

Reference Reviews

Article Information:

To cite this article: Maralee Gordon, (2002) "The Literature of Al-Andalus", Reference Reviews, Vol. 16 Iss: 4, pp.19 - 20
To copy this article: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Related journals/books: Emerald publishes 25 journals and books in the Library and Information Studies catalogue.

Languages and literature : The Literature of Al-Andalus

The Reviewers

Maralee Gordon, Rabbi, Congregation Beth Shalom, DeKalb, IL, USA

RR 2002/189

Review Subject: The Literature of Al-Andalus Edited by Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin and Michael Sells

Publisher Name: Cambridge University Press

Place of Publication: Cambridge

Publication Year: 2001

Price: £90.00 (\$150.00)

Article type: Review

Keywords: Literature, Culture, Religion, Spain

Emerald Journal: Reference Reviews

Volume: 16

Number: 4

Year: 2002

pp. 19-20

Copyright: © Emerald Group Publishing Limited

ISSN: 0950-4125

The Literature of Al-Andalus edited by Maria Rosa Menocal (Yale), Raymond P. Scheindlin (Jewish Theological Seminary) and Michael Sells (Haverford), of the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* series, states right from the start that it is very different from the other volumes in the series. *The Literature of Al-Andalus* does not confine itself to literature, nor does it confine itself to the Arabic language, as its focus is the confluence,

the *convivencia* of cultures, religions and ethnicities making up Andalusia, al-Andalus being the Arabic name for the Iberian peninsula under Muslim rule. Its focus is a time of “unusually strong and complex relationships among the religions of the children of Abraham in this land”, when Arabic, Romance and Hebrew, Muslim, Christian and Jew intertwined.

The introductory essay by editor Maria Rosa Menocal describes the framework and outside-the-box range of this volume on literature, as it touches on architecture, music, the acquisition of knowledge, and the hybrid nature of the educated classes, among other topics. Twenty four academics have contributed chapters in their areas of expertise. Each chapter includes notes and extensive non-annotated bibliography.

The principal purpose of the 500-page volume is to cultivate the memory of al-Andalus from a wide variety of vantage points and for a wide variety of viewers. Unlike other locales in the Middle Ages, to look at Andalus along single-language lines, derivative of national canons misses the unique situation of the time and place. While the four previous volumes in the series were intended for Arabists, this one explicitly is not. The editors’ most idealistic goal is to make now disparate academic communities less so, aiming to be a useful and enjoyable resource for colleagues “from the French medievalist whose interest has been aroused by notices of Hispano-Arabic culture having some interaction with Provençal, to the specialist in Hebrew poetry who may want to understand the Jewish Golden Age in its fullest context, from graduate students in European medieval studies who will not necessarily learn Arabic but will need to understand something of this central culture, to the Ottomanist interested in the makeup and history of so many refugees in the sixteenth century”.

The book is divided into five sections, each devoted to a separate area of Andalus culture. There is a section dedicated to literature itself, covering the three types of Arabic poetry and prose most prominently composed in Andalusia, the *muwashshah*, the *maqama* and the *qasida*. Another section is devoted to areas of culture, with chapters on language, music, spaces, knowledge and love. Peter Heath’s chapter on Knowledge, while fascinating, would have benefited by more than the one sentence about the education of women, and a more accurate use of “sons” in place of his use of “children” in describing education of the young. A biographical section gives us chapters on ten prominent men of the time to broaden and deepen the reader’s understanding of the cultural milieu. A section on Andalus as reflected beyond Iberia, in Sicily, precedes the final section, Marriages and Exiles, which explores four ethnic/cultural hybrids historically and in their current garb: Mozarabs (Christians who adopted

Arabic language and culture while retaining their faith), Arabized Jews, Sephardim (descendants of Jews expelled from Spain in 1492), and Moriscos (underground Spanish Muslims). Each of five sections is followed by a chapter on a specific building or space, reflecting a particular nuance of architecture/design/decoration of al-Andalus.

The editors have created a multi-dimensional tapestry, aptly reflecting the rich, complex, intertwined culture of Al-Andalus. Unfortunately the price tag will put it outside the budget of most libraries.

Printed from: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm?issn=0950-4125&volume=16&issue=4&articleid=1496641&show=html> on Thursday December 15th, 2011 © Emerald Group Publishing Limited