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**The Landscape of Sicily in and around the 13th Century.
The Idealization and Islamization of the Island
in the Literary Narratives of Al-Qazwīnī and Abū Bakr al-Harawī**

Abstract

In and around the 13th century, two eastern authors describe the island of Sicily from different perspectives but with the common purpose of linking it to the Arab and Islamic world it had belonged to. Both describe the place with varied images which combine the real physical aspects with fantasy, and which show natural landscapes, both urban and rural, dominated by the presence of the great volcano. The study of this island using its landscapes as a key allows us to investigate the ideological processes of the authors who describe it. Al-Qazwīnī and Al-Harawī undertake a literary itinerary in which the images of idealization and Islamization or sanctification of the island are crystallised.

Keywords: Geographical Literature, landscape, nature, urban design, rural world, '*ağā'ib*, *ziyāra*, idealization-Islamization, Al-Harawī, Al-Qazwīnī

1. Introduction

Beyond the world of suggestions which an island, *ğazīra/ğazā'ir*, in this case Sicily, generates, we must consider its reality as an actual entity of solid earth, completely surrounded by the sea. This nature, a mixture of terrestrial and maritime, which defines an island, has traditionally aroused great interest among geographers, travellers and pilgrims



who crossed the Mediterranean, also among rulers who observed it from the vantage point of power with the desire to dominate and control it as a strategically situated piece of territory. From earliest times, the Mediterranean was a vital transport route for the transit of people and ideas, an axis of communication, generator of identities and route by which the traditions of the different peoples who looked out on its coasts were forged, spread and settled. Narrators of all eras have devoted a special place to the description of this interior sea and its varied islands, and have presented it as spaces sometimes real, sometimes idealized; always solid territories for the traveller or the pilgrim who arrived at them confident at the promise of shelter and/or adventure.

From antiquity many islands assumed a privileged role as exceptional places, as microcosms in which any kind of event might occur, sometimes extraordinary, «ambiguous» spaces, as was stated by A. Miquel when referring to the islands surrounding the Arabic and Islamic medieval world.¹

The study of natural landscapes, both urban and rural, allows us to visualise different territorial spaces and to discover the ideological assumptions of those who have described them, because beyond the physical characteristics of the place, there is the individual appreciation of those who observe it, their subjective interpretation, in which several factors play a role. Landscapes are accumulators of history and reveal mental processes as well as aesthetic keys, together with other signs of civilization, and inform us about people's relation with their surroundings through time.² Nicolás Ortega³ states that “to speak of landscape is tantamount to saying we are posing a cultural translation of that which surrounds us, which depicts reality and puts it in order and attributes it with values, symbolic dimensions and meanings”. For this the existence of “an eye that contemplates the totality and that generates a feeling that interprets it emotionally” is necessary, because the landscape is not only that which we perceive visually, but also a cultural construct; not an exclusively physical place but also answers to a series of ideas, sensations and feelings which we create starting from the place itself.

The island of Sicily has been the object of description by geographers of the Arabic world from earliest times. Serious studies have been devoted to research into its history with approaches which sometimes were partial and on other occasions have ambitiously combined different branches of study.⁴

¹ A. Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du 11ème siècle*, Paris 1973–1988, vol. 2, p. 485 and M. Delgado, *Lo real y lo maravilloso en la ecúmene del siglo XIII. Las islas en el Āṭār al-bilād de al-Qazwīnī*, Sevilla 2003, p. 98.

² See M. de Pisón, ‘El paisaje, patrimonio cultural’, *Revista de Occidente* 194–195 (1997), pp. 38–39; F. Roldán Castro, ‘La dimensión histórica del paisaje: la conciencia paisajística en la cultura andalusí’, in: *Territorio y patrimonio. Los paisajes andaluces*, eds. J. F. Lacomba, F. Roldán Castro y F. Zoido, Sevilla 2003, pp. 116–133, p. 117.

³ N. Ortega, ‘Paisaje y cultura’, (unpublished paper presented during the conference *Fundación Duques de Soria*, June 1996).

⁴ See among others: M. Amari, *Biblioteca arabo-sicula*, Mantua 1987 (1st ed. 1880); M. Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, Catania 1933–39, Firenze 2002; A. De Simone, ‘Palermo nei geografi e viaggiatori arabi del Medioevo’, *Studi Maghrebini* 2 (1968), pp. 129–189; F. Gabrieli, *Viaggi e Viaggiatori arabi*, Firenze 1975;

In the 12th and 13th centuries, various geographers described the island of Sicily from different perspectives and with different objectives. Seen together, these descriptions show complementary images of a Sicily already under the domination of the Normans for which reason it is worth travelling to.

Amongst the aforementioned geographers, the Iraqi Al-Harawī (died 1215) compiled an interesting catalogue of pilgrim sites around the island in his *Kitāb al-iṣārāt ilā maʿrifāt az-ziyārāt*, and the Persian Al-Qazwīnī (died 1283) described the island in his *Āṭār al-bilād*, carrying out an exercise in compilation of information from earlier sources.

In their respective Sicilian visions various levels of evaluation can be observed of an island territory which belonged as much to the category of *Dār al-Islam* as of *Dār al-ḥarb*, sometimes land of *ʿahd*. Their visions overlap at times, others complement each other, both describe a place which played a leading role in an unstable history from one category to another, a tesserae of Islam which historical circumstances converted into land of *Rūm*,⁵ European and Christian land. This island fits the description of what Y. Déjugnat,⁶ following A. Miquel, defined as an intermediate or changing country due to its vague frontiers between Islam and the Latin world, and for being a mosaic of religions, languages and dominions in which Moslems and Christians lived together.

Although both authors describe a Christian Sicily in their respective literary narratives, it is clear that they wish to bind it to the range of the Arab and Islamic world, perhaps because from a nostalgic perspective they wished to maintain its attachment to the historic memory of a territory which was under Moslem power from the year 827 until the landing of the Normans in 1066, preserving a significant amount of Moslem population until at least 1243. Our authors stamp identity on the place and feed stereotypes which transmit

F. Gabrieli and U. Scerrato, *Gli arabi in Italia*, Milano 1979; G. Peyronnet, 'Coexistence islamo-chrétienne en Sicile et au Moyen-Orient (fin du XIIe siècle)', *Islamochristiana* 19 (1995), pp. 55–73; R. Traini, 'Şikilliya', in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 9, Leiden 1997, pp. 404–405; H. Bresc, 'La Sicile à l'époque islamique. Questions de méthode et renouvellement récent des problématiques', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Moyen Âge* 116 (2004), pp. 501–510; F. Cresti, 'Città, territorio, popolazione nella Sicilia musulmana. Un tentativo di lettura di un'eredità controversa', *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche* IV (2007), pp. 21–46; H. Kennedy, 'Sicily and al-Andalus under Muslim Rule', in: *The New Cambridge Medieval History, III: c. 900–c. 1024*, ed. T. Reuter, Cambridge 2008, pp. 646–669; A. Rotolo, 'Sicilia islámica. Proyectando su estudio', *Arqueología y Territorio* 6 (2006), pp. 139–156; G. Mandalà, 'Una nueva fuente para la historia de la Sicilia islámica: un pasaje de *al-Muqtabis* V de Ibn Ḥayyān sobre la revuelta de Aḥmad b. Qarhab (300–304/913–916)', *Al-Qanṭara* 33/2 (2012), pp. 343–374; A. Vanoli, 'Musulmani in un'isola cristiana. Brevi cenni di una lunga storia', *Edad Media, Revista de Historia* 17 (2016), pp. 157–169; J.Ch. Ducène, *L'Europe et les géographes arabes du Moyen Âge*, Paris 2018.

⁵ In the opinion of M.J. Viguera this refers to the three categories into which medieval Moslems divided the inhabited world, which was added to the dividing up of the European continent between the "country of the Slavs" and "Countries of the *Rūm*" an anachronistic generalisation by which Arab texts at least until the Late Middle Ages called the former territories of the Roman Empire. See M.J. Viguera, 'Imágenes de Europa en textos árabes medievales', *Memoria y civilización. Anuario de Historia* 18 (2015), pp. 9–36, p. 33.

⁶ Y. Déjugnat, 'La Méditerranée comme frontière dans le récit de voyage (*riḥla*) d'Ibn Ḡubayr. Modalités et enjeux d'une perception', *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 38/2 (2018), pp. 1–18, p. 3.

a certain cultural superiority, in a similar manner to what Al-Qazwīnī did, for example, when he described Al-Andalus.⁷

To make this connection, they carried out an interesting process of idealization and Islamization of the place. Analyzing this process is the main object of this article.

Let us not forget to mention here the highly complementary vision which Al-Idrīsī dedicates to Sicily and the rule of Roger II, an attitude which is logical given that Roger is his patron. In his description Palermo is the paramount city of the island, from which coastal and inland itineraries depart. This author is interested in topographical data, economic resources, and land and sea communications. Being the centre of power, this city has a strategic position in the composition of the work, and its geographical situation is also favourable. Through his words, we know that it was embellished by a considerable building programme that demonstrated the Normans' power and its representation before a people who would have to corroborate their sovereignty in the zeal they showed for building. Thus their buildings and the organisation of the streets are remarkable, as is the fundamental organization in two neighbourhoods, inherited from the preceding period: Cassaro (*al-qasr*) where the seat of power was to be found and *Rabad* o suburb, near the sea, with the port and arsenal. And, as is usual throughout the Mediterranean in cities of ancient foundation, the old main mosque, transformed from an ancient Christian temple, became Christian once more in the Norman era.⁸

In 1184, Ibn Ġubayr, coming from Syria, arrived in the island, driven there by a fierce storm which was lashing the Mediterranean as he was returning by sea to Al-Andalus. This author stayed in Sicily for a time and highlighted in his *riḥla* the various kindnesses of the Norman rule towards the Moslems. He drew attention to the great number of followers of Islam who stayed on the island and the benevolence of the king towards them. He was surprised by the prosperity attained by many of them, through their knowledge and experience in cultivating the land. He was delighted by Palermo, by the beauty of the city itself as well as the territory surrounding it. He admired the considerably large Moslem population who resided on the island and the fact that its communities did not live grouped together in specific enclaves, but free and separate one from another, and that they had oratories, mosques and *muṣallā*⁹ for their use. When we read Ibn Ġubayr we discover that he expresses an overcoming of prejudice, a recognition of Roger II's outlook and that of his successor, both of whom showed considerable respect, recognition and admiration towards certain characteristics of the culture of the Moslems.¹⁰

⁷ See F. Roldán Castro, 'Paisaje y ciudad en al-Andalus: la particular visión de al-Qazwīnī (m. 1283) en el *Kitāb Āṭār al-bilād*', *eHumanista/IVTRA* 17 (2020), pp. 161–182.

⁸ Ducène, *L'Europe et les géographes arabes du Moyen Âge*, p. 208.

⁹ On this topic see H. Bresc and A. Nef, *Al-Idrīsī. La première géographie de l'Occident*, Paris; See also Ducène, *L'Europe et es géographes arabes du Moyen Âge*, pp. 195–212.

¹⁰ Ducène, *L'Europe et les géographes arabes du Moyen Âge*, p. 209. Al-Idrīsī and Ibn Ġubayr have been the subject of serious studies. Their texts on Sicily are not analyzed here because this task deserves a separate study, and on this occasion it would exceed the main objective of this article.

As M.J. Viguera states,¹¹ “in the images expressed by the different geographers and historians not only is the object focused on, but also the subject himself, with the circumstances and determining factors of his vision, manifesting his subjective, ideological realities, based frequently on eloquent and coded clichés”. However, each narrative expresses a different logic, certain reasons that justify it and therefore provide some images which do not always coincide but rather complement each other.

2. Some Contextualising Aspects

In the process of the development of geography in the Arab and Islamic world during the Middle Ages, there appeared a narrative model at the service of the ruling power. This power needed to know about the territories that were being incorporated into the Islamic world in order to control them more efficiently. However, soon a human variety of geography began to emerge, which placed man at the centre of attention as the main subject and led to the inclusion of all types of material related to human beings and their surroundings. The aforementioned geography combined objective facts with imaginary and legendary material. This led to the appearance of numerous works very much to the taste of an elite who enjoyed finding out about historical, geographical and biographical facts at the same time as immersing themselves in an imaginary world full of fantasy which embraced the traditions of the classical world and the Mediterranean adapted to their context.

In the majority of the works which are encompassed in the genre known as *al-masālik wa-al-mamālik*, as well as encyclopaedic works of the latest times -mostly compiled by geographers in libraries almost all of them sedentary-, there are plenty of marvellous stories or *‘aḡā’ib* which embellish and fill out the description of countries, islands, cities and villages, without the authors distinguishing between reality and illusion, perhaps because both angles were necessary to enable complete understanding of the places described. These sedentary geographers took their references from previous sources and only occasionally expressed their own experiences in the first person or those provided by a third party. In general all the geographers transmitted a positive view of the cities and territories of the *Dār al-Islam*, and expressing their admiration for something that fascinated them led to the idealization that prompted the compilation of the said marvels, and changed them into an almost essential rhetorical element in these travel writings, as stated by H. Touati, who describes the phenomenon of the main role which Islam gives the eye as the source of knowledge.¹²

From this symbiosis between the real and the imaginary, in this zeal to idealize what Sicily had been, participated Al-Qazwīnī and Al-Harawī, both of whom were keen to highlight the importance of a place which had been under Moslem rule and in the last

¹¹ Viguera, ‘Imágenes de Europa en textos árabes medievales’, p. 33.

¹² H. Touati, *Islam et voyage au moyen âge*, Paris 2000, p. 269.

third of the 11th century came under Christian rule by conquest. Although they generate different feelings and have different objectives when attempting to promote a particular perception of the island and its inhabitants, both of them have a nostalgic memory of the time in which Sicily belonged to the Arab and Islamic world, a period which they tend to idealize by means of unique literary strategies. However, each of them carries out a distinct task with different rationales. By this means their texts offer complementary perceptions and coincide in some details.

As was stated earlier, these authors observed how the Moslem inhabitants of Sicily in the service of a Norman sovereign enjoyed a new social status. The same happened in Al-Andalus, where the Moslem population of the different regions of the country became Mudejar as the territory fell into Christian hands from 1085, the date of the fall of Toledo, until the gradual disappearance of the Almohads throughout the 13th century and that of the Nasrids of Granada, the last bastion of Al-Andalus in the 15th century. In the last case its inhabitants went from becoming Mudejars in the earlier times of incorporation into a new socio-political order, to later becoming *Moriscos* or clandestine Moslems, once they were forced to convert or be exiled. A new status, new laws and the sense of having passed from a position of dominance to one of service to the new dominating power took place in Sicily.

The historical vicissitudes of this island have been dealt with in serious studies as has been indicated earlier. These have certain similarities to those of Al-Andalus, an issue which has been addressed among others by H Kennedy in *Sicily and al-Andalus under Muslim rule*,¹³ Alessandro Vanoli in his work *Musulmani in un'isola cristiana. Brevi cenni di una lunga storia*¹⁴ and by Giuseppe Mandalà in *Figlia d'al-Andalus! Due ġazīra a confronto, Sicilia e al-Andalus nelle fonti arabo-islamiche del Medioevo*.¹⁵

Two counterpart territories, one an island and the other on a peninsula, both given the term *ġazīra* in the sources, situated in the Mediterranean, Al-Andalus in the extreme of the known world and lapped by two seas; and Sicily in the heart of the green or white sea *baḥr al-ḥadrā/ baḥr al-abyaḍ*, or *baḥr al-Maġrib*¹⁶, whose mere denomination already transmits a clear ideological and symbolic weight: it refers to the sea of communicability, an enclosed sea, known facing the *baḥr az-ẓulumāt* or Sea of Darkness, the title given to the Atlantic Ocean, an unknown menacing sea, of unimaginable boundaries. Both, island and peninsula, were territories of Islam for extended periods of time, both disappeared as Moslem territories, and in both cases the imprint of the Arab and Islamic world would have to survive the political circumstances. Thus, the expertise of the inhabitants of Sicily as well as of Al-Andalus converted their knowledge and customs into privilege, by making themselves essential in order to maintain or reconstruct, by example, methods of farming, trading skills and hydraulic engineering, all systems on which the economy of both states depended considerably. In both cases the admiration of the Christian rulers

¹³ See note 4.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Al-Qazwīnī, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, *El-Cazwini's Kosmographie. Kitāb Ātār al-bilād*, Wiesbaden 1848, p. 106.

for the culture of the conquered population was made patently clear. Once again the dominant power succumbed to the attraction of the aesthetic of the Arabic and Islamic world in its Andalusian and Sicilian varieties.

The perceptions of Sicily are not uniform neither in the nostalgic effort to maintain the memory of an era already passed, nor in the admiration for the persistence of the traces of the Moslem population of the island. The examples that serve as a reference point in this case present the observation of the island from external perspectives, from a distance in both time and space, and the experience of a traveller who visited it and observed it from the perspective of someone who judged on the basis of objectives formed somewhere else.

3. Al-Qazwīnī and the Idealization of Sicily

As stated by Ch. Mazzoli,¹⁷ historical semantics allows medievalists to immerse themselves in the written sources. In Al-Andalus, the axis is the city or *madīna*, surrounded by its city wall, within which were to be found the fortress or *qaṣaba* and the most archetypal buildings which give character to Moslem cities in all medieval Arabic and Islamic geography, more or less strictly according to the author who is describing it. For the case of Sicily, as will be seen, the main reference is the same, although for the first of our authors attention to the features of landscape which define it are not given as much importance in urban areas as its natural wealth and details of topography as well as the configuration of space.

Zakariyyā Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Maḥmūd al-Qazwīnī, born in Qazwīn, Persia, around 1203, studied in Damascus under illustrious *‘ulamā*, among whom we must highlight the Andalusian master Ibn ‘Arabī. He was *qāḍī* in Iraq and died there in 1283. Having probably retired from his professional work, he composed the opus entitled *Ātār al-bilād wa-aḥbār al-‘ibād* (Remains of the countries and histories of the servants of God), an authentic example of a geographical dictionary of his time. He additionally compiled an important cosmographic work entitled *‘Āğā’ib al-maḥlūqāt wa-ğarā’ib al-mawğudāt* (Marvels of the creation and mysteries of the creatures). Both were compiled from bibliographical research with contributions from the author himself.¹⁸

This author fundamentally cultivated human geography, a literary narrative of heterogeneous content, and focused on the knowledge of the countries of the world and their inhabitants at that time as well as their customs and traditions. An example of this

¹⁷ C.H. Mazzoli-Guintard, ‘Les villes dans le Mughrib d’Ibn Saïd: aux sources du discours’, *VII Estudios de Frontera. Islam y Cristiandad. Siglos XII–XVI*, in *Homenaje a María Jesús Viguera Molins*, coord. Fco. Toro Ceballos and J. Rodríguez Molina, Jaén 2009, pp. 559–575, p. 559.

¹⁸ A more detailed presentation on this author may be found in F. Roldán Castro (trans.), *El occidente de al-Andalus en el Ātār al-bilād de al-Qazwīnī*, Alfar, Sevilla 1990; F. Roldán Castro, ‘El oriente de al-Andalus en el Ātār al-bilād de al-Qazwīnī’, *Sharq al-Andalus* 9 (1993), pp. 29–46; see also F. Roldán Castro, ‘Paisaje y ciudad en al-Andalus: la particular visión de al-Qazwīnī’.

geography is the first of the works cited, which is organised into an introduction and three prologues previous to the texts which comprise the dictionary proper, together with some illustrations of little documentary value. In the *Āṭār al-bilād* additional items of varied information are incorporated, always within a none too strict format which the author adapts to the place that he describes in extension and content. Al-Qazwīnī divides the Earth into seven climates or longitudinal strips following the Ptolemaic tradition, as Al-Idrīsī had also done. Within these strips the countries and places appear in alphabetical order. In each entry the author includes various items of information, historical as well as geographical, anthropological, onomastic, or anecdotal, and numerous *‘aḡā’ib*, incomprehensible to the common man but of great interest to the reader of the time, who found within this sophisticated literature a variety of insights into the world and its inhabitants.¹⁹ Each entry opens with the name of the place in which the term is key to understanding the essential nature of the place: *madīna*, *ḡazīra*, *ḥiṣn*, *qarya*, *qal’a* or any other category which identifies and evaluates a site which finishes up locating it but its proximity to another nearby place.

As far as the narrative style of the work is concerned, the prologues display greater complexity and erudition, and a higher level of language is used here than in the remainder of the book. In these prologues the author makes an interesting anthropological reflection which a century and a half later Ibn Ḥaldūn would develop and widen in his *Muqaddima*.²⁰ In the first prologue Al-Qazwīnī defends the necessity to live in society and thus justifies the emergence of the city as a suitable environment for a human being. In the second prologue, following Hippocratic principles, he asserts the influence of surroundings and climate on the character of human beings, and in the third he divides the known world into inhabited and uninhabited regions, a sketch of the *mappa mundi* associated with the “school of al-Balḥī”.²¹

The organisation of the Earth into inhabited and uninhabited regions is justified the moment we read the aforementioned prologues, from which we begin to infer the quality of the land of Sicily and the character of the Sicilians. To begin with, the island is situated in what the author calls the «inhabited quarter», where “seas, islands, rivers, mountains, deserts, cities and villages can be found. The region which is left after the

¹⁹ A wide reflection on these themes can be seen in *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu’au milieu du 11ème siècle*. See also E. Ashtor, ‘Che cosa sapevano i geografi arabi dell’Europa occidentale’, *Rivista storica italiana* 81 (1969) and C.F. Beckingham, *Between Islam and Christendom. Travellers, Facts and Legends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Variorum, London 1983 among others.

²⁰ I have dealt with this topic in other publications see F. Roldán Castro, ‘Paisaje y ciudad en al-Andalus: la particular visión de al-Qazwīnī’, pp. 162–164; See also: Franco-Sánchez, ‘Geografía y cartografía en la obra de Ibn Jaldūn’, in: *Miradas españolas sobre Ibn Jaldūn*, eds. J.L. Garrot & J. Martos Quesada, Madrid 2008, pp. 195–223, pp. 206–207.

²¹ On this topic see F. Franco-Sánchez, ‘Geografía y cartografía en la obra de Ibn Jaldūn’; F. Franco-Sánchez, ‘*Al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*: precisiones acerca del título de estas obras de la literatura geográfica árabe medieval y conclusiones acerca de su origen y estructura’, *Philologia Hispalensis* 31/2 (2017), pp. 37–66 and F. Franco-Sánchez, ‘*Al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik* (II). Construyendo una nueva imagen del mundo: ruterios, geografía y cartografía al servicio de la causa *ṣīṭ*’, *Cuadernos del CEMYR* 26 (2018), pp. 111–170.

inhabited quarter in the north pole is uninhabitable because of its excessive cold and the masses of ice that are produced there. The inhabited quarter is divided into the seven sections already mentioned and each section is called *clima (iqḷīm)*".²²

In the inhabited quarter and among its islands, Sicily is situated in the third climate, and there all the archetypes of a territory endowed with natural benefits of every sort can be found. Situated in this island are marvellous phenomena typical of the literature of *'aḡā'ib*: the setting is presented as exceptional, dominated by the presence of the mountain of fire (*ḡabal an-nār*).

In order to interpret this source we must bear in mind what we can expect from an author who describes a land without knowing it personally; thus in the description of Palermo and of Etna, as will be seen below, he quotes Ibn Ḥawqal and Al-'Uḍrī respectively as sources of information that give solidity to his narration in specific details; and in the result of the said compilation we must observe the way in which the text becomes a reflection of the reality that it describes.

3.1. Landscape Characteristics which Define the Territory of Sicily and the Character of its Inhabitants

The extensive entry which Al-Qazwīnī dedicates to Sicily²³ presents an outline similar to that which he devotes to Al-Andalus and in general the rest of the entries that comprise the *Āṭār al-bilād*, the length of which varies according to the importance he attributes to each place. He divides his Sicilian vision into two parts; in the first part he breaks down the general landscape details which provide the idealized impression of the island that allows us to sketch the whole of Palermo, with the help of a brief independent text which the author dedicates to the city. In the second he concentrates on the description of the most emblematic landscape motif of the island, the great volcano.

The first part opens with the denomination of «island» (*ḡazīra*), which identifies its natural character, and subsequently he incorporates some details which enable us to calculate its size together with landscape features of a different sort amongst which feature natural wealth, details of relief, water courses and agricultural production. To this some historical data in a succinct format are added, as well as a poetic quotation which embellishes the narrative and assists in idealizing the place. Among the essential elements that define the Sicilian landscape are the mountains, and most especially the mountain of fire *ḡabal an-nār*, Mount Etna. The author asserts that in this island there are high mountains harbouring springs with plentiful water. There are also abundant rivers and marvellous landscapes.

He begins by describing the island as «magnificent, splendid, imposing» (*'aẓīma*). In this case he doesn't use the term «large» (*kabīra*) which he uses for Al-Andalus and which transmits a more objective than evaluative notion of its size. He places Sicily in

²² Roldán Castro, 'Paisaje y ciudad en al-Andalus: la particular visión de al-Qazwīnī', p. 164.

²³ Al-Qazwīnī, *Kitāb Āṭār al-bilād*, pp. 143–144 and Appendix 1. My own translation.

the west, in the Maghreb, opposite Ifrīqiyya, and describes it as triangular in shape. As was usual at that time, he offers an assessment of its size from one extreme to another based on the time it would take a man to cross it, in this case seven days, which coincides approximately with the actual distance between Palermo and Catania if we bear in mind that a man can walk about thirty kilometres a day; that would amount to about 210 kilometres. Further on he indicates that its perimeter is equivalent to sixteen days and its diameter to five days, measurements which are not as close to reality. Remarkably, for the author the island is impregnable, invulnerable and immune (*ḥaṣīna*), a term which probably has a wide semantic meaning more symbolic than real, perhaps because of the presence of numerous fortresses and defensive structures, which paradoxically he does not mention in the text, but that we can recognise in the toponymy which al-Harawī compiles, as shall be seen below. Or perhaps the sense of the term is widened to include the absence of poisonous animals as asserted in the text by Al-Qazwīnī.

The author mentions a very important detail: this island is densely populated as «in it there are numerous cities and villages», an unmistakable sign of civilisation and life for Islam, not forgetting the presence of animals: horses, mules, cows and sheep, apart from wild animals.²⁴ In a general way the admiration of this author for the urban world is made clear in the use of vocabulary with positive connotations.

By means of these images the main scene is set which confirms a large population situated in urban or rural areas, similar to the distribution found in the Arabic and Islamic world. We must not forget that in the majority of the texts in the work we are examining, the Persian emphasises greatly that for him the city is the ideal place for the development of culture and life in Islam, where, for example, wise men and masters may be received and welcomed in a dignified manner, in a suitable style, apart from many other considerations.

As our author describes from a distance, he offers an image organised from the partial selection of his readings about this place, although for the moment he does not mention his sources of information. It is strange that the Persian does not refer to Palermo in this general chapter dedicated to the island, however it is true, as has been indicated, that it is the only Sicilian city to which he dedicates a small independent chapter.²⁵

In the presentation of the island there is a surprising fact: there are no predators, scavenger birds nor stinging insects on the island (*laysa bi-hā 'ād banāb aw burzun aw ibra*).²⁶ On top of that, the most remarkable natural wealth is described as concealed in gold, silver and copper mines as well as deposits of iron, lead, alum, antimony, sulphate and mercury.²⁷

Regarding the absence of dangerous animals and insects, Al-Qazwīnī does not mention the existence of talismans, nor of protective walls as are seen in other cities described in the work. These are frequent resources in geographical works, related to marvellous

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 143 and Appendix 1.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 106 and Appendix 1.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 143 and Appendix 1.

²⁷ Ibidem.

stories or *'ağā'ib* which explain the protection of the place.²⁸ Although he might not mention it in the Sicilian case, perhaps the author takes it as understood and in this way explains the extraordinary phenomenon that extends over all the island and converts it into a place that is symbolically immune through the preventive effect of implicit talismans and protections.

On top of the hidden riches of the island, details of the physical geography itself are added. He mentions the existence of springs, woods and fields where all kinds of fruit are cultivated in both summer and winter.²⁹ This brings to mind descriptions of the Paradise of the Koran in which the trees are always replete with ripe fruit. To complete this laudatory picture, the author affirms that saffron is grown in Sicily. Saffron is a spice which had been known in the Mediterranean from long before and been widely used in cooking throughout the Arabic world. The author presents us an idealized place, but he doesn't forget to mention local economic activity and the existence of bazaars (*sūq*), central urban points for the inhabitants of the city and for artisans and peasants. The Persian also affirms that water is abundant in the island, which is a very valuable natural resource as well as an essential element in the configuration of the landscape, which he characterises because there are springs of abundant water and wide fast-flowing rivers to be found there.

In this literary landscape an aesthetic means is used to add nuances regarding the charms of the island: the memory of the Sicilian poet Ibn Ḥamdīs³⁰ (died 1132), who felt a great love for Sicily, where he had lived and to which he dedicated the verses which our author reproduces.³¹

At this point it is opportune to remember Ibn Ḥafāḡa, the poet of Alcira, in the *Šarq al-Andalus*, which dedicated similar words to this peninsula in a prologue of praise full of nostalgia in which, as with Sicily, he compares it to paradise.³²

How strange it is that Al-Qazwīnī makes no reference to the Mediterranean when he describes Sicily, this being what marks the essential character both to the place and to its people. For this reason, in order to complete our author's general perception of the island and its people, it is worth bearing in mind that being situated in the third climate it is included in the strip of territory that the author considers favourable to the settlement of human population, together with the fourth and fifth, given that "outside these men live in torment".³³

²⁸ To this theme see J. Hernández Juberías, *La península imaginaria. Mitos y leyendas sobre al-Andalus*, Madrid 1996, pp. 327–333.

²⁹ *Kitāb Ālār al-bilād*, pp. 143 and Appendix 1.

³⁰ See U. Rizzitano, 'Ibn Ḥamdīs', *E.I.*, 2^a ed. Leiden, vol. III, pp. 806–807.

³¹ "I remember Sicily and the passion/ stirs up its memory in my soul/ I speak of it / Now that I have left paradise", see *Kitāb Ālār al-bilād*, p. 143 and Appendix I.

³² "Oh, inhabitants of al-Andalus, what happiness is yours having water, shade rivers and trees! The garden of eternal bliss is not outside but within your territory [...] Do not believe you will enter the inferno; you will not enter it after having been in Paradise". On this poet and the theme of nostalgia for al-Andalus see T. Garulo, 'La nostalgia de al-Andalus. Génesis de un tema literario', *Qurṭuba* 3 (1998), pp. 47–63.

³³ F. Roldán Castro, 'Paisaje y ciudad en al-Andalus: la particular visión de al-Qazwīnī', p. 163.

in the wet zones [...] the atmosphere does not heat intensively and the winter is not harsh. Its inhabitants are characterised by having an excellent temperament, by the softness of their skin and for the rapidity with which they adapt to changes and their great agility in physical exercises and for their strength.

Al-Qazwīnī offers no judgment on the character of the Sicilians, as he does on other occasions, but in this sense, M.J. Viguera³⁴ affirms that Al-Hamdānī in the first half of the 10th century refers to the transcendental relationship between human groups and astrology, “following one of the correspondences present in ancient and medieval knowledge”; for this geographer the Italians, French and Sicilians are “polite, generous and helpful” whilst the inhabitants of the Iberian peninsula possess a “peaceful temperament and a love of order”. In another quotation from the same author we read that Sicily is in one of the zones ruled by the triad of the north east: Aries, Leo and Sagittarius, and like other nations of this quadrant “are little inclined to submission, lovers of liberty, or arms and of work, hostile towards people of order and control, and given to great enterprises [...]”.³⁵

3.2. Palermo and the Landscape Dominated by a Mountain of Fire

Of all the unique features that define this beautiful island from a landscape point of view, the most significant one is the mountain which Al-Qazwīnī calls “of fire”: naturally, the volcano Etna to whose description he dedicates a large part of the text. As stated by A. Miquel,³⁶ for Arab geographers mountains occupy the centre of their attention, as among other things they display examples of divine omnipresence.

At an earthly level mountains demarcate the spaces between heaven and earth, and for our author, as for other authors, such as Ibn Ġubayr or Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, these are privileged places where those sent by God have passed on his legacy.³⁷ It is a basic element in the physiognomy of the Earth with a strong telluric connotation and potent visual effect, and therefore tending to accommodate all types of extraordinary phenomena in its core and on its surface. Mountains and rocks together with fountains, springs, trees and islands are spaces given to harbour all types of inexplicable events only attributable to divine intervention. In these settings any kind of phenomenon related to nature and its supernatural behaviour could take place. Imaginary animals could intervene and beings and objects belonging to a very distant literary heritage, therefore these marvellous phenomena or

³⁴ See ‘Imágenes de Europa en textos árabes medievales’, and A. Miquel, *La géographie humaine*, vol. 2, pp. 35–37.

³⁵ Viguera, ‘La percepción de Europa desde el ámbito araboislámico’, *Europa: Proyecciones y percepciones históricas*, Salamanca 1997, pp. 49–69, p. 95.

³⁶ A. Miquel, ‘Montagne et montagnes, montagne au massif’, *Annales Islamologiques* 15 (1979), pp. 25–36, pp. 25–26 and M. Balda-Tillier, ‘Entre ciel et terre: la montagne dans l’imaginaire littéraire arabe médiéval’, *REMMM* 135 (2014), pp. 33–48.

³⁷ Miquel, ‘Montagne et montagnes, montagne au massif’, p. 36.

‘*ağā’ib*’ must be understood as a cultural inheritance of sometimes unknown origin and as a creation or re-creation of the culture that embraces and transmits them.³⁸

In one of the first quotations of the text Al-Qazwīnī refers to a hill of promontory that is called *Qaṣr Bāna*, which is “one of the marvels of this world”. On the said hill he situates a great city (‘*aẓīma*’), elevated, superb, proud (*šāmiḥa*) and surrounded by many orchards and gardens. He states that the city appears to be hanging in the air, enclosed and with only one entrance gate; from the highest part [of the hill] sources of water flow.³⁹

Earlier it was stated that our author did not mention the city of Palermo in the full entry that he dedicates to the island, and that he devotes a brief text to it separately.⁴⁰ However from the reading of the text which has just been summarised, it can be understood that this knoll which is named *ġabal* could refer to the elevated zone of the capital of the island in which, following the urban canons of Moslem cities, stands the palace or fortress designated as the dwelling of the Emir in the Moslem era, surrounded by fortifications to which there would be only one possible access. This palace would be surrounded by beautiful gardens, orchards and leisure spaces, which brings to mind a characteristically urban landscape adapted to the topography of the place. In it one can recognize the features of a fine *qaṣr* (palace) situated some distance from the urban conurbation. Its privacy and elevation suggest the management of the privacy of all its leaders, as well as the visual manifestation of power and realization of a genuine urban concept, similar to that found in other cities in the Arab world. It could be a memory of the city of Palermo at the height of its splendour, a city dominated by the presence of a building exemplifying its power, which served as the foundation of the Norman capital. This evokes a city laid out within the habitual framework of the Arab world, with a citadel, castle, and military predominance, the *qaṣba* dominating the city. This hypothesis leads us to visualise the essential axis of the real Palermo which runs from one side of the city to the other, which for some time was called Cassaro (*Qaṣr Bāna*?). This axis rises from the sea to what was the Norman palace, situated on the aforementioned promontory, and there the first *Madīna Ṣiqiliyya*, later *Balarm* – Palermo must have been situated.

F. Cresti⁴¹ states that from the year 937 the power of the Fatimid dynasty restructures this city and converts it into one of the most important urban centres of the western Mediterranean. The sources tell us of a magnificent city with new palaces and places of worship where one could observe a significant demographic increase starting from this point in time. Towards the middle of the 10th century this city and island reached

³⁸ A large bibliography exists on this theme, for example among others the following titles: C.E. Dubler, ‘*‘adja’ib*’, t. I, 209–210; M. Rodinson, ‘La place du merveilleux et l’étrange dans la conscience du monde musulman médiéval’, *L’étrange et le merveilleux dans l’Islam medieval*, Paris 1978; A. Ramos, ‘Literatura fantástica y geografía árabe’, *Al-Andalus y el Mediterráneo*, Madrid 1995, 169–193; Ch. Le Goff, *Lo maravilloso y lo cotidiano en el Occidente medieval*, Barcelona 1996; Hernández-Juberías, *La península imaginaria. Mitos y leyendas sobre al-Andalus*; C. García Gual, *Mitos, viajes, héroes*, Madrid 2011.

³⁹ *Kitāb Aḡlār al-bilād*, p. 143 and Appendix I.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 106 and Appendix I.

⁴¹ Cresti, ‘Città, territorio, popolazione nella Sicilia musulmana’, pp. 25–28.

the height of a prosperity never seen before. In the 12th century Al-Idrīsī evaluated it as a beautiful, splendid and excellent city of the west, full of every kind of delight.

In the text which the Persian devoted to the city of Palermo⁴² he referred to it as *madīna*, which presupposes the validation of his appraisal. He situated the island in the Maghrebi sea, another name for the Mediterranean. The author cites Ibn Ḥawqal who highlights in the first person the presence of numerous mosques in the city: «There are more mosques there than I have seen in any other country», a remarkable statement to which he adds the fact of having heard a legend of historical connotation linked to the Greek past. This latter author had already described this city in the 10th century as densely populated. If we link this date to the fact that the city described by the Persian had a great number of mosques and that it was dominated by the seat of power, we find ourselves confronted by an *identitaria* city, as Ch. Mazzoli would say.⁴³ In the part devoted to Palermo our author recounts a legend more correctly linked to the fantasy literature of wonders frequently found in the *Ālār*, referring to the suspended wooden tomb of Aristotle at which (Christians) prayed for intercession according to the dogma of the Greeks.⁴⁴

However the paradigm of the mountain on which exceptional phenomena take place which give credence to the divine presence in this place is the mountain of fire (*ġabal an-nār*) – Etna – which rises from the sea with the perimeter of a three-day walk, near to Taormina (*Ṭabarmīn*) and on whose hillsides covered with abundant trees there are hazels, pines and yews (*arzan*), they also cultivate all types of fruit.⁴⁵ On this mountain the four elements of Nature interact with equal prominence and together produce amazing phenomena.

The author states that in the highest part of this mountain there is a crater (*manāfis an-nār*) from which fire and smoke billow, and at times this fire erupts onto the surface and burns everything in its path, destroying the land, transforming it into something resembling slag metal spread out, leaving it barren and preventing the passage of animals. The people call these phenomena eruptions.

The Persian, once he has described the nature of this constantly active volcano, goes on to express in great detail the description of the landscape which characterises it apart from its imposing telluric force. In this endeavour he points out that in the highest part of the mountain there are perennial clouds, snow and rain at all times and all seasons of the year, and, although the snow does not exactly cover the summit in the summer, it is present from the beginning to the end of winter.⁴⁶

The mountain of fire accumulates surprising phenomena, such as when he writes that “at night an impressive fire can be seen burning at the summit and during the day one can see dense smoke which does not allow anyone to approach. If you light a wick from this fire, it goes out as soon as you move away from it.”⁴⁷

⁴² *Kitāb Ālār al-bilād*, p. 106 and Appendix 1.

⁴³ Mazzoli, ‘Ronda en el orden urbano del reino nazarí ¿hacia una historia global de las ciudades?’, *RIEEI* 46 (2018), pp. 91–128, p. 107.

⁴⁴ *Kitāb Ālār al-bilād*, p. 106 and Appendix 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 144 and Appendix 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

Quoting his frequently referenced author, Al-‘Uḍrī from Almería continues with the description, stating that nowhere in the world there is a volcano (*burkān*) more terrifying in appearance and more extraordinary in its innards, because when the wind blows an impressive rumble is heard which is reminiscent of a clap of thunder. The grandeur of this volcano is astounding.⁴⁸

According to the author this has always been the greatest attraction of the island and thus remembered by the *Rūm* (Byzantines or non-Moslems), and the majority of the learned who travelled to Sicily did so in order to view the wonders (*‘aḡā’ib*) of this mountain and the simultaneous presence of fire and snow. One must not forget, as was indicated earlier, that for the Arabic geographers the mountains occupied a privileged position in the description of landscapes because of their powerful suggestion related to the constant action of God.

Furthermore Al-‘Uḍrī relates another curious phenomenon related to the three wells of oil of naphtha (*zayt an-nafta*) -bitumen or petroleum- that exist on the island and flow from the beginning to the end of spring. You go down into them via a staircase and whoever enters them has to block his nostrils and cover his face because if he breathes in the fumes he will die immediately. The liquid is extracted (*mā’a-hā*) and placed in barrels; there is no better quality naphtha oil, later it is collected and put into bottles (*qawārīr*).

Through the texts that have been commented, it is clear that Al-Qazwīnī described Sicily with characteristic features of admirable spaces in the Arab-Islamic environment. This is how he wanted to commemorate this island which, being under Norman power, kept close to the Arab world, preserving the appearance of a typical *Dār al-Islām* place.

4. Abū Bakr al Harawī and the Symbolic Islamization or Sanctification of Sicily

Al-Harawī (died 1215) structures his discourse in accordance with a well-developed plan from the beginning of his *Kitāb al-iṣārāt ilā ma’rifat az-ziyārāt*, this is to compile a catalogue of pilgrim sites of his era; therefore he focuses on the island and its cities from particular angles and in this manner he tells us about a Christian territory in the Mediterranean linked to the Arab and Islamic world of its time.⁴⁹

The author was a traditionalist, a diplomat, a political emissary, and a tireless traveller, as Ibn Ḥallikān recounts. He was born in Mosul in the midst of a Sunni *Šāfi’ī* family. His travels around Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Sicily, among other territories, enables us to arrange certain information about his life. It is known that he was in Damascus and in Baghdad as an envoy on a diplomatic mission and that in 1180 the Abbasid Caliph An-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (governed 1180–1225) appointed him preacher (*ḥaṭīb*) in

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ See Appendix 2, my own translation. To the study of this author, to this work and its content see F. Roldán Castro, ‘El *Kitāb al-iṣārāt ilā ma’rifat al-ziyārāt* de Abū Bakr al-Harawī (m. 1215): Entre el viaje espiritual, la autobiografía y la literatura de ‘aḡā’ib (I)’, *eHumanista/IVITRA* 8 (2015), pp. 302–319.

the principal mosque in Baghdad, perhaps also in Aleppo; he was designated to promote friendly relations with the Ayyubids. He served Saladin (ruled 1169–1193) and passed to the court of his son Mālik az-Zāhir Ġāzī, where he paid special attention to building works, specifically the building of sanctuaries. He served both of them in important diplomatic dealings during the Crusades. Among his diplomatic work I would like to highlight the audience he was granted with the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Komnenos. He mentions his meeting with the ambassador of Sicily, Abū al-Qāsim Ibn Ḥammūd, who gave him a very warm reception and handed him a communiqué addressed to Saladin, encouraging him to conquer Sicily. He also refers to how the missive could not be delivered due to a shipwreck of the vessel on which he was sailing, once he had left Sicily and was en route to Cyprus. He recounts how he was taken prisoner by Richard the Lionheart, who confiscated some of his documents. All in all, although the details of his life may be more or less precise, there can be no doubt that he acted as an emissary of the Ayyubids and was involved in the politics of his time.⁵⁰

About his ascetic and mystical life we shall not go into so much detail, neither into his political strategy,⁵¹ given that what really interests us here is the compilation of his *Kitāb al-iṣārāt ilā ma'rifat az-ziyārāt*, which he writes as the result of a journey around Sicily. In this work he communicates directly, as a witness, what he sees of the Sicilian landscape in the midst of the 13th century, through the spiritual paths drawn in the landscape of his personal devotion.

This author, following a frequently used literary device, justifies the writing of some «memories» with the request of a friend who implores him to compile and describe the holy places he had visited. Guided by an alleged fundamental spiritual feeling, he would design a map of religious and cultural geography of his era, ordered by wide geographical zones, although he does not establish specific itineraries neither state the distances between places, nor the time required to get from one place to another, since this information was widely available in geographical dictionaries of the time. Among the zones around which he travels are the Maghreb or west, and within it the islands of the Mediterranean. Taken together he talks of a series of journeys that give shape to a sacred geography, and many of these are real and shape both physically and symbolically a series of scenes in which numerous places of devotion both cultured and popular of Islam, Christianity and Judaism can be found, drawing an interesting social and religious map of Middle East and the Mediterranean of his time.

The *Kitāb al-iṣārāt ilā ma'rifat az-ziyārāt* fits into the genre of the geography of the medieval Arab and Islamic world as an example of the subgenre *ziyāra*, dedicated to the compilation of information related to places of minor pilgrimage, centred on popular religiosity parallel to the practice of official religion, within and outside the medieval Arab world. The term *ziyāra* refers to the visit or pilgrimage to the tomb of a character

⁵⁰ See Appendix 2.

⁵¹ In this sense he wrote an interesting study on the arts of war in which he presents reflections of surprising modernity. This work is entitled *Taḍkirat al-harawiyya fī al-ḥiyāl al-ḥarbiyya*. It has been translated and studied by Dr O. Torres, *Al-Harawī. El libro de las estratagemas*, Madrid 2021.

with a special religious connotation, that in the scope of the *Šī'a* was a common practice, even recommended as a religious act with important spiritual benefits. The aforementioned practices took place in urban or rural mosques, mausoleums, cemeteries, tombs and burial sites, some more popular than others, that many pilgrims visit no longer in a particular way or on specific dates in the year.⁵²

On top of that, pilgrimage guides were written, as the *kutub az-ziyārāt*, which described buildings and also the ceremonies and other details related to each sanctuary, tomb or place of veneration. Many of these compiled a list of the companions and followers of the prophet as well as the places where they were buried or where they had died as martyrs in combat.

There is a large literature devoted to describing the miraculous actions of these exemplary beings of Islam to whom supernatural strengths linked to mystery and divinity were attributed, and who gave blessings and performed acts of kindness to pilgrims who approached their tombs. The narratives devoted to compiling these experiences include numerous legends and '*ağā'ib*' by developing them into remarkable scenes of spiritual transcendence.

Referring specifically to Sicily, Al-Harawī mentions burials of various types both in urban and in rural spaces that transmit the image of a well-organised territory: Marsala (*Marsā 'Alī*), Catania (*Qaṭāna*), Castro Giovanni (*Qaṣr Yānna*), Trápani (*madīna Atrabulus*), Rocca di Prizzi (*Qal'at Barazzu*), Misilmeri (*Qaṣr al-Amīr*) and *Qaṣr al-Huradāna*.⁵³

In none of the cases indicated is the interior of the building described, whether it be mosque, tomb or burial site, as the author does for some of the exceptional mosques, churches or major Christian temples, although even here Al-Harawī does not collect many details about the physiognomy of these architectural ensembles. In some cases, outside the Sicilian context, he singles out towers and minarets for their admirable construction or for being linked to some story of great religious significance, for example the main mosque of Constantinople, in which he describes the remarkable minaret (*al-manāra*) together with ancient remains, bronze and marble statues, columns and marvellous talismans that he says do not exist in any other part of the world. Apart from the architectural interest, he definitely alludes to details which link the story to the literature of '*ağā'ib*'.

In the urban area of Sicily, our author references fortifications that are directly related to sanctity: In *Qal'at Barazzu* (Rocca dei Prizzi) stands the tomb of Ḥassān Ibn Mu'āwiyya Ibn Ḥudayḡ as-Sakūnī, son of Mu'āwiyya Ibn Ḥudayḡ, one of the companions of the Prophet and opponent of 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib.⁵⁴ It is said that this fortress and the bastions of the island were conquered by him. The existence of the bastions has a bearing on the idea of a spatial organisation similar to that of the rest of *Dār al-Islām*, because of

⁵² See F. Roldán Castro, 'El *Kitāb al-iṣārāt ilā ma'rifat al-ziyārāt* de Abū Bakr al-Harawī (m. 1215)', pp. 305–308.

⁵³ Places identified by J.W. Meri: Al-Harawī, *A Lonely Wayfarer's Guide to Pilgrimage*. 'Alī ibn Abī Bakr al-Harawī's *Kitāb al-Iṣārāt ilā Ma'rifat al-Ziyārāt*, J.W. Meri (ed. and trans.), Princeton–New Jersey 2004, pp. 143–146 and Appendix 2.

⁵⁴ Son of Mu'āwiya Ibn Ḥudayḡ, one of the companions of the prophet, opponent of 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib. See Al-Harawī, ed. Meri, *A Lonely Wayfarer's Guide*, p. 150, n. 19.

the existence of fortified strongholds or *qal'a* which in turn shape the inhabited areas of diverse magnitude.

The palace is another essentially urban building related to venerated burial sites; thus in *Qaṣr Yānna* (Castro Giovanni), a toponym which implies a courtly and/or defensive function. This toponym makes evident the existence of some type of sumptuary construction and would indicate nearby an environment linked to the life of the palace and the family who resided there.

Next to the walls of some cities there are cemeteries of groups of tombs, often situated, as was usual, outside the defences. Thus states Al-Harawī that in *Qaṣr al-Huradāna* in Sicily the tomb of the poet Abu Du'ayb is found next to the wall of the palace.

As regards cemeteries, in Catania (*Quṭāna*) he locates a group of about thirty men who were followers of the Prophet (*min at-tābi'in*), all of them martyrs killed there and buried in the cemetery.

The references to tombs and sepulchres in spaces in the open air are also abundant, without indicating a link to any building or erected structure in particular within or outside the walls where they existed: in Misilmeri there is the tomb (*qabr*) of Galen on the road to Palermo, and in Marsala seven companions of the Prophet (*min al-ṣaḥāba*) are buried in a single tomb. Between Catania and Castro Giovanni (*Qaṣr Yānna*) in the eastern region of the island is the tomb of one of the most eminent people of the place, Asad Ibn Al-Furāt.⁵⁵

He also refers to burials in mosques like in Trapani (*madīna Aṭrabulus*) where a mosque stands in which the tomb de 'Ā'īša [...] is to be found.

Al-Harawī, as has been stated, does not establish definite itineraries, but he does trace paths that any pious person could follow, and these paths indicated the hierarchy of religious spaces, urban mosques, oratories or rural mosques as well as other sites made extraordinary by the phenomenon of popular religiosity; all in all he designs a particular "sacred topography" which raises every city, place or scene to the category of a privileged space due to its being the exponent, to a greater or lesser degree, of divine manifestation, or theophany.

The inventory of exemplary Moslem men and women buried in Sicily either for being residents or for finding themselves there by chance, allows him to suggest a «symbolic possession [or conquest]» of the island and from there its Islamization or sanctification, made evident in the venerated places and the burial sites located in the island territory.⁵⁶ The Sicily that our author visits therefore remains strongly linked to the places of devotion to Islam and in this way to the Arab and Islamic world of his time.

In the second part of the text that Harawī dedicates to this island, he presents a theme which is very different to that which we have just examined. He continues the process of Islamization of the place, this time by means of a remarkable story which links reality

⁵⁵ Scholar and jurist dead in 213H/828 C. See Al-Harawī, ed. Meri, *A Lonely Wayfarer's Guide*, p. 150, n. 16.

⁵⁶ As M. Marín shows for Constantinople in 'Constantinopla en los geógrafos árabes', *Erytheia* 9/1 (1988), pp. 49–60, p. 54, the "possession comes into effect by means of the existence of a sacred Islamic place within the city [in this case also island] and this must be related to a cultural current clearly evident in the Islamic world. I refer to the 'sanctification' of the cities because of the presence in them of specific places (tombs, sanctuaries) that exercise a benevolent effect on its surroundings".

with fiction but that contributes to the Sicilian landscape definition. In this case the magical character is attributed once again to the volcano, (*ġabal an-nār*) (Etna) which according to Al-Harawī «arises from the sea and reaches into the air. During the day smoke is seen coming out of it and at night fire emerges from its insides». He adds that a scholar (*‘ālim*) from the place told him that he had seen an animal in the shape of a shiny grey quail arise from the fire and later re-enter it, and it was said on the island that it was a dragon. The author states cautiously that he had only seen a black rock on the sides on the mountain that had holes in it making it look like that used in the bath (*ḥammām*)⁵⁷. Also it is said, he continues, that very far, in Fergana (*al-Fargāna*) there is a similar mountain, where the rocks burn and the ashes are extracted and then sold, probably because of its whitening effect on clothes.

At the close of his tour of Sicily he recounts having been there with the governor Abū al-Qāsim Ibn Ḥammūd, who welcomed him most warmly and composed a missive addressed to Saladin, in which he exhorted him to conquer the island. He confesses to have fallen ill when he was at the mosque of *‘Ayn Šafā*, which is name of the spring next to where the oratory was situated “to which people flocked for the therapeutic properties of its waters.” But Al-Harawī, in a gesture of caution perhaps so as to avoid unfavourable judgements towards his religious integrity, highlights that he recovered his health because God was benevolent to him.

In this passage two things stand out; the first one is the caution of our author, the care to safeguard the orthodox image of his religion without leaving any room for doubt about his belief in possible superstitions as would have been to trust his health to the beneficial action of the waters of the spring, sanctified by inherited popular religiosity due to the spring’s proximity to the holy building. Let us not forget that the fact of his work being written in the first person makes it definitely a special example of autobiography.

On the other hand, the appearance of an oratory, a sacred place next to a source of water with healing properties, a frequent scenario in spaces where miraculous events related to the divinity and its manifestations or theophany, is also related to the stories of miraculous fertility in some lands or with sacred trees which are usually located in similar settings to that described by Al-Harawī. This scenario reminds me of the miracle of the «marvellous olive tree», situated according to tradition next to a church and a spring of therapeutic waters, that flowers one particular day of the year, offering the visitor to this place on this specific day the spectacle of the emergence of the blossom, the appearance of the fruit and its ripening, thus as the gift to harvest this fruit which takes on its therapeutic properties. There is not a specific location for this phenomenon which appears linked to several Andalusian toponyms in the medieval sources. Al-Qazwīnī expresses the opinion that each one of the geographers that mention it locates it in a place where he was living or nearby.

⁵⁷ The author makes reference to pumice stone.

J. Hernández-Juberías points out that the binomial church-olive tree is usually complemented by the presence of water.⁵⁸ It is this relationship that is worth highlighting because although in the scene that our author depicts he does not mention any trees, the symbol of the binomial mosque-water is the same: a special place with therapeutic water or produce which outlines a suggestive or magical sacred spot.

In this case, as was discussed above, what is missing is the arboreal element, so present in the oriental and Mediterranean traditions because of its cosmological function, and the survival of these beliefs in Christianity and Islam.⁵⁹ The function of the scene is identical. It is precisely the survival of these beliefs, above all in the field of popular religiosity, that have been rendered sacred by the religions that gave it meaning. J. Hernández-Juberías states that in relation to the marvellous olive tree there is an evolution which moves away from certain archaic representations that were established in sacred texts and finally crystallised in popular belief.⁶⁰ She draws a parallel between the phenomenon of the olive tree and a pagan festival celebrating the arrival of spring and therefore the renewal of the year, that has been subsequently reinterpreted by Christianity but continues to be celebrated in Spain under the denomination of «may» or «branch». On the other hand, the aforementioned phenomenon highlights the religious building, the presence of water and the tree as a scenario which leads us directly to religious legends and Christian iconography dedicated to the appearance of the Virgin, so frequent in numerous places in our geography.

Be that as it may, Al-Harawī knew of a sanctified corner in a place in Sicily and there in the intimacy of a landscape presumably secluded there was a small mosque and a spring flowed with holy water; both elements, water and oratory, made a magnificent scene which completed the sacred landscape with which this author wished to single out the island.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this article I set out to analyse the content of the Al-Qazwīnī and Al-Harawī texts in order to propose several hypotheses about the authentic propaganda reason observed in both authors, so that by reading their Sicilian descriptions, the reader wanders around an island which is more Muslim than Christian; where the landscape, both natural and built, speaks of a vivid Muslim presence that is shown in the action of its leaders and inhabitants, who we could imagine present and active at the end of the 12th and in the 13th century.

The literary resources used by both authors, the themes, the wide casuistry that both of them use, justify the hypothesis of a clear intention on their part to idealize and/or Islamize a Sicily that no longer belonged to the Muslim context when they described it.

⁵⁸ Hernández-Juberías, *La península imaginaria*, pp. 295–296.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 296.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

5. Appendices

5.1. Appendix 1

Al-Qazwīnī, *Ātār al-bilād*, OHG, Wiesbaden, F. Wüstenfeld (ed.) 1848, pp. 143–144 and 106.

صفليّة جزيرة عظيمة من جزاير أهل المغرب مقابلة لأفريقية وهي مثلثة الشكل بين كلّ زاوية والآخرى مسيرة سبعة أيام وهي حصينة كثيرة البلدان والقرى كثيرة المواشى جداً من الخيل والبغال والحمار والبقر والغنم والحيوانات الوحشية ومن فضلها أن ليس بها عادٍ بنبابٍ أو بُرْثَنٍ أو ابْرةٍ وبها معدن الذهب والفضة والنحاس والرصاص والحديد وكذلك معدن الشبّ والكحل والزاج ومعدن النوشاذر ومعدن الزبيق وبها المياه والأشجار والمزارع وأنواع الفواكه على اختلاف أنواعها لا تنقطع شتاء ولا صيفاً وأرضها تنبت الزعفران وكانت قليلة العمارة خاملة الذكر إلى أن فتح المسلمون بلاد إفريقية فهرب أهل إفريقية إليها وعمروها حتى فتحت في أيام بنى الأغلب في ولاية المامون فيقيت في يد المسلمين مدة ثم ظهر عليها الكفار وهي الآن في أيديهم ، وبهذه الجزيرة جبال شامخة وعيون غزيرة وأنهار جارية ونزهة عجيبة وقال ابن حُمَديس وهو يشناق إليها

نَكْرُثٌ صِفْلِيَّةٌ والهوى يهيج للنفس تذكارها

فان كنت اخرجت من جنة فاني احدث اخبارها

ذكر أن دورها مسيرة ستة عشر يوماً وقطرها مسيرة خمسة أيام وهي مملوءة من الخيرات والمياه والأشجار والمزارع والفواكه بها جبل يقال له قصر بانه وهو من عجائب الدنيا على هذا الجبل مدينة عظيمة شامخة وحولها مزارع وبساتين كثيرة وهي شاهقة في الهواء وكلّ ذلك يحويه باب المدينة لا طريق إليها الا

بذلك الباب والانهار تنفجر من أعلاها وبها جبل النار ذكر ابو على الحسن بن يحيى أنه جبل مطلق على البحر دورته ثلاثة أيام بقرب طبرمين فيه أشجار كثيرة وأكثرها البندق والصنوبر والأرز وفيه أصناف الثمار وفي أعلاه منافس النار يخرج منه النار والدخان وربما سالت النار منه الى جهة تحرق كلّ ما مرّت به وتجعل الارض مثل خبث الحديد لا تنبت شيئا ولا تمرّ الدابة بها ويسميه الناس الاخبث وفي اعلى هذا الجبل السحاب والثلوج والامطار دائمة لا تكاد تقلع عنه في صيف ولا شتاء والثلج لا يفارق اعلاه في الصيف وأما في الشتاء فيعمّ الثلج أوله وآخره وزعمت الروم أن كثيراً من الحكماء يرحلون إلى جزيرة صفليّة للنظر إلى عجائب هذا الجبل واجتماع النار والثلج فيه فترى بالليل نار عظيمة تشعل على قلاته وبالنهار دخان عظيم لا يستطيع أحد من الدنو إليها فان أفتبس منها طفنت اذا فارقت موضعها، وبها البركان العظيم قال أحمد بن عمر العذري ليس في الدنيا بركان أشنع منه منظراً ولا العجب مخبراً فاذا هبت الريح سمع له دوى عظيم كالرعد القاصف ويقطع من هذا البركان الكبريت الذي لا يوجد مثله ، وقال أيضا بها آبار تلت يخرج منها من اول الربيع الى آخره زيت النفط فينزل في هذه الابار على درج وتقعّ النازل ويسدّ منخره فان تنقّس في أسفلها هلك من ساعته يغترف ماءها ويجعله في آجانات فما كان نفطاً علا فيجتمع ويجعل في القوارير .

[The Island of Sicily]

Sicily (*Ṣiqīliyya*)⁶¹ is a large island, it is one of Maghribi islands (*min ahl al-Mağrib*), is situated opposite *Ifriqiyya*, and is triangular in shape. From one extreme to the other (of the island) it is a walk of seven days. It is safe from any danger (*ḥaṣīna*), in its territory there are numerous cities and villages, and in them horses, mules, donkeys, cows, sheep and wild animals. Among its blessings is the fact that no predatory animals or scavenging birds or stinging insects inhabit the island. In this island there are gold, silver, copper, lead and iron mines, and also alum, antimony, sulphate, rock crystal (*nuṣāḍīr*) and mercury.

On the island there was a scant and little known population until the Moslems conquered *Ifriqiyya* and some of its inhabitants fled to Sicily, where settled and remained up until they were conquered in the time of Aghlabids under the command of Al Ma'mūn, after which it was held by the Moslems for a long period. The infidels arrived there, conquered it and it remains in their hands until today.

In this island there are mountains and abundant springs, constantly flowing rivers and marvellous landscapes.

The poet Ibn Ḥamdīs said [of Sicily] yearning for it:

I remember Sicily and the passion	stirs up its memory in my soul
I speak of it	Now that I have left paradise

They say that the perimeter of the island is a sixteen-day-walk and its diameter is five. It is replete with blessings, there is an abundance of springs, trees, woods and cultivated fields. There you can see a hill called Qaṣr Bāna, which is one of the wonders of the world. Atop this elevation (*ḡabal*) there is a magnificent city (*‘aẓīma*), on its summit and its surroundings there are many orchards and gardens, [it seems that everything is there] suspended in the air, with a boundary with only one access door. From the highest part rivers flow.

In Sicily there is a mountain of fire (*ḡabal an-nār*) [Etna] of which Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥasan Ibn Yaḥyà says that it is a mountain that looks onto the sea, has a perimeter of three days walk and is close to Taormina (*Ṭabarmīn*). In this mountain there are many trees, but in particular hazel, pine and yew trees (*al-arzan*).⁶² They also produce different types of fruit.

⁶¹ I would like to thank Professor Hanan Saleh Husayn for her interesting and invaluable suggestions with respect to various terms in this text.

⁶² I would equally like to thank Professor Joaquín Bustamante for his invaluable help in the identification of this particular term with the yew tree, a tree that was found in abundance on the hillsides of Etna in other times, whose wood is strong and of good quality and which was used to make arrows, bows, clubs, handles for axes and other utensils. This term, as the Professor indicates, appears as a synonym for *ṣawḥaṭ* (*Taxus baccata*) in *el Kitāb an-Nabāt* of Abū Ḥanīfa ad-Dīnawarī, in the edition of Hamidullah (Cairo 1973).

At the highest point of the mountain there is a crater of fire from which emerge flames and smoke, sometimes that fire erupts onto the surface and burns all that lies in its path, destroying the earth and leaving it as if it was iron slag, which leaves the land barren and no kind of animal can walk there. People call these phenomena eruptions.

On the top of this mountain there are clouds, snow and perpetual rains, they don't disappear either in summer or in winter and although the snow does not cover the summit during the summer, in winter it is present from the beginning to the end.

The *Rūm* state that the majority of the learned people who visit Sicily do it in order to observe the marvels of the island and the simultaneous presence of fire and snow.

During the night an impressive fire is seen burning on the summit, but during the day a dense smoke is seen that does not allow anyone to approach. If you light a wick in this fire it will go out as soon as it is withdrawn from it.

Aḥmad Ibn 'Umar al-'Uḍrī says that there is nowhere in the world a volcano more terrifying in appearance and more extraordinary in its innards because when the wind blows an impressive boom emerges from it that sounds like a clap of thunder. The grandeur of this volcano, which knows no equal, surprises.

It is also stated that in Sicily there are three wells from which oil of naphtha flows from the beginning to the end of spring. One descends to them via a staircase and the person who goes down into them must block his nose and cover [his face] because if they breathed in deeply they would die forthwith. The liquid (*mā'uhā*) is extracted in containers – there is no better quality oil of naphtha – and later it is decanted into receptacles (*qawārīr*).

[The city of Palermo]

The city of Palermo is on the island of Sicily, in the Mediterranean sea (*fī baḥr al-Maġrib*).

Ibn Ḥawqal al-Mawṣilī recounts that there is a magnificent temple (*haykal*) there and [affirmed literally:] «I have heard that [in the said temple], there is a hanging wooden coffin (*fī šay' min al-ḥaṣab*) containing Aristotle, that the Christians venerate his tomb and ask for intercession according the dogma of the Greeks. The author [also] said: «I have observed that in this city there are more mosques than I have seen in any other country, to the extent that he claims that within a stone's throw there are ten mosques, sometimes opposite each other. I asked about this matter and they told me that from pure obstinacy nobody would agree to pray in a mosque different [from his own], so in this way each person has a mosque in which no other person prays».

5.2 Appendix 2

Al-Harawī, *Al-Iṣārāt ilā ma'rifat az-ziyārāt*, Maktabat at-Ṭaqāfa ad-Dīniyya, Cairo 2002, [online]: http://www.worldcat.org/title/isharat-ila-marifat-al-ziyarat/oclc/50710451&referer=brief_results. (Ed. Meri, pp. 143–146; Ed. Sourdél-Thomine, pp. 54–55)

عدنا إلى زيارات البلاد وجزيرة إسقلية

مُؤَسَى عَلِيٍّ به سبعة من الصحابة رضهم في قبر واحد

فُطَانَةُ من هذه الجزيرة بها شهداء في مقبرة شرقها ذكروا أنهم نحو ثلاثين رجلاً من التابعين رضهم قُتلوا هناك والله أعلم

بذلك. وبين فُطَانَةَ وقصر بَانَّةَ شرقي الجزيرة أسد بن الفرات صاحب الأسديّات في الفقه من كبار الأعيان رضه

مَدِينَةُ أَطْوَيْلُس من هذه الجزيرة على ساحل البحر غربي الجزيرة مسجد به قبر عائشة ابنة جَنَادة بن أُوَيْس بن جَنادة أخي

أبي ذَرٍّ رضهما

وبقلعة برُّ وقبر حَسَّان بن معاوية بن حُدَيْج السكوني وقيل إنّ هذه القلعة والحصون بهذه الجزيرة قُتحت على يده وقيل هذا

حَسَّان هو تَوَلَّى قتل محمّد بن أبي بكر وأحرقه والله أعلم. وعن يسار قصر الأمير للمتوجّه إلى المدينة قير جاليئوس وقد تقدّم ذكره.

وبقصر الهردانة قبر أبي ذؤيب الشاعر في جانب سور القصر

وبجزيرة إسقلية جبل النار مطلق على البحر شاطئ في الهواء يرى في النهار الدخان طالع منه وفي الليل النار. وحدثني رجل

من علماء البلاد أنّه رأى حيواناً على شكل السمان رصاصي اللون يطير في وسط هذه النار ويعود إليها وقيل هو السندل. وأنا فما

رأيتُ إلا حجارة سوداء مثقبة مثال حجر الرجل للحمام تقع من هذا الجبل إلى ناحية البحر وقيل بالقرْغانة جبل مثله تحرق الحجارة

وبباع رمادها ثلاث أواق بدرهم يبيّضون به الثياب

واجتمعُ بجزيرة إسقلية بالقائد أبي القاسم بن حمود بن الحجر وذكر لي أنّه من ولد عمر بن عبد العزيز وكنتُ مرضتُ في

مسجد عين الشفا وهذه العين تزار ومن الله عزّ وجلّ عليّ بالعافية وأحسِن هذا القائد إليّ وكتبَ معي كتاباً إلى السلطان تحدّثه على أخذ هذه

الجزيرة وغرق المركب عبد خروجي من هذه الجزيرة وركبْتُ مع قوم من الروم إلى جزيرة قبرس

Pilgrim Sites on the Island of Sicily (*Ġazīra Isqiliyya*)

Marsala (*Marsā Alī*). Seven companions of the Prophet are buried there May God hold them in his glory, in one single tomb.

Catania (*Quṭāna*) is also situated on the island. In the said city there are martyrs in the western cemetery and according to what is said, there are about thirty of those men who followed the Prophet (*min at-tābi'īn*), may God be satisfied with them, they were killed there, but God knows more about all this.

Between Catania and Castro Giovanni (*Qaṣr Yānna*) in the eastern zone of the island is the tomb of Asad Ibn al Furāt, author of the work entitled *Al-Asadiyyāt fī al-fiqh* and one of the most eminent people [of this place]. May God be satisfied with him.

The City of Trapani (*madīna Aṭrabalus*) is also on the island of Sicily on the west coast. There is a mosque which houses the tomb of 'Ā'īša, daughter of Ġunāda Ibn 'Uways Ibn Ġunāda, brother of Abū Ḍarr, May God be satisfied with them all.

In Rocca di Prizzi (*Qal'at Barazzu*) there is the tomb of Ḥassān Ibn Mu'āwiyya Ibn Ḥudayġ as-Sakūnī. It is said that the aforementioned fortress as well as the bastions of the island were conquered by him. They also say that this Ḥassān was in charge of murdering Muḥammad Ibn Abī Bakr and that he burned his corpse, but God knows best.

To the east of Misilmeri (*Qaṣr al-Amīr*) in the direction of the city of [Palermo] is the tomb of Galeno (*Ġālīnūs*), that I have mentioned earlier.

In Qaṣr al-Huradāna is the tomb of Abū Du'ayb the poet, next to the wall of the palace.

In the island of Sicily there is a volcano (*ġabal an-nār*) [Etna] which emerges from the sea and rises into the air. During the day one sees smoke coming out of it and during the night fire emerges from its interior. One of the scholars told me that he had seen an animal with the form of a quail of a shiny grey colour emerging from the fire and later he returned into it. They say it is a dragon. For my part, regarding this I have only seen a black rock with holes in it which resembles one that is used in the bath (*ḥammām*) that can be found on this mountain on the slope that leads down to the sea. They also say that in Ferganá (*Al-Fargāna*) there is a similar mountain whose rock burns and whose ashes are sold; each three *awāqī* – 600 grammes – costs a dirham. With this stone clothes are whitened

In Sicily I met the *qā'id* Abū al-Qāsim Ibn Ḥammūd Ibn al-Ḥaġar, who told me that he was descended from 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz. I became ill in the mosque 'Ayn Šafā, which is a spring to which the people visit [for its therapeutic properties], but God, Glorious and Sublime, returned me to health. This *qā'id* showered me with favours and wrote an epistle addressed to the Sultan [Saladin] that he gave me, in which he exhorted him to conquer the island. But the ship in which I set sail from Sicily was wrecked and I set sail once more with a group of Byzantines (*Rūm*) in the direction of Cyprus (Qubrus).

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