the medallion with the eagles, moralizing persuasion acquires darker tones. As I advanced in my earlier essay, the disposition of the youths, symmetrically stretching their arms to reach the eggs while quadrupeds pull them down, conjures up the outlines of an image that would be readily recognizable to any member of the caliphal court – that is, crucifixion surrounded by dogs, the ultimate punishment reserved for traitors in al-Andalus.[59]

Taslib + Tashbih

"Elevated in life and in death!
You are truly one of (life's) miracles.
It is as if the people around you,
as they stood,
Were seekers of your bounty
on the days of free giving.
…
You stretched out your hands
towards them in welcome,
As if you stretched them out in giving."[60]

Around the time of the creation of the al-Mughira pyxis, far away from Córdoba, in the streets of Baghdad, the poet Ibn al-Andari recited these verses in praise of Ibn Baqiyya, a vizier at the court of 'Izz al-Dawla Bakhtiyar (d. 977). Disconnected from the historical events that inspired it, Ibn al-Andari's poem seems simply to extol the popular adoration motivated posthumously by the vizier's generosity and good government. Yet, despite its ostensible celebratory character, the poem conceals a grim image at its center – one that is only partially revealed through allusions to figures of "elevation" and "outstretched hands." The event that motivated Ibn al-Andari to compose this elegy was none other than the ghastly sight of the vizier's dead body nailed to a cross. Although never mentioned directly, the visual spectacle of the crucifixion emerges from below the surface of the text as the central image of the poem.[61]

A striking, memorable, and ubiquitous public image of punishment in the medieval Islamic world, crucifixion (*taslib*) was often the subject of poets who made it the center of evocative visual associations based on simile (*tashbih*).[62] So common was its presence that one of the most important early theorists of the function of the poetic image in Arabic literature, al-Jurjani, specifically used the theme of the crucifixion to illustrate a type of simile based on the resemblance between the general outlines of two images. He mentions the poetic description of a crucified man whose appearance was "like a lover stretching himself, on the day of departure, to bid a departing person farewell, or like someone waking up from sleep, still languid, continuously stretching in laziness."[63] Al-Jurjani then proceeds to explain the process that brings about this simile, emphasizing the priority of the general composition over the details in the visual apprehension of the image. "Because the similarity of this form, being a generality [or a whole], occurs to anyone who sees a crucified man. The condition [the poet sets] which signifies the continuity and constancy of the state [of the awakening man], turns the similarity into one which does not occur [to the mind] without profound contemplation, a search into the wider realms of the imagination, and alertness."[64]

The process described by al-Jurjani is not limited to the study of rhetoric but accounts for a psychology of vision. Far from being restricted to the domain of language and literature, the impulse to draw similarities between images and establish metaphorical

associations based on resemblance runs deep in medieval Arabic civilization. This is particularly true in the context of courtly culture, where people were educated in the metaphorical conceits of panegyrics such as those recorded by al-Razi or of elegies such as Ibn al-Andari's poem of the crucifixion. Yet artistic productions of the court, namely ivory caskets – which shared rhetorical structure, emblematic imagery, and audience with courtly poetry – are hardly allowed the same levels of metaphorical elaboration.

An awareness of those connections led me to observe, in my first approach to the al-Mughira pyxis, a veiled allusion to a crucifixion in the medallion of the eagles. My analysis rehearsed closely the process of abstraction and association that, as al-Jurjani explained in the passage quoted above, was the procedure used by many Arabic poets to create metaphorical links:

"The extent to which the formulator of the pyxis' program played with al-Mughira's psychological stock of images can be further pursued by returning for a moment to the medallion with the eagles' nests. Its composition is organized in a strictly symmetrical fashion with a central vertical axis dividing the scene in two almost identical halves, a disposition common in textile decoration from where this iconography was probably taken. The result is a scene where the bodies of two men meet at the level of their respective backbones. If we make a formal abstraction of the overall disposition in its main outlines we obtain a large human figure with open arms in the shape of a cross flanked by two dogs. The associations of such an image were unmistakable for any person in al-Andalus, especially for members of the court and military officers. Crucifixion flanked by dogs (or a dog and a wild boar) was a famous punishment reserved for the rebels of the caliphate in Islamic Spain. This was the end that awaited al-Mughira if he decided to participate in any revolt against the legitimate succession."[65]

An interpretation seemingly so elusive and subjective is an easy target for positivists, always keen on policing thought. Even today, in a discipline such as the history of Islamic art, keeping one's analysis at a factual level and treading carefully on the path of the commonplace are often rewarded, while venturing into the domains of interpretation, in order to explore the ways the imagination was mobilized in times past, is generally met with skepticism. This attitude is not only intellectually shortsighted but also clearly anachronistic in that, in the name of a misplaced and disingenuous "modern" notion of scientific rigor, it denies the objects levels of meaning and allusion that were readily available and even actively sought by viewers in their original context of production.

In fact, an intelligent reading of sources, both textual and iconographic, allows for the reconstruction of a "period eye" with which to view these objects – an eye educated at court in the subtleties of visual rhetoric and political propaganda, filled with the images conjured up by poets and with the pageantry and memorable events unfolding within and around the palace. As I will show, for this ideal viewer – a category to which both the designer of the pyxis and al-Mughira belonged – seeing the resemblance to a crucifixion in the compositional structure of the medallion with the eagles was not only feasible but also probable.

There are no iconographic records of a crucifixion in al-Andalus, but its material configuration, its public function, and the impact it had on contemporary audiences can be retrieved through textual sources. One of the most horrifying multiple public crucifixions took place in 939 under al-Hakam II's father, 'Abd al-Rahman III. To make an example of ten soldiers who had fled from the battle of al-Khandaq (Alhandega), the caliph ordered them crucified on tall crosses, which had been set up before the doors of a citadel in Simancas facing the public square. In the *Muqtabis*, Ibn Hayyan inserts the remarkable eye-witness report of a merchant of perfumes who happened to be in town attending the market. This poignant account, transmitted to the historian by the merchant's own son, Yahya ibn Muhammad ibn Numan al-Attar, deserves a full citation:

"I was carried away by the crowd that was swarming to watch the crucifixions. I could not find my way

out of the multitude so I sat on the ground and tried to look away, for I almost lost my mind at the horror that was unfolding before my eyes. I gathered my possessions in a sack, where I put the merchandise I was planning to sell during the *Id* festival season. However, the horror engulfing that place and the screams of those being tormented made me fall into a faint, and a thief took advantage of the opportunity to steal my sack. When I recovered and realized that I had been robbed, I could not help meditating on the difference between my heart and the heart of that thief in terms of weakness and strength in the face of horror. That was a terrible day that frightened people for a very long time."[66]

Other sources report how prisoners were often beheaded, then nailed to a cross and left exposed in public places for months so that the population could insult them. In his *Tawq al-hamama* (Ring of the Dove), Ibn Hazm recalls the indelible impression one of these crucifixions left on his mind: "I well remember seeing him hanging on the cross in the meadows fringing the Guadalquivir; he was so riddled with arrows that one would have said he was a hedge-hog."[67]

As we can gather from these testimonies, public crucifixions in al-Andalus had a double function: punishment and deterrence. Punishment had a physical, immediate character: it was performed on the body of the victim through the infliction of excruciating pain (when the body was crucified after death, the event constituted a posthumous humiliation). Deterrence had a mental and prospective dimension: it was actualized in the conscience of the viewers through their confrontation with an image of suffering so powerful as to become irreversibly imprinted on their minds. The success of deterrence resided precisely in the ability of the prosecuting authority to stage a compelling iconic vision that would be unforgettable to those who were exposed to it. Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi explicitly states this aspect in the famous *urjuza* praising the military victories of 'Abd al-Rahman III, which he included in a book that, as I mentioned earlier, al-Mughira must have known well, *al-'Iqd al-farid*:

"How many apostates who have passed away, and how many religious hypocrites in the company of that wretch, who have enjoyed high rank,
Have then suffered a reversal of fortune, being crucified on a pole with their head placed upon its trunk,
"So how can the lawbreaker not take warning from the fate of one whom Caliphs have pursued?
Do you not see him raised up high in abjection, serving as a warning to whomsoever would see or hear?"[68]

In conclusion, in its function as a punishment, crucifixion was an act (meant to be experienced) while in its function as a deterrent, crucifixion was an image (meant to be viewed). It is this second dimension, that is, crucifixion as an image aimed at deterrence, that we find encoded in al-Mughira's pyxis.[69]

In order to approximate an idea of what the form of crucifixion described in the sources would look like when translated into a two-dimensional representation, we should turn to the iconographic record. Illustrations of crucifixions are rare in Islamic art but not completely absent. We can find them, for instance, in cycles of illumination associated with the Persian royal epic, the *Shah-nama*, especially the episode of the death of Zahhak chained to Mount Damavand. In a manuscript, now at the Bodleian Library (MS. Ouseley Add. 176), the artist recreates the crucifixion in stylized terms, enclosing Zahhak within a medallion-like frame, thus arriving at a formal solution that offers general similarities to the basic structural pattern of the medallion of the al-Mughira pyxis (fig. 79).

The reference to a crucifixion in the medallion is reinforced by the motif of the dogs, which, according to Arabic sources, were employed as part of the public staging of such punishment.[70] The use of dogs as props in public forms of torture was not an occurrence exclusive to the Islamic world. It probably originated in ancient times and survived well into the Middle Ages in Christian Europe, in the mode of hanging known as the "Jewish execution," often reproduced in prints (fig. 80).[71] In both the Chris-

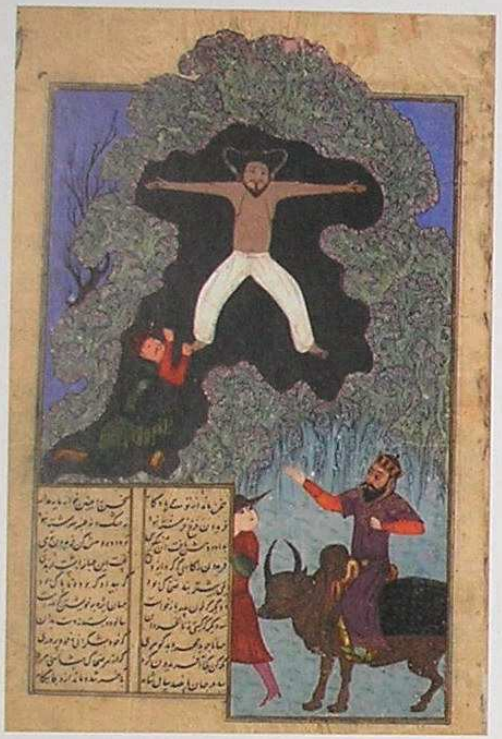

Fig. 79. Zahhak nailed to Mount Damawand, from the *Shah-nama*. c. 1435. – Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Ouseley Add. 176, fol. 30r.

tian and the Islamic cases, the motif of the dogs seems to have been employed as a way to increase the degradation of the victim by equating him to animals at the moment of death. If we mentally merge the Oxford Zahhak miniature with the German print, we may arrive at an idea of what the type of crucifixion that is described in Andalusian sources would look like when translated into a two-dimensional representation – something resembling the general outline and internal constituents of the image on the pyxis.

Once we have recreated in our minds the blueprint of an image that, although absent to us in the archaeological record, was most likely present in al-Mughira's psyche, we can relive the process through which the scene of the medallion transmutes itself before the viewer's eyes into a crucifixion. Such a process involves perception and memory along the lines expounded by al-Jurjani: "After investigation, recollection and activity of the memory, deep search of the self (*nafs*) for the images which it has known, and stirring of the imagination to look actively at the display images, and to recall those images which have remained absent."[72] As in the poem quoted at the beginning of this section, the spectral image of the crucifixion infiltrates the whole surface of the medallion as a lurking and menacing reminder of punishment and death. To recall the conclusion of my earlier study, "Through its multilayered articulation, this scene constitutes a masterpiece of pictorial allusion by synthesizing in one image two teleologically related events – the illegal action and its punishment. It presents al-Mughira with the snapshot of his very act of rebellion, through the simile of the youths stealing eggs, and, at the same time, confronts him with its lethal consequences (crucifixion)."[73]

In its complex and subtle rhetoric of allusion, this image is, uncannily, a literal visualization of the idea contained in the final paragraph of the tale of the lion and the bull in *Kalila wa Dimna*:

"Thus every one who seeks his own advantage by the injury of another, will find the means which he employs for the attainment of his purpose, converted into the instruments of his own destruction."[74]

Fatal Strategies: Subjects (in)to Objects

"Al-Mushafi then hastened to dispatch Mohammed Ibn Abi Amir with a body of troops to the residence of al-Mughira, with instructions to put him to death. Ibn Abi Amir found al-Mughira in complete ignorance of what had occurred; he told him of his brother's death, and how his nephew, Hisham, had been seated on the vacant throne. At the receipt of this intelligence, al-Mughira was terrified; but soon after recovering, he said, 'I hear and obey the orders [of

Fig. 80. "The Jewish Execution", woodcut from *The Desecration and Shame of the Picture of Mary by the Jews*, printed by M. Hupfuff. Strasbourg, c. 1514.

my master].' Not knowing how to act, Ibn Abi Amir sent a written message to al-Mushafi … The answer was, 'Seize him, and put him to death …' Al-Mughira was accordingly strangled."[75]

Fearing that Hisham's minority would embolden those supporting al-Mughira to place him on the throne during the vacancy of power that followed al-Hakam II's death in 976, a group of officials favoring the legitimate line of succession, led by the vizier al-Mushafi, ordered the assassination of the caliph's brother. Eight years after al-Mughira received the gift of the pyxis, the didactic warning carved on its surface had a tragic epilogue.

My interpretation of the pyxis as a hostile warning to al-Mughira, with the consequent implication that it originates in the faction defending al-Hakam II's legitimate line of succession, is not only supported by the peculiar wording of the inscription, as Renata Holod has perceptively observed,[76] and the internal logic of the iconographic program, but also by contextual historical evidence. In fact, every single person that we can relate to the patronage of ivory boxes at the court of al-Hakam II belonged to the political party that opposed al-Mughira and favored one of the caliph's sons.

Ziyad ibn Aflah, to whom a pyxis now in the Victoria and Albert Museum is dedicated, was prefect of police under al-Hakam II (cat. no. 12). When the caliph died, he was among those who endorsed the execution of al-Mughira at the request of the vizier al-Mushafi.[77]

Durri al-Saghir, al-Hakam II's treasurer, whose name appears on the pyxis dedicated to Subh that I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, also belonged to the faction supporting Hisham (cat. no. 4). This is clearly attested by an episode from the *Annals of al-Hakam II* in which al-Razi reports that, in 973, Durri was accused of malfeasance and was discharged. When Prince Hisham learned about it, he personally intervened, sending a handwritten letter to his father asking for a pardon for Durri, who was automatically restored to his position.[78]

More importantly, a closer look at the two principal characters later involved in al-Mughira's death, the vizier al-Mushafi and Ibn Abi 'Amir, reveals the essential constituents of the mindset in which a sophisticated object such as this pyxis might have originated. Al-Mushafi, whose father had been one of al-Hakam II's teachers, was a learned poet and shared the caliph's passion for books and intellectual speculation.[79] He was the person who recommended Ibn Abi 'Amir to al-Hakam II for the position of tutor of his sons, first of 'Abd al-Rahman and later of Hisham. To be sure, Ibn Abi 'Amir was highly qualified for this job, on account of the elite education he had received. Among his teachers was the famous scholar from Baghdad Abu 'Ali al-Qali – a character who played a fundamental role in the transference of Eastern learning and literature into al-Andalus. Not only did al-Qali bring with him the

intimate knowledge of Arabic literature he had acquired in the course of his prominent career as a member of Baghdad's intellectual circles, but he is also said to have managed to transport most of his library to Córdoba.[80]

These facts reveal that al-Mushafi and Ibn Abi 'Amir were two powerful and ambitious figures whose position at court was dependent on the well being of the caliph and his sons. Both were profoundly learned, interested in poetry and in the education of princes, and intimately acquainted with the literary productions of the East, among which *Kalila wa Dimna* stood out as one of the most renowned best-sellers. In sum, they both meet the profile of the creative force behind the al-Mughira pyxis as it emerges from a conceptual and formal analysis of its iconographic program.

As I pointed out in my earlier study, the more likely of the two to have commissioned the pyxis was Ibn Abi 'Amir, who would eventually become "al-Mansur," the powerful dictator of al-Andalus under Hisham. He had indeed the motives, the power, the opportunity, and the mindset. As a protégé of Subh, and tutor for her two sons, he knew that his political career and livelihood were inextricably linked to the succession of one of them. His appointment as director of the mint a year before the pyxis was commissioned attests to his presence and authority at the workshops of Madinat al-Zahra. Moreover, the following year, the now famous 968, stands out as a milestone in Ibn Abi 'Amir's ambitious career because he was appointed treasurer and qadi of Seville and Niebla.[81] Besides his political victories, al-Mansur had also achieved in that year effective control over the monetary and practical resources required to order an object such as the al-Mughira pyxis. In fact, chroniclers report that he frequently commissioned luxury objects to gain support at court by distributing presents. It was precisely during his tenure at the mint that he had a palace of silver made for Subh, prompting al-Hakam II's famous comment, "By Allah! this youth (meaning al-Mansur) has won the hearts and affections of our women with his presents."[82] I would contend that it was also at this time that he commissioned the pyxis for al-Mughira, perhaps as a gift to present to the caliph's brother in the context of the exchanges that took place during the *'Id* ceremonies of 968 – a memorable year in the career of this ambitious courtier.

In recounting these ceremonies, al-Razi describes the tightly scripted topographical location allotted to each member of the court in the space of the reception hall, in keeping with their official rank and familial relationship to the caliph. Al-Mughira occupied a privileged place, fourth in the spatial hierarchy of the reception hall, right after the caliph and two of his older brothers, Abu 'l-Asbagh 'Abd al-Aziz and al-Asbagh Abu 'l-Qasim, who sat on each side of the throne (fig. 81).[83] Al-Mughira's position, next to the caliph and facing the audience, was ceremonially prominent but factually marginal in relation to the structure of power. In these *tableaux vivants*, he appears as an object caught up in a network of relations and exchanges, just like his pyxis – an object with a name but devoid of subjectivity, a bearer of a symbolic text that has not been authored by him but has been inscribed upon him by others. The program of the pyxis addressed the public role that al-Mughira played in the reified structures of the court, with a double intention: celebration and consolidation. Part of its program was aimed at celebrating his position as a willing participant in the universal oath of allegiance to the caliph and his heirs as it was staged in the dual receptions. The other part was intended to render him inactive and make him accept such a role by displaying a didactic text that would teach him about the political and personal dangers of stepping outside it. The object was ultimately meant to objectify its owner. Paradoxically, in the course of history, the pyxis has effectively come to embody al-Mughira by giving prominence to his name, even though he emerges as a marginal character in the written sources of the history of al-Andalus. However, the identity that the pyxis memorializes is not the one that al-Mughira would have presumably liked to be remembered by, but, rather, the one that its iconographic program celebrates, that is, his condition as an idle presence imprisoned in a spectacle of privilege and power. The solemn vitrines of the Louvre Museum, where the pyxis is exhibited today, could not reflect more poignantly the conditions that surrounded its original owner in the reception hall of Madinat al-Zahra, where he was displayed in his glory as a passive object of vision.

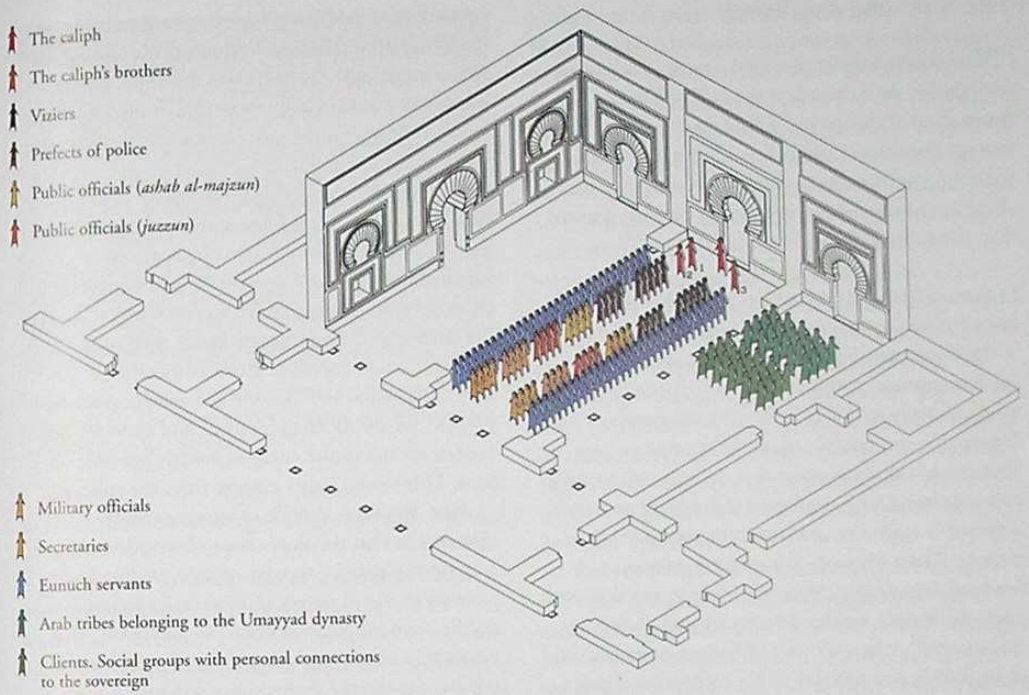

Fig. 81. Axonometric model showing the ceremonial arrangement of officials in the reception hall at Madinat al-Zahra, according to Ibn Hayyan's description.

This discussion of the pyxis invites meditation on the ways in which subjects and objects acquire meaning and exchange positions within the web of socio-symbolic relations. In *Fatal Strategies*, Baudrillard wages an assault on the privileged status given to the subject in history and argues that, on the contrary, it is the object that constitutes itself as a focus of agency in the world, ultimately holding sway over the fate of the subject. The object seduces, while the subject desires, and it is in its strategy of seduction that the object becomes an agent of history, replacing the subject. In order to explore fully the multiple threads that make up the fabric of this confrontation between subjects and objects, it is necessary to suspend the prejudices that confine the object to a passive status. My analysis of the interface between the pyxis and its owner takes this into consideration and, following Baudrillard, may be summarized by observing, "The object is neither the double nor the repressed of the subject, neither its fantasy nor its hallucination, neither its mirror nor its reflection – it has its own strategy and holds the key to the rules of the game, impenetrable to the subject, not because they are deeply mysterious, but because they are infinitely ironic."[84]

The Void and the Vessel

"There is perhaps but one fatal strategy and only one: theory. And doubtless the only difference between a banal theory and a fatal theory is that in one strategy the subject still believes himself to be more cunning than the object, whereas in the other the object is considered more cunning, cynical, talented than the subject, for which it lies in wait."[85]

In the confrontation of subjectivities that emerges from the understanding of the pyxis in the context of the discourse of the gift, there is someone who appears constantly displayed on its surface yet is fundamentally withheld from view: its creator. I have argued that the evasive iconography and complex allusions of the pyxis point to a designer whose mind enjoyed toying with the limits of language and such a person is again the al-Mansur portrayed in the sources. Among the many anecdotes related by al-Maqqari regarding al-Mansur's lively interaction with poets during his *majlis*, there is one that illustrates this aspect.[86] A famous poet of his court, named Said al-Baghdadi, was accused by his colleagues of plagiarism and a lack of originality.[87] Al-Mansur decided to test Said's poetic abilities by presenting to him an elaborate object about which he should recite a composition. The object was:

"A large tray, containing compartments ornamented with every variety of elegant designs … On the roof of the compartments were toys of jasmine made in imitation of females, and under the roof a reservoir of transparent water, the bottom of which was paved with pearls instead of common pebbles; in the water was a snake swimming. [Upon showing this object to the poet, al-Mansur said,] Look at that tray, the like of which, I assert was never placed before any other king but me. If the charge brought against you be false, prove it by describing to me in verse both the tray and its contents. [To meet this challenge, Said recited a composition that al-Mansur deemed beautiful but incomplete. He called Said's attention to a detail he had failed to notice:] a ship, in which was a maiden rowing herself with oars of gold."

Immediately, Said started reciting new verses on the motif he had previously overlooked and, finally, al-Mansur regarded the poem worthy of the object described. For his ability to render images in poetic words, Said received a gift: one thousand dinars and one hundred robes.[88]

Said's merit was not only the beauty of his speech but, essentially, his capacity to overcome the twofold deficiency that initially marred his recitation: superficial observation and the limits of language to capture visual experience. To a certain extent, such is the challenge that art history shares with poetic *ekphrasis*. Said's anecdote provides therefore a suitable background to reflect on the analytical model I propose for the al-Mughira pyxis and its wider implications for the future study of courtly portable objects. Three main issues emerge from the episode:

First, it reveals a mode of viewing courtly portable objects that privileges close observation and attention to detail. It speaks of an eye/I that finds pleasure in the discovery of nuances and variations on the commonplace. It is a mode of viewing that values the unique over the generic, or, to be more precise, the unique that is concealed within the generic.

Secondly, the anecdote exemplifies the complex dialectic interface between the visual rhetoric of portable objects and courtly poetic discourse. Each engages the other in an agonistic dynamics of influence that facilitates a complex exchange of imagery, compositional strategies, and meanings.

Finally, this episode brings into view the role of another subject that eventually enters the semantic domain of the object, not as an intruder, but as an expected, and even anticipated participant – the prospective interpreter. Objects such as al-Mansur's silver tray or the al-Mughira pyxis were created as material tokens to actively engage the viewer in a process of "mutual" interpretation, one that was often private but that acquired, on occasion, a public dimension. When interpretation entered the public stage, its vehicle was poetry because it was understood that the essential challenge posed by the visual was a challenge to the limitations of language itself. Only the poet, the master of language, could attempt

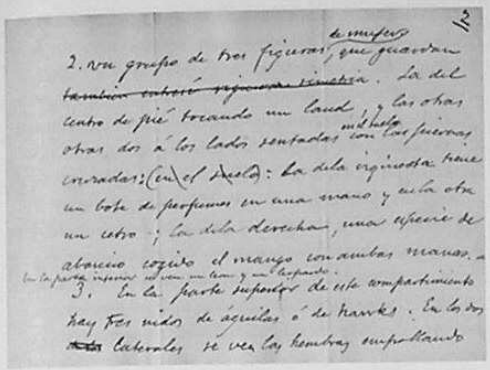

Fig. 82. Juan F. Riaño, handwritten note from the manuscript draft for *The Industrial Arts in Spain*. – The Hispanic Society of America, New York, B 861.

to come close to capturing the full significance of the object.

There is no written record of al-Mughira's interpretive encounter with his pyxis, but there is an interesting document informing us about the experience of its first known modern owner, the Spanish collector and scholar Juan F. Riaño.[89] Riaño's painstaking confrontation with the object in possession is evident in the manuscript draft of *The Industrial Arts of Spain*.[90] Of all the Andalusian ivory boxes he attempted to describe, the al-Mughira pyxis proved to be the most elusive. His notes on the pyxis are marred by corrections, tentative identifications, and misinterpretations (fig. 82). The real presence of the object seems to have been, for Riaño, more disorienting than reassuring. His dissatisfaction with the task is revealed in the fact that, in the final publication, he discarded most of his notes on the pyxis and simply included a general mention of its "splendid ornamentation of figures and animals," in addition to transcribing and translating its inscription.[91]

The privileged information that Riaño could have yielded on his pyxis, but ultimately chose to withhold, stands in poignant contrast to the little value of the notes he has left. His was a discursive approach concerned with the surface of the object. Subjectivity, both his own and that of the object, was entirely removed from scholarly consideration. An excessive attachment to the immediate material presence of the object prevented him from attempting to reach its universal meaning – a goal that may be achieved by engaging the poetic dimension of the interpretive process. As Erwin Panofsky has pointed out, "The humanities ... are not faced by the task of arresting what otherwise would slip away, but of enlivening what otherwise would remain dead."[92] Only by taking up this challenge to the full extent of its methodological implications, might we begin to engage with objects of Islamic art in substantial ways, both their immediate materiality and their universal significance.

The space between these two poles of thought was famously traversed by Heidegger in his 1950 essay *Das Ding*, where he meditated on the ontological essence of another circular portable object. In speaking of a Greek vase, Heidegger reminded us of a simple truth: "From start to finish the potter takes hold of the impalpable void and brings it forth as the container in the shape of a containing vessel. The jug's void determines all the handling in the process of making the vessel. The vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that it holds."[93]

Just like that of the potter, the art historian's creative project should not exclusively focus on mapping variations on the surface of his object, but rather on bringing to light the generative void that constitutes its essence, on creating an epistemological structure that reflects its perceived meaning, and on making it visible by delineating its contours with words. *It cannot be too often repeated* …

1. Knatchbull 1819, pp. 60-61, 63.
2. For an assessment of the figure of Subh in Arabic sources and modern historiography, see Marín 1997. Marín examines the specific appellatives of authority given to Subh when she became mother of the caliph's heirs (*al-sayyida, al-sayyida al-kubrá*). For an interpretation of the vegetal decoration of ivory caskets owned by women in relation to concepts of reproduction and fertility, with special attention to the group of boxes presented to Subh, see Prado-Vilar 1997, pp. 20-21.
3. English translation from Beckwith 1960, p. 10. For a transcription of the Arabic inscription, see Kühnel 1971, cat. no. 22.
4. For al-Mansur, see De la Puente 1997 and Bariani 2003.
5. For a description of the pyxis, see Kühnel 1971, cat. no. 31, and New York 1992, cat. no. 3.
6. Translation according to New York 1992, p. 195.
7. In my 1997 article, "Circular Visions of Fertility and Punishment," I developed an analysis of its decoration in relation to the historical circumstances of its production and reception, disclosing its elusive visual program as a didactic warning to al-Mughira not to become involved in a political conspiracy against his brother's line of succession. In order to rescue al-Mughira's pyxis from the generic discourses of Islamic portable art and stock princely imagery, I situated the object within the field of interpersonal relations. The premise of my analysis was that the resistance of the images to historical interpretation resided in the fact that they were specifically designed to become meaningful within the interpretive framework of the intended owner of the pyxis. I contended that, in conceiving the visual program, the artist combined images to which al-Mughira would have readily responded, turning the prince's mind into the main semantic field where the imagery of the pyxis achieved full signification. In my attempt to unravel the constituents of al-Mughira's subjective and intimate process of viewing, my essay became essentially an inquiry into the possibilities of historically reconstructing a theory of mind. To meet this challenge, I combined a thorough historical reconstruction of the personal and sociopolitical context of the pyxis, both as an object and as a gift, with a formal analysis of the "purely" visual meanings encoded in its decoration, making use of both Arabic poetic theory and modern critical terminology to empower my descriptive language. I refer the reader to that essay as background for the present study.
8. For the date of the death of ʿAbd al-Rahman, see Prado-Vilar 1997, p. 37, n. 28.
9. Like his brother, Hisham suffered from precarious health. The political importance of this issue in the context of the internal power struggles at court is clearly illustrated in the *Annals*. Al-Razi describes the chagrin and concern of al-Hakam II when Hisham was afflicted with smallpox. The recovery from the illness was celebrated by having Hisham give an audience for the high officials of the court – a politically strategic display of the heir to the throne, with his health fully restored, for all members of the court to see. Ibn Hayyan 1965, pp. 152-153 (Spanish trans. in Ibn Hayyan 1967, pp. 192-193).
10. My translation from Ibn Hayyan 1965, p. 61 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, p. 83). For a long panegyric praising Hisham as the heir that will bring prosperity to al-Andalus, see Ibn Hayyan 1965, pp. 131-132 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, p. 155).
11. Stetkevych 2002, pp. 252-253.
12. Rosenthal et al. 1971, pp. 342-350, esp. p. 343. Essential to the meaning of the al-Mughira pyxis is its condition as a gift – an object that was exchanged between two individuals within palace walls, signaling an intentional intrusion of the giver in the receiver's world. Generally, the gift constitutes an autographed message whose goal is the establishment of better personal and social relations or the celebration of special events. In most cases, the message transcends its primary purpose and acquires an ideological elaboration aimed at shaping, to a certain extent, the receiver's reality according to the giver's will. The literature on the discourse of the gift is quite extensive; for an introductory collection of critical essays, see Schrift 1997.
13. For a structural analysis of the different units that constitute the visual program of the pyxis, see Prado-Vilar 1997, p. 27. For the relation between the lid, the inscription, and the decoration, see Prado-Vilar 1997, p. 37, n. 25.
14. For the strategies through which stock princely imagery acquires specific meaning in the context of the al-Mughira pyxis, and their similarities to those employed in panegyrics, see Prado-Vilar 1997.
15. My translation from Ibn Hayyan 1965, p. 184 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, p. 223).
16. In a later ivory box, the so-called Pamplona casket, the ruler appears represented with the same attributes, but bearded (cat. no. 20d); Prado-Vilar 1997, pp. 22-23.
17. Aside from Renata Holod, who aptly noted that the two figures are of similar rank (see New York 1992, cat. no. 3), scholars have traditionally interpreted the character holding the flabellum as a servant. A comparison between this scene and the throne scene from the Pamplona casket (cat. no. 20d) might help clarify this question. The attendants flanking the ruler in the Pamplona casket are represented following a rigid hierarchical scale, which is also the guiding compositional principle determining the smaller size of the musician on the al-Mughira pyxis. Unlike them, the so-called "servant with flabellum" of the pyxis carefully replicates the scale, body type, and dress of his regal counterpart. They are, indeed, twin figures, on account of both their physical characteristics and their demeanor. The solemnity with which the character holds the flabellum stands in clear contrast to the practical manner with which the servants in the Pamplona casket handle their more "functional" objects. In sum, had the designer of the pyxis wanted to represent a servant, this would have been the least likely solution. A more feasible interpretation to explain this "visual ambiguity" is that the artist, in order to meet the requirements of this specific commission, was introducing variations to the traditional iconographic models from which he departed. In fact, this scene represents a type of ceremony that was specific to the Cordovan court: the oath of allegiance to the heir, which was one of the events staged in the context of the "dual receptions."
18. Ibn Hayyan 1965, pp. 155-171 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, pp. 222-226). Taking into account the similarity between the staging of both receptions, we can glean from the *Annals* additional evidence to explain the display of the two princes side by side in the medallion. According to al-Razi, al-Hakam II used to sit on the throne (*sarir*) flanked by his brothers, who sat in similar fashion before the audience (cf. fig. 81). As Barceló has noted, "The Umayyad caliph, having made his entrance alone, then incorporated his brothers into the position of greatest majesty. The distance between the caliph and his lineage was still short. This fraternal presence [was] a clear reminder of the legitimacy of his inheritance from Uthman" (Barceló 1999, p. 435). In sum, the scene on the pyxis recalls the arrangement and political symbolism of the main reception by displaying the heir apparent alongside his brother.
19. Ibn Hayyan 1965, p. 185 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, p. 224).
20. Safran 2000, p. 94.
21. My translation from Ibn Hayyan 1965, p. 186 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, pp. 225-226).
22. Qaddumi 1996, p. 138.
23. My translation from Ibn Hayyan 1965, pp. 166, and 231-233 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, pp. 206 and 274).
24. My translation from Ibn Hayyan 1965, pp. 156 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, p. 198).
25. For an analysis of this *qasida* and its political context, see Stetkevych 2002, pp. 249-256.
26. It is not a coincidence that the beautiful casket in the David Collection exhibits the closest stylistic relation to the al-Mughira pyxis that can be found in the corpus of Andalusian ivories and, at the same time, as Kjeld von Folsach points out in his article in this publication, provides an evident iconographic continuity (cat. no. 10a-10f). On the front of the David Collection's casket, two riders are prominently displayed showing their prowess in hunting – a recurring *topos* in princely iconography similar in symbolic meaning to the lion imagery, which appears on the opposite side of this box. Had there been enough space on the al-Mughira pyxis, this composition could have been framed by a medallion and placed in the same sequence with the court scene and the lion-bull combat, and immediately before the medallion with the riders picking dates (see the discussion of this scene below). Understood as a whole, this program would cover the different aspects upon which the present status and future power of al-Hakam II's two heirs were founded: majesty, military power, and inheritance.
27. My translation from Ibn Hayyan 1965, pp. 76-77 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, p. 99).
28. On the education of Hisham, including information about his teachers, see Ibn Hayyan 1965, pp. 76-77 and 133-134 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, pp. 99-100 and 168).
29. The main study on the system of education in al-Andalus remains Ribera y Tarragó 1928, with numerous references to the time of al-Hakam II.
30. For Ibn ʿAbd al-Rabbih, see Nykl 1946, pp. 35-42; Pons Boigues 1898, pp. 51-57; and Rubiera Mata 1992, pp. 177-180.
31. For an introduction to the cultural policy of the Umayyads and their active promotion of the transfer of eastern culture and scholars into al-Andalus, see Wasserstein 1990-1991. This author recalls the famous reaction of the Buyid vizier of Baghdad, Ibn ʿAbbad, who upon reading *al-ʿIqd al-farid*, complained, "This is our own merchandise being served back to us!" Wasserstein 1990-1991, p. 102.
32. For the specific references to *Kalila wa Dimna* in *al-ʿIqd al-farid*, see Werkmeister 1983, pp. 142-145. This Indian

collection of fables was translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa' in the middle of the 8th century and soon became a best-seller in courtly circles as an effective educational tool to provide moral instruction for young princes. "The author of this work," explains Ibn al-Muqaffa' in the preface, "had four objects in view when he composed it. The first was to render it attractive to the young reader, by the ministry of birds and beasts: the second was to engage the attention of princes, by the conduct of the animals, in the different circumstances in which they are placed: the third was to promote the amusement and excite the curiosity of every class, and thereby contribute to the lasting preservation of a book, which, fourthly, philosophers would not exclude from the sphere of their speculations." Knatchbull 1819, p. 64.

33. Few illustrated cycles of *Kalila wa Dimna* survive before the 13th century, when manuscript production experienced an unprecedented flourishing. However, literary and iconographic evidence has led scholars such as Julian Raby to conclude that there was a consistent iconographic tradition that continued, almost unchanged, from the 8th to the 13th century. As Ibn al-Muqaffa' himself asserts in the preface, he conceived the book to be accompanied by illustrations, probably adopting an existing cycle associated with the Pahlavi version, which he used as the basis for his Arabic translation (see Raby 1991). The rapid dissemination of illuminated versions of *Kalila wa Dimna* in the West is attested by a southern Italian manuscript in the Pierpont Morgan Library (MS. 397) produced between 980 and 1050 and containing a Greek translation with 21 miniatures (see Avery 1941 and Raby 1987-1988, pp. 382-386). The presence of illustrated copies of *Kalila wa Dimna* in al-Andalus, however, cannot be assessed with material evidence due to the unfortunate dispersal and destruction of al-Hakam II's famous library. Yet sources are unequivocal about the caliph's insatiable bibliophilism and his interest in keeping his library permanently updated by sending agents to Cairo, Baghdad, Damascus, and Alexandria to purchase books (see al-Maqqari 1840-1843, vol. 2, pp. 169-170). Taking into account that *Kalila wa Dimna* was known and used as part of anthologies of wisdom literature such as Ibn 'Abd al-Rabbih's *al-'Iqd al-farid*, it is simply unthinkable that illustrated copies of the book did not reach al-Andalus under an avid collector such as al-Hakam II, if not earlier – all the more so if we consider the strong influence of this book on the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages, from its partial use by Peter Alfonsus in his *Disciplina clericalis* in the early 12th century to the several complete translations from the Arabic (including the prologue of al-Muqaffa') into Castilian commissioned by Alfonso X in the 13th century, when he was still a prince (for an edition and study of the Alfonsine translation, see *Calila e Dimna* 1984).
34. Grube 1991, p. 36.
35. Thwarted conspiracies involving uncles and brothers of the designated heir had resulted in a series of executions in the recent history of the Andalusian Umayyad dynasty. In fact, al-Mughira's situation in relation to his nephews had parallels in al-Hakam II's own lifetime. His father, 'Abd al-Rahman III, had executed one of his uncles for having conspired to take the throne in his place. He later eliminated one of his own sons, 'Abd Allah al-Zahid, for allegedly having instigated a conspiracy to have him and his heir, al-Hakam, assassinated (see Lévi-Provençal 1950-1953, vol. 2, pp. 326-327).
36. Knatchbull 1819, p. 82.
37. Knatchbull 1819, p. 120.
38. Knatchbull 1819, p. 127.
39. Knatchbull 1819, pp. 104-105; the teaching is enunciated on p. 109.
40. Knatchbull 1819, pp. 187-189. The ass that is being bitten by two animals in the vertical axis occupied by the affronted goats recalls another "core-image" from the cycle of illustrations of *Kalila wa Dimna* which refers to a story involving a lion, a jackal, and an ass (Knatchbull 1819, pp. 264-268). It teaches the importance of learning from the errors of others.
41. An excellent discussion of the Sogdian frescoes of Panjikent and their relation to the Arabic illustrated tradition of *Kalila wa Dimna* is found in Raby 1991, where the author also mentions the presence of imagery derived from the book on portable objects.
42. Knatchbull 1819, pp. 49-50.
43. Nykl 1946, p. 18.
44. The connection between 'Abd al-Rahman I's poem and the image of the palm tree in the al-Mughira pyxis was first made in Prado-Vilar 1997, p. 38, n. 41. It was later recalled in Martínez-Gros and Makariou 2000, where the authors seem to be aware of my earlier work although most of my arguments are recast in their essay in anonymous terms. For instance, when referring to my interpretation of the vegetal decoration of the boxes given to Subh as an allusion to her fertility, they state, "Plus récemment, on a voulu voir dans l'abondance de cette flore une allusion à la fertilité de Subh." In their analysis of the al-Mughira pyxis, they reproduce in detail the historical circumstances regarding the position of al-Mughira in the question of succession that I originally reconstructed in "Circular Visions" as the main context for an understanding of its decoration. When it comes to the analysis of the scenes in the medallions, they selectively reproduce my interpretation of some individual details while departing in others, without discussing my earlier argument, either in anonymous terms or otherwise. They fundamentally differ in the intentionality of the general program of the pyxis in that they see it as an invitation to al-Mughira to conspire against his brother and step ahead of the two princes in the line of succession. In addition to the basic fact that it is highly unlikely that a conspiratorial message geared to dethrone the reigning caliph could have been produced in the royal workshops (an ivory pyxis is not a letter scribbled by a conspirator writing in the shadows, but a precious object that requires the official setting of the royal workshops and the involvement of professional craftsmen), I believe their conclusion is flawed on two main counts. First, they misunderstand some of the scenes and their relation to the overall program of the pyxis. A case in point is the court scene where the authors, oblivious to the specific ceremonial practices of the Cordovan court, which this scene closely reflects, try to turn it into a "scène de confrontation silencieuse" between two figures personifying the Western and the Eastern caliphates. However, rather than geopolitical allegory, which is more suitable for public monumental programs, the pyxis reflects and addresses the internal situation of the court, which is the natural environment where this object was meant to function and circulate – an environment dominated by the issue of succession. Secondly, they infer their interpretation from an anachronistic contextualization of the pyxis. A conspiratorial injunction to al-Mughira would, at most, make sense seven years after the pyxis was produced, when the caliph was in dire health and had only one remaining heir, but not in 357 / 967-968, when al-Hakam II was in reasonably stable health and had two sons to continue his line of succession. In fact, after the birth of the princes, the attention and hopes of the court had shifted to them and al-Mughira had ceased to be "la perle centrale de la dynastie," as Makariou and Martínez-Gros assert. He had become nothing more than a latent threat – probably perceived as such because of the recent history of the dynasty, which offered several examples of the instability caused by the political ambitions of royal siblings. The pyxis was a way to control, didactically and politically, a teenager who could be potentially manipulated by conspirators, by delivering to him a preemptive message in the form of a "political parable."
45. For this aspect, see Safran 2000, pp. 176-178.
46. For the political circumstances surrounding 'Abd al-Rahman III's adoption of the caliphal title, see Fierro 1989.
47. Lafuente y Alcántara 1867, pp. 58-59; Safran 2000, p. 127.
48. al-Tabari 1990 and al-Tabari 1993. Al-Tabari's universal history was well known in al-Andalus, where 'Arib Ibn Said (d. 980), secretary of al-Hakam II, wrote a summary and continuation (for 'Arib, see Pellat 1960 and Castilla Brazales 1992). The use of the metaphor of the ripe and unripe fruit in the context of the struggles for the caliphate was widespread. For example, after the designation of Abu Bakr as the Prophet's successor, some of the Companions tried to convince 'Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law, to dispute the election and claim for himself the leadership of the community. In the context of this episode, early compilations of sayings put in the mouth of 'Ali sentences such as, "If I had attempted to pluck the unripe fruit of the Caliphate then by this the orchard would have been desolated and I too would have achieved nothing…" (see the full text in the electronic edition of the *Nahj al-Balaghah*, sermon 5: http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul/index.htm). Poets at the court of al-Hakam II also used the metaphor. Al-Razi includes in his *Annals* a *qasida* recited during the *'Id al-Fitr* of 974 that contains the following line: "The ripe dates are eaten while waiting for the unripe ones to mature in due time" (my translation from Ibn Hayyan 1965, pp. 162; Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, p. 202). In her study of this *qasida*, Stetkevych offers a different translation of this passage and signals the earlier use of the metaphor of the ripening of dates in a classical composition by the renowned 9th-century caliphal poet Abu Tammam that might have served as a model for the Andalusian poet (see Stetkevych 2002, pp. 256-271, esp. 269).
49. My translation from Ibn Hayyan 1965, p. 83 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, p. 107).
50. For the political dimensions of ecology in al-Andalus, see Ruggles 2000.
51. Stetkevych 2002, p. 270.
52. See al-Maqqari 1840-1843, vol. 2, p. 93, and Lévi-Provençal 1950a, p. 133.
53. My translation from Ibn Hayyan 1979, pp. 333-334 (Spanish trans. in Ibn Hayyan 1981, pp. 250-251).
54. For an ivory box dedicated to al-Hakam II and exclusively decorated with heraldic eagles, see cat. no. 5b and

Prado-Vilar 1997, p. 26. For the use of banners featuring eagles in two of al-Hakam II's military parades, see Ibn Hayyan 1965, pp. 48-49 and 197 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, pp. 68 and 238). Al-Mughira is said to have been present on both occasions.

55. Knatchbull 1819, p. 113.
56. Knatchbull 1819, p. 113.
57. For another short story belonging to the lion and bull tale thematizing the attempt of a bird to find a secure place to hatch its eggs far from intruders, see Knatchbull 1819, p. 145.
58. The commissioner of the pyxis could have thought of how to deal with al-Mughira's situation along the lines of another teaching contained in the story of the lion and the bull: "A prudent man will never have recourse to measures of open violence, till he has exhausted the resources of intrigue and secret management," Knatchbull 1819, p. 145.
59. Prado-Vilar 1997, pp. 28-29.
60. Ajami 1990, p. 2.
61. See Ajami 1990 for an analysis of this poem and its historical context.
62. See Ullmann 1995 for the motif of the crucifixion in medieval Arabic poetry.
63. Abu Deeb 1979, p. 119.
64. Abu Deeb 1979, p. 119.
65. Prado-Vilar 1997, p. 28.
66. My translation from Ibn Hayyan 1979, p. 446. I thank Yumna Masarwa for her valuable suggestions in the translation of this passage (for a Spanish rendering, see Ibn Hayyan 1981, pp. 334-335). This was just one in a series of memorable and widely publicized crucifixions staged during the reign of 'Abd al-Rahman III. The most important of them was the crucifixion of the rebel Ibn Hafsun and his sons in 927, which was the subject of numerous compositions by poets. For a poem describing metaphorically the appearance of Ibn Hafsun's crucified body, see Ibn Hayyan 1979, pp. 221-222 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1981, p. 170). For a study of the political significance of crucifixions under 'Abd al-Rahman III, see Fierro 2004, pp. 55-63. It is worth noting that some of the main public crucifixions were scheduled, with a clear symbolic intention, to coincide with the *'Id al-Adha* (Festival of Sacrifice) – a ceremonial context that, as I have shown, seems to frame the political imagery of the pyxis.
67. Ibn Hazm 1953, pp. 249-250. For further references to forms of crucifixion in the Andalusian penal system, see Lévi-Provençal 1950-1953, vol. 3, pp. 159-162. For an example of crucifixion under al-Hakam II, see Ibn Hayyan 1965, p. 149 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, p. 188).
68. Monroe 1974, pp. 116-117.
69. In practice, the punishment of the crucifixion did not always involve the disposition of the criminal with outstretched arms. On occasions, the criminal was simply affixed to a pole and pierced with arrows. However, in the poetic and artistic representation of this punishment, that is, in its conceptualization as an image, its structure was always that of a man nailed to a cross.
70. For references, see Prado-Vilar 1997, p. 39, n. 51.
71. For the Jewish execution, see Glanz 1943, pp. 3-26; Cohen 1989, pp. 407-416; Merback 1999, pp. 187-189. This form of torture is documented in Spain in the early 14th century; Cohen 1989, p. 412.
72. Abu Deeb 1979, p. 109. Sons of caliphs – and al-Mughira was no exception – had many opportunities to witness grisly public displays of the mutilated remains of those who dared to challenge caliphal authority. In 971, for instance, a solemn procession exhibiting the heads of decapitated insurgents paraded though the streets of Córdoba, passing in front of all the members of the court, including al-Mughira. For this military celebration and a list of participants, see Ibn Hayyan 1965, pp. 47-53 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, pp. 64-74).
73. Prado-Vilar 1997, pp. 28-29.
74. Knatchbull, 1819, p. 192.
75. Al-Maqqari 1840-1843, vol. 2, pp. 177-178.
76. New York 1992, cat. no. 3.
77. For Zyad Ibn Aflah and his relatives, who held important bureaucratic positions at the court of Córdoba, see Meouak 1989, esp. pp. 107-108. For a brief study of this pyxis, see Prado-Vilar 1997, pp. 30-31.
78. Ibn Hayyan 1965, p. 103 (Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, p. 132). To justify their interpretation of the pyxis as a gift coming from a faction supporting al-Mughira, Makariou and Martínez-Gros have pointed out that the two *fityan* who tried to place al-Mughira on the throne immediately following al-Hakam II's death – Faiq (chief of staff of the caliph, superintendent of correspondence and chief of the tiraz workshops), and Yawdhar (chief of silversmiths) – could have been the commissioners of the pyxis (Martínez-Gros and Makariou 2000). However, the object was produced in 357 / 967-968 and the political dynamics that the scholars describe corresponds to 976, eight years later – the moment when Faiq and Yawdhar, facing the sudden crisis of the death of al-Hakam II and the minority of Hisham, opted for backing al-Mughira openly. When the pyxis was made, there was no need and no urgency for the *fityan* to give al-Mughira "un cadeau de majorité et un gage de maturité politique, d'actitude à l'exercise de la plus haute chase." In fact, both the archaeological record and the *Annals* of al-Razi provide a different account of the political alliances of the *fityan* in the period that corresponds to the creation of the pyxis, that is, between the birth of the princes and the death of al-Hakam II. Just a few months before the caliph's death, Yawdhar's name appears on a silver casket commissioned to commemorate Hisham's official confirmation as the designated heir (see fig. 41 and New York 1992, cat. no. 9). As for Faiq, al-Razi reports, for instance, how al-Hakam II awarded him a luxurious house in the complex of Madinat al-Zahra in order to "honor him because of the high esteem in which he held him and as a token of distinction and preference" (my translation of Ibn Hayyan 1965, p. 66; Spanish trans. Ibn Hayyan 1967, p. 88). It is difficult to maintain that the caliph who, as all chroniclers emphasize, had as his priority the education, protection, and exaltation of his young heir, would have held in such high esteem someone like Faiq who, according to Makariou and Martínez-Gros, was so openly courting al-Mughira by giving him a gift whose decoration, to make things worse, called for the usurpation of the caliphal throne. Moreover, if we frame the pyxis in its proper chronological context, we find that the monetary and logistical means to control the commission of luxury objects at court fell definitively on the side of the party led by Subh, al-Mushafi, Zyad ibn Aflah, Durri al-Saghir and, especially, Ibn Abi 'Amir (al-Mansur), all of whom are documented in the sources as being adept at giving gifts to procure political support.
79. For a brief biography of al-Mushafi, with an account of his poetic production, see Nykl 1946, pp. 49-51. It is worth noting that 'Arib Ibn Said – the scholar and physician who wrote a summary and continuation of al-Tabari's *Universal History* and a treatise on obstetrics dedicated to al-Hakam II – belonged to al-Mushafi's entourage. For the connections between 'Arib Ibn Said and aspects of the al-Mughira pyxis, see above, n. 44, and Prado-Vilar 1997, p. 40, n. 65.
80. For Abu 'Ali al-Qali, see Pons Boigues 1898, pp. 71-72; Bonebakker 1964; and Sellheim 1978.
81. For Al-Mansur's progressive accumulation of offices in 968, see de la Puente 1997, p. 377.
82. For this anecdote, see al-Maqqari 1840-1843, vol. 2, p. 179. Subh was also adept at using gifts to gather political support. Chroniclers report that in the days following al-Hakam II's death, she started to distribute gifts to secure the succession of her son Hisham; Marín 1997, p. 439.
83. On the staging and political symbolism of the receptions held by al-Hakam II in Madinat al-Zahra, see Barceló 1999.
84. Baudrillard 1990, p. 181.
85. Baudrillard 1990, p. 181.
86. For the *majalis* hosted by al-Mansur, where he generously distributed gifts to poets in order to recruit them as mouthpieces for his political agenda, see de la Puente 1997, pp. 389-395.
87. For this poet, see Nykl 1946, pp. 52-54, and Pons Boigues 1898, pp. 111-113.
88. Al-Maqqari 1840-1843, vol. 2: pp. 156-198. Said was lucky to have pleased al-Mansur. Sources tell of another poet, Muhammad ibn Abi Yuma, who spread rumors about the *hayib*'s approaching demise, to which al-Mansur responded by having him crucified and his tongue cut out (de la Puente 1997, p. 386). In al-Mansur's lifelong masterful employment of "the discourse of the gift," one can observe a constant fluctuation in its field of meaning among reward, bribery, and punishment.
89. For biographical information on Juan F. Riaño, see Almagro-Gorbea 1999, pp. 144-146, and Caballero 2002, pp. 34-37.
90. This manuscript is in the collection of the Hispanic Society of America in New York. I am grateful to Mariam Rosser-Owen for informing me of its location. I thank John O'Neill, curator of Manuscripts at the Hispanic Society of America, for granting me permission to examine it and providing the reproduction that appears in this article.
91. Riaño 1890, pp. 132-133.
92. Panofsky 1955, p. 24.
93. Heidegger 1971, p. 169.

Cat. no. 4a.

CAT. NO. 4. PYXIS ("THE ZAMORA PYXIS").

Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid, inv. no. 2.113.

H: 18; Diam: 10.5 cm.

353 / 964.

Ordered by al-Hakam II, supervised by Durri al-Saghir, made for Subh.

Ferrandis 1935-1940, I, cat. no. 4; Beckwith 1960, pp. 10-13, pl. 6; Kühnel 1971, cat. no. 22.

Illustrations: Cat. no. 4a; fig. 61.

Cat. no. 5a.

Cat. no. 5b.

CAT. NO. 5. PYXIS.
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. no. 217-1865.
H: 7.7; Diam: 10 cm.
C. 965.
Ordered by al-Hakam II, supervised by Durri al-Saghir.
Ferrandis 1935-1940, I, cat. no. 5; Beckwith 1960, p. 14, pls. 7-8; Kühnel 1971, cat. no. 27.
Illustrations: Cat. no. 5a, b.

Cat. no. 10a.

CAT. NO. 10. CASKET.
The David Collection, Copenhagen, inv. no. 5/2002.
H: 9.9; W: 14.5; D: 9.3 cm.
C. 966-968.
Not in Ferrandis 1935-1940, Beckwith 1960,
or Kühnel 1971.
Illustrations: Cat. no. 10a, b, c, d, e, f;
figs. 65, 66, 68, 70, 71, 72.

Cat. no. 10d.

Cat. no. 11a.

CAT. NO. 11. PYXIS ("THE AL-MUGHIRA PYXIS").
Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. AO 4068.
H: 17.6; Diam: 11.5 (top) / 11.2 (bottom) cm.
Weight: 269 g (lid), 876 g (total).
357 / 967-968.

Made for al-Mughira.
Ferrandis 1935-1940, I, cat. no. 13; Beckwith 1960, pp. 16-20, pls. 14-17 and 22; Kühnel 1971, cat. no. 31.
Illustrations: Cat. no. 11a, b, c, d, e; figs. 25, 31c, 31d, 74, 75, 77.

Cat. no. 11b.

Cat. no. 11c.

Cat. no. 11d.

Cat. no. 11e.

Cat. no. 12a.

CAT. NO. 12. PYXIS.
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. no. 368-1880.
H: 18.5; Diam: 11.5 cm.
359 / 969-970.
Made for Ziyad ibn Aflah.
Ferrandis 1935-1940, I, cat. no. 14; Beckwith 1960, pp. 20-21, pls. 18-22; Kühnel 1971, cat. no. 32.
Illustrations: Cat. no. 12a, b; figs. 21, 171.