

**‘UMDAT AL-ṬABĪB FĪ MA‘RIFAT AL-NABĀT:  
COMMUNITY AND TERRITORIAL CONSCIOUSNESS  
OF AL-ANDALUS IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY  
‘Umdat al-ṭabīb fī ma‘rifat al-nabāt: conciencia comunitaria y  
territorial de al-Andalus en el siglo XI**

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**Abstract:** This article examines a significant number of linguistic and geographical references found in the botanical treatise *‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb fī Ma‘rifat al-Nabāt*, possibly written in the second half of the eleventh century and attributed to Abū l-Khayr. This work not only provides valuable botanical information but also offers a wealth of data about life and society in Andalusian times, as well as the author's perception of the world. The methodology used in this study is based on a sociolinguistic and philological analysis of terms and expressions that provide insights into identities and territories. The findings suggest the existence of a certain sense of community and belonging to a geographical space, contrasted with other linguistic, ethnic, and religious groups within and beyond al-Andalus in the eleventh century. This hypothesis is of great interest and relevance for better understanding the author of this treatise, the society of that era, and the identity characteristics present in at least a portion of the population.

**Resumen:** Este artículo analiza un importante número de referencias lingüísticas y geográficas encontradas en el tratado botánico *‘Umdat al-ṭabīb fī ma‘rifat al-nabāt*, posiblemente escrito en la segunda mitad del siglo XI y cuya autoría ha sido atribuida a Abū l-Jayr. Se trata de una obra que, además de proporcionarnos una valiosa información de índole botánica, nos ofrece igualmente gran cantidad de datos sobre cómo era la vida y la sociedad andalusí en aquella época, así como la percepción que el autor de la obra tenía del mundo. La metodología que hemos seguido para la realización de este trabajo se ha basado en un análisis de carácter sociolingüístico y filológico de términos y expresiones que nos proporcionan información relacionada con las identidades y los territorios, y cuyo resultado apunta hacia la idea de la existencia de un cierto sentimiento comunitario y de pertenencia a un espacio geográfico en contraste con otros grupos lingüísticos, étnicos y religiosos existentes dentro y fuera de al-Andalus en el siglo XI. Este postulado nos parece de gran interés y relevancia para conocer mejor al autor de este tratado, la sociedad de aquel momento, y las características identitarias existentes en al menos una parte de la población.

**Keywords:** Al-Andalus. Botanical treatise. *‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb*. Community Consciousness. Territories.

**Palabras clave:** al-Andalus. Tratado botánico. *‘Umdat al-ṭabīb*. Conciencia comunitaria. Territorios.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The Andalusian work *Kitāb ‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb fī Ma‘rifat al-Nabāt li-kull labīb*, or *The Pillar Book of the Physicians for the Knowledge of Plants to Every Expert*<sup>1</sup>, is considered one of the most comprehensive medieval treatises on botanical science due to the large number of plant entries —more than five thousands—, most of which are meticulously classified and described. This botanical treatise is particularly notable for offering a wealth of plant terminology in various languages, including Arabic, Andalusī Arabic, Romance, Greek, Latin, Coptic, Persian, Syriac, and Nabatean.

Although the objective of this study is not to address the question of authorship or the period in which this treatise was written —possibly in the second half of the eleventh century— we consider it necessary to briefly present the hypotheses regarding its authorship, as we will later analyze excerpts and expressions from the author of *‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb* that provide information about their identity, other potential identities, or the awareness of group and territorial belonging.

The prevailing hypotheses suggest that the author of *‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb* was a contemporary of the physician Abū l-Ḥasan ibn al-Lūnquh, Ibn Wāfid, and Ibn Baṣṣāl. Hence, the references to these agronomists in this treatise are numerous, such as “it was what I was told by the agronomist Ibn Baṣṣāl”<sup>2</sup>; “I saw this plant when Ibn Baṣṣāl was planting it in the garden of the sultan where I met him”<sup>3</sup>; or “Ibn Baṣṣāl showed me this specie”<sup>4</sup>. The author seems to be one of Ibn Baṣṣāl’s disciples, or at least someone very close to him, a botanist or an agronomist who had a great knowledge of these two disciplines and was probably from the city of

1. The title of *‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb* has been translated into English directly from the Arabic since (as it is the case with other Andalusī agronomic and botanical treatises) there is no English version of the text. The Spanish translation is *Libro base del médico para el conocimiento de la Botánica por todo experto*.

2. Abulḥayr Al’iṣbīlī. *Kitābu ‘Umdati ṭabīb*, vol. II, p. 124.

3. *Idem*, p. 749.

4. *Idem*, p. 773.

Seville<sup>5</sup>, Aljarafe<sup>6</sup>, or elsewhere in the south-west regions of al-Andalus. If we consider Abū l-Khayr to be the author of *'Umdat al-Ṭabīb*, it is possible that he died at the beginning of the twelfth century after his master Ibn Baṣṣāl, although all of the sources point to the fact that Abū l-Khayr probably died at the end of the eleventh century and Ibn Baṣṣāl lived until the beginning of the twelfth century<sup>7</sup>. Another hypothesis is that this treatise was not written by Abū l-Khayr, but by another unknown Andalusian botanist or agronomist who died in the twelfth century.

Whether the correct hypothesis about the authorship and the period of composition of this encyclopedic treatise is the first one or the latter mentioned above, there is no doubt that the analysis of more than fifty excerpts taken from *'Umdat al-Ṭabīb* enabled us to obtain interesting data regarding the existence of an Andalusian identity and group consciousness in the eleventh century, a hypothesis which in previous studies has been based more on factors of a historical and social nature<sup>8</sup> —the so-called “Andalusi” *'aṣabiyya* that can be considered as the feeling of unity among the different ethnic groups of the population of al-Andalus which arose as a result of the reaction of opposition to the Berber groups, the Berber *'aṣabiyya*, which inundated the Peninsula in the second half of the tenth century— than on data obtained from a linguistic analysis of Arabic texts from the period which, in one way or another, refer to this question.

COMMUNAL IDENTITIES: “WE/AMONG US” IN CONTRAST TO “OTHERNESS”  
(NAḤNU/‘INDA-NĀ VS. ‘AĠAM/‘ARAB/‘ĀMMA)

It is essential that we focus on the numerous quotes in which the author indicates the name by which a specific plant species is known among the individuals of his own community, as opposed to the term in the language of other communities located both outside of and within Andalusian territory, for example among the Arabs or the indigenous population groups of al-Andalus. These are formulae which include expressions such as *nusammī naḥnu* (“we call it”) and *'inda-nā* (“among us”), after which the author states the term common to his group, in con-

5. “This plant grows among us in some of the gardens of Seville”. *Idem*, p. 283.

6. “I saw this plant in Aljarafe, to the west of Seville”. *Idem*, p. 84; “This plant grows in abundance among us in Aljarafe”. *Idem*, p. 202; “This plant is abundant among us in the region of Aljarafe”. *Idem*, p. 557.

7. “This hypothesis is based on a reference in *'Umdat al-Ṭabīb* to the “palm tree” (*naḥl*) where the author declares that what he is writing is what “the excellent master Ibn Baṣṣāl —*raḥimahu llāhu* (Allah have merci upon him)— told him”. *Idem*, p. 492.

8. Ibn Khaldūn makes reference to this, writing that it was the Almoravids who “obliterated all traces of (the small princes) who were unable to defend themselves because they had no (longer any) group feeling”. Ibn Khaldūn. *The Muqaddima*, p. 125.

trast to the term in the languages of other communities different to his own, in which case, after *'inda* or *yusammà*, the name of the ethnic group referred to is added, e.g. *yusammà al-'arab*, *'inda al-'arab* (“called by the Arabs”, “among the Arabs”).

In other cases, there are entries in which the author alludes to the land where a particular species originated or was found, and on some occasions he even indicates the types of land and soils which are most favourable for growing each species<sup>9</sup>. An example of this is *ḥarrub šāmī* (the carob bean)<sup>10</sup>, about which he writes, among other things, that “it is what we have (*'inda-nā*) in our country (*bi-bilād-nā*)”<sup>11</sup>; here, this is understood to refer to the territory of al-Andalus. On occasions, he also adds whether it is found in abundance or is scarce in his immediate surroundings —Seville or the areas close to that city—, as can be seen, for example, in *baṣal al-narḡis* (“narcissus onion”), which the author declares is “abundant among us” (*kaṭīr 'inda-nā*) in the marshes (*sibāḥ*), and he adds that “it is brought to Seville from its western region (*min ḡihat al-ġarb min-hā*)”<sup>12</sup>, which here is understood to refer to the land which would have been part of the Taifa of Seville, in the south-western zone of the Iberian Peninsula.

In addition to these types of geographical references, the linguistic element, which plays a decisive —though not exclusive— role in shaping a sense of belonging, unity, and communal identity, is also of particular interest when reconstructing an individual’s identity. As Alfonso indicates, “while representation and self-representation are not exclusively a matter of language, it is in the domain of language that they become explicit”<sup>13</sup>. In this respect, the *'aḡamiyya* language appears in *'Umdat al-Ṭabīb* as a unifying force in the indigenous community or communities of the Iberian Peninsula, the *'aḡam*, which is distinct from the author of this treatise and his community. The comparison of the Arabic name for a species, which is the one used in his community, with its synonym in any of the varieties of *'aḡamiyya*, highlights the linguistic differences between these communities. One example of this is when the author, in writing about a species, states that it is called “among us (*'inda-nā*) ‘chicken fat’ (*ṣaḥmat al-daḡāḡa*),

9. For further information on types of soils in Andalusi agronomic treatises, see Bolens-Halimi. “De l’idéologie aristotélicienne à l’empirisme médiéval”, pp. 1062-1083.

10. Concerning the carob tree (*Ceratonia siliqua* L.): “There are various species, among which the Andalusian has, in turn, two varieties: one male, which does not bear fruit, and another, the female, which produces fruit that is long and broad. Other varieties of the carob tree include: the smooth (*am-līsī*); mouse tail (*ḍanab fa'r*); Syriac (*šāmī*), which bears small, round fruit; golden shower (*ḡiyār šanbar*); and wild (*yabalī*)”. Carabaza Bravo *et al.* *Árboles y arbustos de al-Andalus*, p. 207.

11. Abulḡayr Al'isbīlī. *Kiṭābu 'Umdati ṭṭabīb*, vol. II, p. 283.

12. *Idem*, p. 152.

13. Alfonso. *Islamic Culture through Jewish Eyes*, p. 9.

which in Romance (*bi-l- 'ağamiyya*) is *šībuh dīgillīna*<sup>14</sup>, because of its mildness (*li-ruṭūbat-hi*)<sup>15</sup>.

The botanical terms in the different local varieties of Romance which are collated in this treatise reveal, on the one hand, the lexical richness of *'ağamiyya* and the linguistic diversity within the different indigenous communities of al-Andalus and, on the other, the profound knowledge or, at any rate, the high level of documentation by the author of *'Umdat al-Ṭabīb*, at least as far as botanical vocabulary is concerned, of the language of "otherness". Moreover, he displays an unusual interest, unique to a philologist or a linguist, in revealing all of this lexical wealth of Romance in his work, which is reflected in the numerous references throughout the treatise to these dialectal varieties of Romance. These can be classified, as we see it, into three groups, depending on whether the variety in question is from one of the cities located within the boundaries of al-Andalus, the border territories in the North (Upper March) and Zaragoza, or the variety of Romance spoken in the Christian kingdoms in the north-west of the Peninsula, which are also referred to at times in this work.

Regarding the first group, the author usually refers to this as the "*'ağam* of our country", as can be seen in the entry for the species called *ḥubbāzà* (*Malva* L.), about which he writes, "it is called by the *'ağam* of our country (*'ağam balad-nā*) *mālba ballūḥa* (*Corchorus olitorius* L.)<sup>16</sup>, although the correct word is *maluḥa*, that is to say, viscose"<sup>17</sup>. Sometimes the author makes a direct reference to the city in which the Romance term is used. The numbers of terms mentioned in this way, according to the figures from our count, are as follows: seventeen terms in the Romance dialect of Toledo (*Ṭulayṭula*); four Romance terms from Badajoz (*Baṭalyaws*); twelve terms in the Romance of al-Andalus (*'Ağamiyyat al-Andalus*); four Romance terms from Cordoba (*Qurṭuba*); three terms in the Romance language of Seville-Ourique (*Išbīliyya-Iwark*); three Romance terms from Granada-Sierra Nevada (*Garnaṭa-Ġabal Šulayr*); and two Romance terms used in the region of Jaen-Baza (*Ġayyān-Basṭa*)<sup>18</sup>. This group also includes a word in the Romance of the "strongholds in the North" (*Ḥuṣūn al-Ġawf*)<sup>19</sup> in Seville, record-

14. ŠÉBO DE ĠALÍNA "matricaria": GB 269 includes this Romance term with its correct etymons, Lt. *sēbum* and *gallina*. See PEDE ĠALLÍNA". Corriente. "El romandalusí reflejado por el glosario botánico de Abulxayr", p. 195.

15. Abulḥayr al-Išbīlī. *Kitābu 'Umdati ṭabīb*, vol. II, p. 721.

16. For further information on the etymology of this species, see the section on "MÁLBA BALLÚXA" in Corriente. "El romandalusí reflejado por el glosario botánico de Abulxayr", p. 156.

17. Abulḥayr al-Išbīlī. *Kitābu 'Umdati ṭabīb*, p. 279.

18. This count differs slightly from the one found in volume III (indexes) of the edition of *'Umdat al-Ṭabīb* by J. Bustamante, F. Corriente and M. Tilmatine. *Idem*, vol. II, p. 921.

19. *Idem*, vol. II, p. 505.

ed in the entry for *nabiyālluh* (*Aconitum napellus* L.)<sup>20</sup>, which “in Romance (*bi-l-‘ağamiyya*) is *ğinğibāruh*, in our strongholds in the North (*bi-ħuṣūn al-ğawf min-nā*) is *darḍayrah*, and in the Romance of al-Andalus (*bi-‘ağamiyyat al-Andalus*) is *nabbālluh*”<sup>21</sup>.

References to the Romance variety spoken by the inhabitants of the lands of the Upper March (*al-Ṭağr al-A‘lā*) and its capital Zaragoza, in the region of the Valle del Ebro (*Wādī Ibruḥ*), are also quite common. This territory would have been exposed to a greater influence from the kingdoms of the North and would have been in contention with the Aragonese Christians<sup>22</sup>. In the section on *ħiṭmī*, or marshmallow (*Althaea officinalis* L.), the author states that this variety is called “among us in al-Andalus (*‘inda-nā bi-l-andalus*) ‘meadow fat’ (*ṣaḥmat al-marğ*), due to the dampness of its roots, because upon crushing it resembles fat which has been kneaded...”<sup>23</sup>, whereas “in the Romance of the Upper March (*‘ağamiyyat al-ṭağr*) it is called *altiyyah*”<sup>24</sup>, alluding to the variety of Romance spoken by the indigenous populations of the area bordering onto the Christian kingdoms in the north-east of the Peninsula. The total number of terms in the Romance of the Upper March counted in *‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb* is thirty-two, and there are seven terms belonging to the Romance dialect from Zaragoza (*Saraqusṭa*).

Thirdly, although such references are very rare, there are also two terms in the Romance of the region of Galicia (*Ğillīqiyya*)<sup>25</sup>, a territory which, the Arab historians tell us, included the kingdoms of Asturias, Leon and a significant part of the north-western area of the Iberian Peninsula<sup>26</sup>.

In addition to the *‘ağams*, other elements contribute to the impression of “otherness” conveyed by the author. Similar to the examples analyzed in relation to terms in *‘ağamiyya*, in all its varieties, which often appear alongside Andalusī Arabic terms used by the author and his community, an analysis of other sections reveals comparable features. These features suggest a comparison between the latter group —characterized as Andalusī Muslims, “without distinguishing be-

20. NAP[Y]ÉLLO or NAPÉL “aconite”: GB 191 includes this Romance word and gives its correct etymon, a *dim. Rom.*, with or without diphthongisation, from Lt. *nāpus*. Corriente. “El romandalusí reflejado por el glosario botánico de Abulxayr”, p. 163.

21. CENČEBARA “aconite”. *Idem*, p. 127.

22. “The Islamic provinces such as Aragon that had been along the frontier with Christian Spain were naturally the first to succumb to the Reconquest. The Muslim aristocracy and high administrative officials left these provinces immediately, but rural Muslims and sectors of the urban population stayed”. Ruggles. “Representation and Identity in Medieval Spain”, p. 96.

23. AbulḤayr al-İsbīlī. *Kitābu ‘Umdati ṭṭabīb*, vol. II, p. 280.

24. *Ibidem*.

25. *Idem*, vol. II, pp. 386 y 556.

26. Huici-Miranda. “*Djillīqiyya*”, p. 542.

tween Arab, Berber, Slav or *muwallad* origin<sup>27</sup>,— and the language of the Arabs (*al-'arab*, *'inda al-'arab*) from the Islamic East (*bilād al-'arab* or *arḍ al-'arab*).

It should be noted that the variety of Arabic spoken in al-Andalus is referred to in this treatise as a language called *andalusiyya* (Andalusi), distinct from the Arabic language (*'arabiyya*). For this reason, at no point in the work is the *andalusiyya* language considered a dialectal variety of Arabic. Consequently, there is no reference to “Andalusi Arabic” (*'arabiyyat al-Andalus*) or “Arabic in al-Andalus” (*'arabiyya bi-l-Andalus*), reflecting the degree of independence of the *andalusiyya* element at that time in relation to the Eastern Arab element. Among the many examples, one entry that highlights the author’s lack of identification with the Arab element concerns *ḥummāḍ bustānī* or sorrel (*Rumex acetosa* L.), where he writes that “it is known among us (*ma'rūf 'inda-nā*) as *qurašī*”<sup>28</sup>. He adds that “the Arabs (*al-'arab*) call any plant with an acidic taste *ḥummāḍ* or *ḥamḍ* (which means ‘acid, sour’)”<sup>29</sup>. Another example involves the species *bahār*, which is called “...among the common people (*'amma*) *zanbaq*, *bahār abyāḍ* in Arabic, or even *bahār al-riyād*, and *qulaymūna* in Indian”<sup>30</sup>. He further notes that “the Arabs (*al-'arab*) use the term *bahār* (from the root *b-h-r*, meaning “to glitter, shine”, though the plural term *bahārāt* means “spice”) to refer to anything that glitters”<sup>31</sup>.

Similarly to the treatment of the Romance language, this treatise also includes botanical terms from different linguistic varieties of Arabic. For example, the plant *aqīmūn* or star thistle (*Centaurea calcitrapa* L.), is noted as being called by “some Arabs (*wa-ba'ḍ al-'arab*) *'inqaz*, which is also marjoram (*Origanum majorana* L.), though its Arabic name is *murar*, although some (*ba'ḍ-hum*) call it *sam'ar*”<sup>32</sup>. This once again highlights the author's interest in compiling as many lexical variants as possible from different languages in his treatise. This could be interpreted as the author's way of showcasing both his linguistic proficiency and his botanical expertise, which was likely one of the objectives that this botanical dictionary aimed to achieve.

In *'Umdat al-Ṭabīb*, there are references to the dialectal variants of Arabic spoken by the tribes (*qabā'il*) and groups in the Arabian Peninsula and the East. Among the varieties of Levantine Arabic (*šām*), fourteen terms are identified.

27. Guichard. *Al-Andalus*, p. 38.

28. One of the varieties of fig. Others include *qūṭī*, *ša'arī*, *qāriq*, *liṭyāl*, *milhī*, *šuhayllī*, *ray*, *dunniqāl*. Concerning the fig tree (*tīn*) and types of figs, see Abū l-Jayr. *Kitāb al-Filāḥa*, p. 224.

29. AbulḤayr al-Isbīlī. *Kitābu 'Umdati ṭṭabīb*, vol. II, p. 253.

30. *Idem*, vol. II, p. 152.

31. *Ibidem*.

32. *Idem*, vol. II, p. 77.

Within the Mesopotamian dialects, there are five Arabic terms from *‘irāq-bašra*, three terms in *sawād* Arabic, and two from the *ġazīra* variety. Among Western Arabic dialects, one term is attributed to *huḍayl*, three to *ṭayyi*, one to *ṭaqīf*, five to *ḥiġāz* Arabic, and four to *yamāniyya*. Finally, among Eastern Arabic dialects, there is one term from *yamāma*, one from *šihr*, one from *baḥrayn*, and two terms from *tamīm-qays*<sup>33</sup>.

On the other hand, there are also excerpts in which the author clearly identifies himself with the geographical area of Seville, the regions adjacent to that capital city, or other regions of the *ġarb* of al-Andalus, which following the process of territorial expansion had come under the control of the “Abbadids of Seville”<sup>34</sup>. Moreover, it is worth noting that, along with other factors, the constant references in this treatise to this geographical area are among the most influential reasons for attributing its authorship to the agronomist Abū l-Ḥayr from Seville. Among the various references to this city and to other geographical landmarks within the territorial boundaries of the Taifa of Seville, the author notes in the entry for *ḥiyār šanbar*<sup>35</sup> (the golden shower tree, *Cassia fistula* L.) that it is a species that “grows among us (*‘inda-nā*) in some vegetable gardens (*bi-bustān*) in the capital of Seville (*ḥādirat Išbīliyya*)”<sup>36</sup>; Similarly, regarding *ḥinṭa*, (wheat, *Triticum* L.), he remarks that it is a variety which “is sown among us (*‘inda-nā*) in part of Medina Sidonia<sup>37</sup> (*bi-nāḥiyat Šiḍūna*)”<sup>38</sup>.

Finally, from a social rather than an ethnic perspective, author also identifies himself with a group that was likely a minority —perhaps a circle of cultivated individuals and scientists associated with the court— who held a privileged position in contrast to the social class he refers to as *‘amma* (plural *‘awwām*), mean-

33. This count also differs slightly from the one found in volume III (indexes) of the edition of *‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb* by J. Bustamante, F. Corriente and M. Tilmatine. See AbulḤayr al-Išbīlī. *Kitābu ‘Umdati ṭṭabīb*, vol. II, p. 918.

34. “The expansion of Seville is the most noteworthy event which determined, more than halfway through the eleventh century, the political geography of southern Al-Andalus. The Hammudid threat having all but disappeared, al-Mu’tadid Ibn ‘Abbād launched a calculated campaign of territorial enlargement at the expense of his neighbours”. Guichard and Soravia. *Los reinos de taifas*, p. 79.

35. “Accounts of its cultivation, or at least of an attempt at such, appear in the text of *‘Umda* where it is explained how in Seville, in the garden of the court of al-Mu’tamid, it was attempted, certainly not with any great degree of success, to grow the golden shower tree”. Carabaza Bravo *et al.* *Arboles y arbustos de al-Andalus*, pp. 210-211.

36. AbulḤayr al-Išbīlī. *Kitābu ‘Umdati ṭṭabīb*, vol. II, p. 283.

37. Medina Sidonia (City of Sidon) is nowadays a municipality in the province of Cadiz. It is probable that in the south-east of this municipality, on around 20 July of the year 711, one of the battles which determined the future of the Iberian Peninsula took place between the armies of Rodrigo and Ṭāriq b. Ziyād, which ended in the defeat of the Visigothic troops. See Kennedy. *Muslim Spain and Portugal*, p. 11.

38. AbulḤayr al-Išbīlī. *Kitābu ‘Umdati ṭṭabīb*, vol. II, p. 247.

ing “the common people” or “the broad masses.” Such references are reasonably frequent.

One of these describes grain (*ḥabb*) which, according to the author, “we know (*na'rifu-hu naḥnu*) as *ḥarmal* (*Peganum harmala* L.), and it is a plant whose leaves are similar to those of ‘stonecrop’ (*ḥayy al-'alam al-ṣagīr*), but the leaves are longer and thinner, flattened like the tails of wingless grasshoppers (*ḡarrād allaḡī la aḡniḥa la-hu*), which it is known among the common people (*'inda al-'awwām*) as *burrūq*”<sup>39</sup>. The religious and ethnic factors, therefore, do not seem to have been the only determining elements in the creation of identity. It could also be said, as seen in this example, that the Muslim, Jewish and Christian elite who frequented the royal courts of the Moslem and Christian rulers “may have had more in common with each other<sup>40</sup> with respect to education, wealth, and social fraternization than with ordinary laborers of their same religion”.

*IDENTIFICATION WITH THE TERRITORY: “OUR COUNTRY” IN CONTRAST TO “OTHER COUNTRIES/TERRITORIES” (BILĀD-NĀ VS. BALAD/ARĀD/NAWĀḤĪ/ ĞIḤĀT)*

Identification with the territory is a further factor to be taken into account when it comes to deciphering and determining the cultural identity of an individual and the particular group or community to which they belong. Starting from this initial premise, the study of the different territories (*arḡ*) and “countries” (*bilād*) in *'Umdat al-Ṭabīb*, as well as the groups of humans and nations (*ahl, umam*)<sup>41</sup>, established both within and outside of al-Andalus and the Peninsula, brings to light some interesting information regarding the author’s view and perception of the world.

There are several passages in this treatise in which its author makes reference to “our country” (*bilād-nā*) to indicate the origin of a species, or the land in which it grows or is cultivated abundantly. Furthermore, examples can be found in which the plant in question is not a species which exists in al-Andalus, coming instead from other territories, in which case this is also normally indicated. As a result, as well as allowing us an insight into how the author perceives the different territories, pinpointing locations in this way is of particular importance, from a geobotanical perspective, in terms of enabling the identification of each species along with its place of origin and its habitat.

39. *Idem*, vol. II, p. 227.

40. Ruggles. “Representation and Identity in Medieval Spain”, p. 78.

41. This last term, *umam* (nations), which also has the meaning of peoples, is not included in *'Umdat al-Ṭabīb* although it is frequently found in other texts, albeit on different subjects, from this same period, for example in *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-Umam* by Ṣā'id al-Andalusī. Ṣā'id al-Andalusī. *Science in the Medieval World*, p. 6.

Among the geographical locations mentioned in *‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb*, those of greatest interest to us —due to their proximity to the author— are those related to specific cities or areas within the territorial boundaries of al-Andalus, the Christian kingdoms in the north of the Iberian Peninsula, and the three border areas or marches, which served as places of “encounters and misunderstandings” between these two regions. As reflected in the majority of examples, the author identifies himself with the territory of al-Andalus, referring to it as “my/our country” (*bilād-nā/balad-nā*). In many entries he writes, for example, that a species “is not a plant from our country” (*laysa min nabāt bilād-nā*)<sup>42</sup> or, on the contrary, he states that it “is a plant that we have in our country” (*wa-huwa allaḡī ‘inda-nā bi-balad-nā*)<sup>43</sup>. In other excerpts, as in the case of pomegranate (*Punica granatum* L.), he indicates that among the many varieties of *rummān*, there is one which is sour (*ḥāmiḡ*), and that in turn there are several varieties of this, one of which is “of the country” (*al-ḥāmiḡ al-baladī*)<sup>44</sup>, with this being understood to refer to a variety which grows or is cultivated in al-Andalus. However, there are also passages in which the territory of al-Andalus is discussed in somewhat more neutral terms, for example in *zanḡabīl ifranḡī*, which is “ginger” (*Zingiber officinale*), a plant which “grows in the country of the Franks (*bi-bilād al-ifranḡ*), and in al-Andalus”. Similarly, it is not uncommon to find descriptions such as “I have seen it in Monchique (*bi-ḡabal Munt Šāqir*), and in the region of Malaga (*bi-nāḡiyat Mālaqa*)”<sup>45</sup>, through which we learn that the author of this book undertook numerous journeys within al-Andalus, possibly with the purpose of collecting information about the plant species in that territory. In any case, regardless of his specific objective, one thing is clear: his dedication to gathering information, wherever he went, about plants, both in terms of their names (phytonyms) and purely morphological characteristics.

Within al-Andalus, the city of Seville (*ḥāḡirat Išbīliyya*) and the areas near that capital, such as Aljarafe, which the author occasionally refers to as “our Aljarafe” (*Šaraf-nā*)<sup>46</sup>, as well as the territories which the author considers to be “our western regions” (*nāḡiyat ḡarb-nā*)<sup>47</sup>, *ḡihāt al-ḡarb*, *ḡihāt al-ḡarb min Išbīliyya*, *ḡihāt al-ḡarb ‘inda-nā*), using Seville as a point of reference, hold a special place in *‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb*. This was, as we know for certain, the author's place of residence and, in all likelihood, his birthplace as well. In the entry on a variety of

42. AbulḤayr al-Išbīlī. *Kitābu ‘Umdati ṭṭabīb*, vol. II, p. 228.

43. *Idem*, vol. II, p. 283.

44. *Idem*, vol. II, p. 330.

45. *Idem*, vol. II, p. 339.

46. *Idem*, vol. II, p. 432.

47. *Idem*, vol. II, p. 524.

*ḥummāḍ al-sawāqī* (a type of sorrel which grows near irrigation channels) which is called *ḡāsūl*, the author notes that this species is called “*buqustus* in Greek, *šawšiyallah* in Romance, *šwayla*’ in Arabic, and it is abundant among us (*wa-huwa kaṭīr ‘inda-nā*), in the region of Almeria (*wa-bi-nāḥiyat al-Mariyya*) and in Arabia (*wa-bi-arḍ al-‘Arab*)”<sup>48</sup>. In this example, it can be observed how the author establishes a division between the territory to which he belongs —Seville, or at least the western part (*ḡarb*) of al-Andalus<sup>49</sup>— the territory of Almeria in the central southern part (*mawsaṭ*) of al-Andalus, and the “country of the Arabs”, which is the Arabian Peninsula, referred to in *‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb* not using the more common term of *ḡazīrat al-‘arab*<sup>50</sup> but rather as *bilād al-‘arab* or *arḍ al-‘arab*.

Regarding the representation of the latter territory, the country of the Arabs, an analysis of various excerpts from the work reveals that, for the author, it is a somewhat distant and unfamiliar land, with which he does not seem to have any emotional connection. As a result, his treatment of this region in *‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb* does not differ from that of other territories (“*nawāḥīr*” and “*ḡihāt*”) mentioned in the work, both in the East and the West. Some examples of this are “lemongrass” (*Cymbopogon schoenanthus* L.), *iḍḥir* in Arabic, which “is plentiful in Arabia (*bilād al-‘Arab*) and Antalia (*bilād Anṭāliyā*)”<sup>51</sup>; or the species named *dawālin*, which is “a kind (*šanf*) of grape (*‘inab*) which grows in Arabia (*arḍ al-‘Arab*), and is known there (*ma ‘rūf hunāk*)”<sup>52</sup>. A similar treatment is given to other areas in the Muslim East, such as Syria. For example, the author notes that *rummān* (“pomegranate”) is a species that “is abundant in Syria (*kaṭīr bi nāḥiyat al-Šām*) and which we have in al-Andalus (*‘inda-nā min-hu bi-l-Andalus*), where we use it as a remedy (*‘ilāḡ*), cultivating it in vegetable gardens (*basātīn*)”<sup>53</sup>.

Certain species which were plentiful in the Christian kingdoms in the North, in particular spices, were imported to al-Andalus<sup>54</sup>. One of these was *muštahā*,

48. *Idem*, vol. II, p. 254.

49. “Along the Levant coast (*Sharq al-Andalus*) the land was widely given to irrigated garden (in Castilian, *huerta*), making the region famous for its fruits, vegetables, and rice. In the south-west, the Guadalquivir valley supported more agricultural land, less intensely irrigated, and especially known for olives and olive oil”. Constable. *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain*, p. 141.

50. “The country of the Arabs is known as *Jazīrat al-‘Arab*. It was called *Jazīrat* (Island) because the sea surrounds it on three sides, the west, the south, and the east”. Šā‘id al-Andalusī. *Science in the Medieval World*, p. 42.

51. AbulḤayr al-Isbīlī. *Kitābu ‘Umdati ṭabīb*, vol. II, p. 80.

52. *Idem*, vol. II, p. 300.

53. *Idem*, vol. II, p. 331.

54. “The majority of species were imports to al-Andalus, where they found a ready and stable market. In some cases, as with frankincense from south Arabia, an item might originate within the *dār al-Islām*, but many of the spices traded internationally from India and Far East. Sources indicate that spices of all varieties were bought and sold in Andalusī markets”. Constable. *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain*, p. 152.

which is whitebeam (*Sorbus aria* L.), which “is abundant in the country of the Christians (*bilād al-rūm*) and Zaragoza (*Saraqusṭa*)”<sup>55</sup>. A further illustration is *ṭūrna marīṭuh* (“anise, horseradish”), which “in Jaen (*Ġayyān*) is called *ṭūrna* and the Christians (*naṣāra*) use it as incense. It is abundant in Zaragoza and throughout the Upper March (*al-ṭaġr kull-hu*), being scarce (*qalīl*) in our country (*bi-balad-nā*)”<sup>56</sup>. This final example is a clear reflection of the author’s perception of the Upper March and Zaragoza as being different territories with regards to the land that he considered to be “his country”, although in the latter example it is difficult to determine whether he is referring to al-Andalus or to the Taifa of Seville. In this regard, we are confronted with various questions that have no easy answer: if by *balad-nā* he is referring to al-Andalus, does it mean that, for the author of *‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb*, the territories of the Upper March and, in particular, the Taifa of Zaragoza, which remained independent until the year 1110, were not considered part of the state known as al-Andalus as a whole, like the other kingdoms that were also independent during that period? And if he is referring to the city of Seville, or the kingdom of Seville, which is very likely where the author was from, does this not represent yet another example that shows that, at this time, at least among certain sectors of the population, in addition to a sense of Andalusī identity, there must have been other identities corresponding to each of the kingdoms and small states, arising as a consequence of ethnic and political division?

In any case, whichever of these scenarios is correct, this is one of the best examples, though not the only one, that reveals the lack of territorial unity in al-Andalus at the end of the eleventh century, the outcome of which would be the rise of the state ruled by the Almoravid dynasty.

In terms of North Africa, this is referred to as “the other side” (*al-‘idwa*), Barbary (*arḍ al-Barbar*, *bilād al-Barbar*), the territory of Tunisia (*Ifriqiya*), or the region of the central Maghreb (*al-Ġarb al-Awsaṭ*). There are also many references in this treatise to geographical locations within this vast territory, especially in the westernmost part (*bilād al-Maġrib*), amongst which we find the regions of Rif (*Rīf*) and Sous (*Sūs*), cities such as Fez (*Fās*), Agmat (*Aġmāt*), Sijilmasa (*Siġilmāsa*), Meknes (*Miknāsa*) and Marrakesh (*Marrākuš*), and mountain ranges such as the Mountains of Gomara (*Ġibāl Ġumāra*).

As well as the “country of the Christians” (*bilād al-‘Aġam*, *bilād al-Rūm*), the “country of the Arabs” (*bilād/arḍ al-‘Arab*) and the “country of the Berbers” (*bilād/arḍ al-Barbar*) which we have just discussed, the list of geographical loca-

55. AbulḤayr al-Isbīlī. *Kitābu ‘Umdati ṭṭabīb*, vol. II, p. 342.

56. *Idem*, vol. II, p. 361.

tions also extends to other more distant territories, to many countries and groups of people, only some of which we will mention here<sup>57</sup>. These include India (*arḍ al-Hind*), Abyssinia (*arḍ/bilād al-Habaš/al-Habaša*), Land of the “Magi” (*arḍ/bilād al-Mağūs*), Land of the Copts (*arḍ al-Qubṭ*), Land of the Zang (*arḍ al-Zanğ*), Egypt (*arḍ Miṣr*), Oman (*arḍ 'Umān*), Land of the Nabateans (*balad al-Nabaṭ*), Land of the Syrians (*balad al-Suryāniyyīn*), land near *al-sadd*, “The Great Wall of China” (*balad Halāhil*)<sup>58</sup>, Country of the Persians (*balad/bilād Fāris/al-Furs*), “Country of the Khazars” (*bilād al-Ḥazar*), Country of Incense (*bilād al-Kundur*), Country of the *Mašāmiḍa* (*bilād al-Mašāmiḍa*), Country of the Jews (*bilād al-Yahūd*), Country of the Greeks (*bilād al-Yunāniyyīn*), Country of the Negroes (*bilād Sūd/al-Sūdān*), Upper Egypt (*bilād al-Ša'īd*), Country of the Turks (*bilād al-Turk*), Country of the Zang (*bilād al-Zanğ*), Country of Babylonia (*bilād Bābil*), Lycia, in Asia Minor (*bilād Lūqiyā*), and Country of Cappadocia (*bilād Qabāḍūqiyā*)<sup>59</sup>. Many of these locations indicate the place of origin of species of plants, such as one of the varieties of *kabīkağ*, which “grows widely in a country (*bilād*) called Sardinia (*Sardūniyā*)”<sup>60</sup>. Others even take the name of their place of origin, such as *dustī*, which is also called *tusturī*, a name given to the inhabitants of “Country of Tustar” (*balad tustar*, modern-day Šūštar, in Iran), due to its abundance there (*li-kaṭrat-hu hunāk*), and from where its seeds were brought (*ğuliba bazr-hu*) to al-Andalus<sup>61</sup>.

### CONCLUSIONS

Although *'Umdat al-Ṭabīb* is a work of an eminently botanical nature, the vast amount of information that can be gleaned from its analysis beyond the mere

57. A complete list of place names is given in the indexes (vol. III) of the edition of *'Umdat al-Ṭabīb*. AbulḤayr al-İsbīlī. *Kitābu 'Umdati ṭabīb*, vol. III, pp. 984-1006.

58. In addition to this location in China, there are various excerpts which the author of *'Umdat al-Ṭabīb* takes from other Arabic sources alluding to the territory of *al-Šīn* (China), *al-Šīn al-Šağīr* (Indochina) or *al-Sadd* (the Great Wall of China), usually to indicate the Chinese location and/or origin of a particular species. This information would have been gathered by Muslim travelers and merchants who ran trading operations in territories outside of *dār al-Islām*, in remote regions such as India and China.

59. It should be noted that some of these geographical references are not directly attributable to Abū l-Ḥayr, but rather originate from the sources upon which he drew in the composition of the *Kitāb 'Umdat al-Ṭabīb*. Specifically, the mentions of Lycia and Cappadocia are derived from Dioscorides, as found in chapter 1.132 concerning *Lukion*. See Dioscorides. *De Materia Medica*, p. 130; AbulḤayr al-İsbīlī. *Kitābu 'Umdati ṭabīb*, vol. II, pp. 718-719.

60. Once again, it should be noted that this geographical reference is not directly attributable to Abū l-Ḥayr, but rather originates from the sources upon which he relied in the composition of the *Kitāb 'Umdat al-Ṭabīb*. The mention of Sardinia is derived from Dioscorides, as found in chapter 2.206 concerning *Ranunculus arvensis*. See Dioscorides. *De Materia Medica*. pp. 343-344; AbulḤayr al-İsbīlī. *Kitābu 'Umdati ṭabīb*, vol. II, p. 388.

61. AbulḤayr al-İsbīlī. *Kitābu 'Umdati ṭabīb*, vol. II, p. 290.

study of plants is remarkable. This is a work that provides numerous insights into society, linguistic landscape, ethnicity, politics, and religion of al-Andalus during the period in which it was written. Hence, the importance of examining it more deeply from a sociolinguistic perspective.

One of the main novelties of this research is that the findings related to group and territorial consciousness presented here are based more on philological analysis than on theories solely rooted in historical and social factors, as we have seen in previous studies.

We have focused on terms and excerpts which, while not providing explicit information in *‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb* about the identity of the author himself or of other ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups mentioned in the text, do allow us to highlight the existence of a consciousness of “us” versus “others”. The latter are represented by various groups, both within and outside the territory of al-Andalus, that are mentioned in the work.

From the terminology and excerpts concerning the various groups, territories, and their respective languages analyzed here, we can conclude that if an Andalusian national unity ever existed by the end of the eleventh century —when this botanical treatise was written and considering the context of political division among the various Taifa kingdoms— such a sense of unity would have entirely disappeared or persisted only in certain kingdoms or among sectors of the population with greater mutual affinity. However, what we can observe, after analyzing various fragments where the term *andalusiyya* appears in reference to language, is the degree of independence of the “Andalusi” element in relation to the Eastern Arab element, given that the term *‘arab* in *‘Umdat al-Ṭabīb* refers exclusively to an external entity, namely, the Eastern Arabs.

On the other hand, it seems more difficult to confirm from this material the existence of a “Sevillian” identity —that is, an identity specific to the community of the Taifa of Seville, a territory that, we should remember, was at the time ruled by the Banū ‘Abbād, a dynasty of Andalusian-Arab origin. However, there are some examples that suggest a certain sense of a distinct Sevillian community consciousness, one that, in some cases, appears different from the populations and territories of other kingdoms— whether those ruled by a dynasty of the same ethnic origin as the Taifa of Seville or those governed by a dynasty of different origin.

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