

The Forested Frontier: Commentary in the Margins of the Alhambra Ceiling Paintings

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Abstract

This paper argues that important notions are imbedded within the seemingly marginal backgrounds of the ceiling paintings in the Alhambra's so-called "Hall of Justice." The shared European and Islamic iconographies evident in the paintings' settings, and the creatures that appear therein, reiterate the complexities inherent in the multicultural context of the Alhambra. Through the processes of intercultural appropriation, interpretation and adaptation, these plants and animals seem to transcend their many individual cultural resonances, generating new meanings based on the particular convergences fostered by the Nasrid court. The paintings' backgrounds, on the edges of the central courtly dramas, literally visualize the cultural "outsideness" of forests, which, as spaces for seclusion and distance from the distractions of daily life, also may have served as a metaphor for the Nasrid court in Granada. At the same time, these newly reconstituted meanings often seem to speak directly to the nature of the *relationships* between the figures depicted in the main scenes. Displaying integrated associations deliberately culled from the visual repertoires of several cultures, these paintings appear to offer something of an oasis, where intellectuals of various religious and cultural affiliations would have been encouraged to engage in contemplation and dialogue with one another.

Keywords

beaver, bee, Bestiaries, Richard of Fournival, The Bestiary of Love (*Le Bestiaire d'amour*), Ramon Llull, forests, magpie, sufism

As several of the essays in this volume demonstrate, the figural imagery in the painted ceilings of the Alhambra's so-called "Hall of Justice" speaks to the paintings' unique context—that of a Muslim structure built in multi-cultural and multi-confessional fourteenth-century Iberia. Filled with the activities of knights and ladies set against the courtly backdrops of castles and forests, the ceilings may seem out of place to a modern visitor to the Alhambra. But as we continue to examine these paintings in relation

to their spatial and historical contexts, the medieval viewer comes into greater focus—a viewer who probably found such juxtapositions far less peculiar.

In this essay, I will argue that important ideas are imbedded within the seemingly marginal backgrounds of these paintings. These ideas can serve not only to enrich our readings of the primary figures and scenes, but also clarify the paintings' place in both the so-called "Palace of the Lions" and the Alhambra as a whole. The animals and plants that populate these margins often have multiple, even conflicting connotations that proceed from a variety of contexts, including al-Andalus, the Christian kingdoms of Castile and Aragón, broader Europe, and the wider Islamic world. Far from being mere (and meaningless) "decoration," these motifs were not only deliberately chosen, but—as will be argued—were chosen precisely because of their multivalent qualities. The processes of intercultural appropriation, interpretation and adaptation demonstrated by these representations result in the generation of completely new meanings for the visual elements to be examined in this paper, meanings that are specific to the Alhambra and its frontier context. In the context both of these ceilings and of the building and kingdom of which they form part, these plants and animals seem to transcend their many individual cultural resonances in order to create new meanings based on the particular convergences fostered by the Nasrid court; indeed, many of the connotations suggested by the creatures and their encompassing landscapes can be found in texts with definite links to medieval Iberia, precisely the context which fueled these reinvented meanings.¹ More specifically, these newly reconstituted meanings often speak directly to the nature of the relationships between the figures depicted in the main scenes. With subtlety and nuance, this focused commentary was also quite probably meant to address the political affiliations and social bonds so important to the Nasrids and their Castilian allies.

All three ceiling paintings are similarly oriented with the figures and scenes radiating outward from the center of their oval frame. This circular format generates a series of potentially narrative scenes that merge into one another, defying our attempts to identify the specific moments represented in each scene, or to distinguish one scene from another. Although the two lateral ceilings show two registers of action (differentiated by the size of the figures and the nature of their actions), there is no clear framing or delim-

¹ Such regional connections are key to a number of the papers presented in this issue; see, for example, Robinson's contribution.

itation of individual scenes, and few beginnings or ends to the narrative components can be firmly established. These implied, and implicitly overlapping or intertwined, narratives resist all attempts to decipher them, and the thick tapestry of images that forms the background to the central scenes can, upon a first (or even a second) consideration, seem equally confusing. The margins, however, do in fact serve to illuminate the principal scenes, but only for those willing to make the effort to diligently study and absorb the wealth of visual information they contain.

Investigating the “margins” of medieval art is certainly not a new approach. Michael Camille and Nurith Kenaan-Kedar each published on the topic in 1992, and Camille’s book continues to be a popular text with medievalists, while also becoming one of the breakout books that engages non-medievalists in the field of art history.² Most useful for my analysis is Camille’s relatively simple assertion that the margins are involved in a direct and complex relationship with the principal images they frame, rather than serving as unrelated, largely “decorative,” details to be understood in isolation from the intended iconographic message of the whole. Almost as though they invite consideration of this visual process of commentary, the “Hall of Justice” ceilings display clear distinctions between the visual space in which knights and ladies live, and the alternative realm that exists around them. Both in the very specific context of the “Palace of the Lions” and the more general one of Nasrid Granada, visually unpacking the marginal spaces in these images demands prior consideration of some of the artistic norms across both al-Andalus and Europe.

Two of the three ceilings in the “Hall of the kings” contain complex backgrounds that indicate a particular setting or environment, while the background of the central ceiling, depicting a circle of seated men in Muslim garb, is uniformly gold; my focus will be on the two lateral ceilings, which depict chivalry and hunting scenes (Illustrations 6 and 13).³ The backgrounds of these two paintings consist of a narrow, outer rim of grass

² Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992); Nurith Kenaan-Kedar, “The Margins of Society in Marginal Romanesque Sculpture,” *Gesta* 31, no. 1 (1992); Nurith Kenaan-Kedar, *Marginal Sculpture in Medieval France: Towards the Deciphering of an Enigmatic Pictorial Language* (Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press, 1995).

³ The background of the third painting contains no figures or objects save a longitudinal band of stars (blue) and two coats-of-arms on either end supported by pairs of diminutive lions.

and undergrowth, dotted with plants and terrestrial creatures including a beaver, hares, and monkeys. The rest of the space is given over to sky, indicated by its dark blue color⁴ and the numerous tree-tops and many birds with which it is filled. The backgrounds are densely filled, both with trees and animal life, and the careful and even distribution of trees and birds indicates the deliberate nature of the images' layout. Overlap does not occur except in a few instances where birds or other animals are perched in trees; rather, flying birds are centered within the blue spaces between trees, and all the compositional elements—human figures, animals, architecture—are framed by similarly balanced expanses of blue sky. As a result, no area of sky is left unfilled, and I believe that such precision is indicative of the intentionality of these various formal effects.

Although it is clear that significant effort and attention went into the conception and production of these backgrounds, very little has been said about this aspect of the paintings. In her seminal article on the ceilings, Jerilynn Dodds notes only that the backgrounds of the two lateral paintings are “crowded in varicolored masses on a blue-green field . . . that abound with flora and fauna . . . to create a lively natural setting.”⁵ If, as is pointed out several times in this volume, no significant research has been presented on these paintings since Dodd's work was published in 1979, even less attention has been devoted to their backgrounds. It is my contention that the flora and fauna of the backgrounds, far from being as insignificant as this scholarly neglect would seem to suggest, provide important clues to the overall meaning of the ceilings. As I will demonstrate, the shared European and broader Islamic iconographies evident in the paintings' settings, and the creatures that appear therein, will reiterate the complexities inherent in the multicultural context of the Alhambra, resulting in a distillation of the many (and often contradictory) meanings associated with each element into a uniquely Iberian formal language, one which casts a new light onto the meanings these ceilings may have held for their original audience.

Animals played an important role in the literature and visual culture of both Europe and Islamic lands in the Middle Ages, appearing not only as

⁴ Whether the dark blue depicts day or night is unclear, and may be meant to paradoxically suggest both. Oleg Grabar has posed a similar notion for the Lions complex as a whole: Oleg Grabar, *The Alhambra* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 85.

⁵ Jerilynn D. Dodds, “The Paintings in the Sala de Justicia of the Alhambra: Iconography and Iconology,” *Art Bulletin* LXI, no. 2 (1979), p. 189.

the central characters in fables, but also in the margins that frame many other kinds of texts, both religious and secular, and in the decoration of everything from clothing to architecture. For example, bestiaries, manuscripts that were usually illustrated with a great variety of known animals and which included discussions of the meanings of these animals' behaviors, were produced over several centuries across Europe, as were herbals, dictionary-like compendia of plants used in remedies that often included a section on animals. Approximately 132 manuscripts have been traced to this tradition, written in Latin, French, Middle English, Italian, and Catalan between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries.⁶ The Latin versions are most abundant, commonly dated to the late twelfth or thirteenth century and proceeding primarily from England.

An interesting transformation of the common medieval bestiary into a text which might be classified as a literary one is *The Bestiary of Love* (*Le Bestiaire d'amour*) composed by Richard of Fournival, a French text that offers courtly connotations for the animals discussed on its pages.⁷ Written in the middle of the thirteenth century and surviving in some twenty manuscripts, Master Richard's text is sometimes accompanied by a "response," a supplemental text written by an anonymous woman who counters many of his zoological interpretations of courtly love. Richard reinterpreted many of the bestiary's descriptions of animals and

⁶ For catalogues and analysis of bestiaries, see Ron Baxter, *Bestiaries and Their Users in the Middle Ages* (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, in association with the Courtauld Institute, 1998); Willene B. Clark and Meradith T. McMunn, eds., *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages: The Bestiary and Its Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989); Florence McCulloch, *Mediaeval French and Latin Bestiaries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962); Debra Higgs Strickland, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Many editions and translations have been published, including T. H. White, trans., *The Book of Beasts: A Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1954); Richard W. Barber, trans., *Bestiary: An English Version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford Ms Bodley 764* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 1993); Guy R. Mermier, trans., *A Medieval Book of Beasts: Pierre de Beauvais' Bestiary* (Lewiston, NY and Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).

⁷ Key translations include Richard de Fournival, *Master Richard's Bestiary of Love and Response*, trans. Jeanette Beer (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1986); and Richard de Fournival, *Li Bestiaires d'amours di Maistre Richart de Fornival e li Response du Bestiaire*, trans. Cesare Segre (Milan and Naples: R. Ricciardi, 1957). See also Jeanette Beer, *Beasts of Love: Richard de Fournival's Bestiaire d'amour and a Woman's Response* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

their attributes in order to bring these ideas into agreement with the discourses of courtly romance literature, in a sense combining two different literary forms into a third, unique hybrid. As we shall see, these creative reinventions are especially provocative when considered in relation to the ceiling paintings under discussion.

Although the medieval bestiary does not appear to have been as popular in Iberia as it was in England or France, several related texts suggest that this tradition was nevertheless present in Iberia from as early as the thirteenth century. For example, around this time the Mallorcan author Ramon Llull wrote *The Book of the Beasts* (*Llibre de les bèsties*), a text of the “mirror-for-princes” genre which offered a didactic series of stories set in the animal kingdom through which suggestions were made concerning how a human king ought to rule and avoid poor counsel.⁸ Llull, a prolific writer in Catalan, Latin, and Arabic, fostered translations of Arabic works, and later in his life is believed by many either to have joined or to have been in some way closely associated with the Franciscan order.⁹ Llull’s work may have been based in part on *Calila e Dimna*, a series of similar stories that, although originating in India, was translated from Persian into Arabic around 750 and into Castilian under the patronage of Alfonso X in the thirteenth century.¹⁰ *Calila e Dimna* (or *Kalila wa Dimna*) was copied abundantly for centuries in many languages; in those relevant to this study, manuscripts still exist of both the Castilian and Arabic versions.¹¹ Although

⁸ E. Allison Peers, trans., *The Book of the Beasts: Translated from the Catalan of Ramón Lull* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1927). See also Edward J. Neugaard, “The Sources of the Folk Tales in Ramon Llull’s *Llibre de les bèsties*,” *Journal of American Folklore* 84 (1971), 333–337.

⁹ E. Allison Peers, *Foll d’amor: La Vida de Ramon Llull* (Palma de Mallorca: Editorial Moll, 1966). On the other hand, John Tolan and Harvey Hames dispute this: John Victor Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), especially 256–274; Harvey Hames, “Conversion via Ecstatic Experience in Roman Llull’s *Llibre del gentil e dels tres savis*,” *Viator* 30 (1999), 182; Harvey J. Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

¹⁰ Juan Manuel Cacho Bleuca and María Jesús Lacarra, *Calila e Dimna* (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1984), pp. 12–13.

¹¹ Castilian copies include Escorial MS h-III-9 and MS x-III-4; *Ibid.*, 50–65. Important illustrated Arabic copies include Bodleian Library MS Pococke 400 and BN MS Arabe 3467. See Esin Atil, *Kalila wa Dimna: Fables from a Fourteenth-Century Arabic Manuscript* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 61–71.

none of the surviving illustrated manuscripts of *Calila e Dimna* appear to have been made in Iberia, several of the illuminated Mamluk copies date from the period of the Nasrid Sultanate.¹² We will return to the images from one of these manuscripts, Bodleian MS Pococke 400 (1354), later in this essay.

The medieval French stories of Renard the Fox (collected in the *Roman de Renard*), which date from the late twelfth or thirteenth century, were likely another influence on the multilingual and well-traveled Llull.¹³ Approximately 15 tales were written, deriving primarily from the work of Pierre de Saint-Cloud, who was the first author to write about the triangle created by the three key characters of Renard the fox, Ysengrin the wolf, and Hersent his wife, although the stories include numerous characters that reflect the diversity of the animal world.¹⁴ The earliest extant manuscripts of the *Roman de Renard* date from the thirteenth century, represented by some twenty manuscripts and fragments, several of which include illuminations.¹⁵ The key figure in Llull's *The Book of the Beasts* is a cunning, female fox named Dame Reynard, who manages to ingratiate herself to many key political players in the animal kingdom, but eventually overmanipulates the situation, leading to her own demise.¹⁶ Both texts depict the lion as king, although Llull's rendition paints a picture that questions the authority and nobility of the lion, while the *Roman* seems to assert the supremacy of the king as reflected by actual French monarchy in the late twelfth century.¹⁷

Several later manuscripts also suggest that a bestiary tradition existed in medieval Iberia. For instance, five Catalan bestiary manuscripts, dating from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, have been linked to an Italian version that first appeared in the fourteenth.¹⁸ Eleven manuscripts also

¹² See previous note.

¹³ Neugaard, "The Sources of the Folk Tales in Ramon Llull's *Llibre de les bèsties*."

¹⁴ Patricia Terry, trans., *Renard the Fox: Translated from the Old French* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1983), 4.

¹⁵ Robert Bossuat, *Le Roman de Renard* (Paris: Hatier, 1967), 181–183.

¹⁶ Peers, trans., *The Book of the Beasts*.

¹⁷ Terry, trans., *Renard the Fox*, 7.

¹⁸ Clark and McMunn, eds., *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages*, 203. See also Michel Salvat, "Notes Sur les Bestiaires Catalans," in *Epopée Animale, Fable, Fabliau: Actes du IV^e Colloque de la Société Internationale Renardienne* (Evreux, 1981), ed. Michel Salvat and Gabriel Bianciotto (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984); McCulloch, *Mediaeval French and Latin Bestiaries*.

exist of a fifteenth-century Castilian translation of Brunetto Latini's encyclopedic work, *Livres dou tresor*, written in French in the late thirteenth century.¹⁹ This text included a comprehensive bestiary, but in contrast to other texts associated with the tradition, was void of most Christian moralization. Although no copies of the *Tesoro* (the Castilian translation) from the late thirteenth or fourteenth centuries have been discovered, several of the extant manuscripts include prefatory remarks stating that the text was originally translated for King Sancho IV by Alonso Paredes and Pascuala Gomes.²⁰ These later examples have been interpreted as proof of the extreme popularity of Brunetto's *Tesoro* in medieval Spain;²¹ whether or not this was the case, they definitely demonstrate that the bestiary tradition had a long legacy throughout Europe, which clearly included several regions of Iberia.

Animals were important in the Middle Ages not only as literary characters, but also as marginal figures in the visual programs of many manuscripts. In the Islamic world, a thirteenth-century Persian manuscript of the tragic romance of *Varqa and Gulshah* depicts an abundance of signifying animals cavorting throughout the images.²² In his study of the symbolism of the animals in this manuscript, Abbas Daneshvari proposes that the animals function as allegorical representations that highlight the main themes of the narrative. The agility and speed of rabbits, for example, associated them with good luck or survival; scenes in which the rabbit is underfoot are therefore interpreted as good omens for the main characters. However, when the rabbit is seen sleeping, symbolizing unconsciousness or death, or appears to be leaving a scene, the interpretation may be that bad luck or even death awaits Varqa and Gulshah. Interpreting the animals as reflections of the sentiments or conditions affecting the story's characters, Daneshvari also suggests that the medieval Islamic beliefs that inform his reading are applicable to the interpretation of similar imagery produced in other regions and contexts of the Islamic world.²³

¹⁹ Spurgeon Baldwin, *The Medieval Castilian Bestiary from Brunetto Latini's Tesoro: Study and Edition* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter, 1982), xxi.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., vii–viii.

²² Topaki Sarayi MS H.841. See Abbas Daneshvari, *Animal Symbolism in Warqa wa Gulshah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). I also thank Oya Pancaroglu for sharing with me her unpublished paper, "The Narrative and Visual Horizons of *Varqa and Gulshah*," 2003.

²³ Ibid., 10.

Two ducks and a rabbit also appear in one of the illuminated scenes from *Hadith Bayâd wa Riyâd*, a thirteenth-century manuscript that happens to be the only surviving illustrated Arabic manuscript from medieval al-Andalus.²⁴ These animals are located in the space surrounding the narrative, and seem to function both as commentary on the main scene and as signifiers of the scene's natural setting, in much the same way as the animals in *Varqa and Gulshah*. In addition to these examples, of course, there are endless marginal menageries that proliferate in late medieval prayer books, books of hours, and courtly literature throughout Europe, as well as in tapestries and wall paintings.

It seems likely that the patron of the Alhambra's painted ceilings would have been familiar with much of the cultural production outlined above. After all, such knowledge is certainly in keeping with the characterization offered by several of the essays in this volume of Muhammad V and his court and worldly and connected. In addition, that many of the sources described above can be linked to Iberia is especially important, reminding us that in and around al-Andalus there existed a profusion of bestiary ideas which were readily available to both patrons and artists (as well as to members of the audience) at the historical moment during which the ceilings were conceived and executed. The effect of such rich offerings will become evident in the next section, where I will consider the connotations of several of the animals and plants depicted in the backgrounds of the ceilings. The unique status of the Nasrid court, and the complex and sensitive nature of its relationships with its allies, will materialize as the main preoccupation of many of these images.

Activity in the Margins

Many of the animals in the ceilings were quite popular in medieval art, and their symbolic meanings are fairly clear and well-researched. The presence

²⁴ Cynthia Robinson, *Medieval Andalusian Courtly Culture in the Mediterranean: Hadith Bayâd wa Riyâd* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 32 and 77. On the *Hadith Bayâd wa Riyâd*, see also Cynthia Robinson, "The Lover, His Lady, Her Lady, and a Thirteenth-Century Celestina: A Recipe for Love Sickness from al-Andalus," in *Islamic Art and Literature*, ed. Oleg Grabar and Cynthia Robinson (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001); and Cynthia Robinson, "Going Between: Literary Types and the Fabrication of Female Identity in Thirteenth-Century Spains," in *Under the Influence: Questioning the Comparative in Medieval Castile*, ed. Cynthia Robinson and Leyla Rouhi (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 199–230.

of lions, dogs, falcons, and other hunting-related animals, for instance, invokes the long tradition of hunting as an elite pastime, allusions that may have been intended to indicate the royal status and noble character of the Nasrid Sultans.²⁵ In the pages that follow, however, our attention will be focused on several of the less obvious animals that make appearances in the ceilings. Unfortunate victims of the ravages of time and restoration, many of these unnoticed animals are somewhat difficult to discern. For example, it is not easy to identify many of the birds depicted in these paintings. Certainly the ducks in the fountain, or the falcons attacking other birds in the sky, are recognizable, but many of the other birds are very similar, being whitish-brown in color and fairly homogenous in size (for example, Illustration 15). A similar observation has been made concerning the visual programs of numerous medieval manuscripts incorporating animals, including the thirteenth-century Persian manuscript of *Varqa and Gulsha*.²⁶ This might lead us to conclude that when (and only when) a bird is clearly represented and identifiable, a specific connotation is intended. Birds most often identifiable in the aforementioned medieval contexts include not only falcons and ducks, but also peacocks, crows, and cockerels and hens. And in the Alhambra's ceilings, we can distinguish at least one other bird through its visible differences from the more homogenous white-brown type evident in the paintings (Illustrations 6, 11, and 15).

Black with large swathes of white on its breast and wing, the magpie had some interesting and well-known connotations in the bestiaries of medieval Europe. These books often included the story of the fox pretending to be dead, luring the magpies to his body, only to snap them up when they attempted to eat his tongue. As depicted in the margins of the fourteenth-century Psalter of Queen Isabella of England (Figure 1), or the thirteenth-century bestiary MS Bodley 764,²⁷ the fox's treatment of the magpies is described as "the symbol of the devil, who appears to be dead to all living things until he has them by the throat and punishes them."²⁸ In Richard of

²⁵ See Jerrilynn D. Dodds' contribution to this issue.

²⁶ Daneshvari, *Animal Symbolism*, 79-82.

²⁷ Barber, trans., *Bestiary: An English Version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford Ms Bodley 764*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 65. See also Debra Higgs Strickland, "Marginal Bestiaries," in *Animals and the Symbolic in Mediaeval Art and Literature*, ed. L. A. J. R. Houwen (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1997), 181.



Figure 1. Fox with Birds, including Magpie, *Isabella Psalter*, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München [MS gall. 16], fol. 13r, England, 1303-1308. Reprinted with permission.

Fournival's *Bestiary of Love*, the fox deceiving a magpie is likened to uncaring men who pretend to be in love in order to seduce women: "A man will say he is dying of love when he feels no pain or hurt, and these deceive good folk just as the fox deceives the magpies."²⁹ It would appear that just such an interpretation is intended for the bird in the "Hall of Justice" ceiling paintings. The magpie appears three times in the ceilings, and is always found in the vicinity of the Lady: twice on the hunting ceiling (N)

²⁹ Fournival, *Master Richard's Bestiary of Love and Response*, 35. See also Beer, *Beasts of Love*, 107.

and once on the battle ceiling (S) (Illustration 6, in tree to left of castle; Illustration 11, top center, left of starred panel; Illustration 15, lower center). Although there are certainly numerous meanings that might have been associated with this bird, its insistent visual connection with the Lady may be intended to convey her position as the focus of the attentions of several knights, perhaps not all of them with the noblest of intentions.³⁰

Magpies are not always represented as victims, however, for outside the context of the fox story, they are usually portrayed as birds of prey.³¹ This facet of their character is reflected in the fox story itself, their intentions being to consume the carcass of the fox they believe to be dead. The magpie, then, can be interpreted as representing both pursuer and pursued. As such, the bird's association with the lady indicates far more than victimization, either of itself or of the Lady; rather, the magpie may bring resonances of duality and ambiguity, suggesting that the Lady is, not only the object of male desire, but also a savvy player in the courtly games that transpire in the ceilings.³² Moreover, the magpie's duplicity may reference the instability and negotiation necessary not only in romantic exchanges, but also in strategic engagements, a reading that is especially pertinent to the sensitive relationship between the Nasrids and their Christian allies.

Careful navigation in the realms of words as well as of actions was important to both the Nasrids and their Christian neighbors, and further associations offered by the magpie may also suggest some of the uncertainty of negotiating across language and culture. In a common Latin bestiary text, magpies are noted as poets because "they can speak words with different sounds, like men;" in addition to the positive associations such qualities would appear to carry, they also suggest a talent for the *manipulation* of words, which may be used in the production of effusive and false praises as well as in the creation of verse. The Latin word for the magpie, *Picus*, is interpreted as a reference to "Saturn's son, because he used them in foretelling the future."³³ The text states that "you may think what you

³⁰ In her reading of the "Christian" knight, Robinson suggests that he loses in part because he allows desire to get the better part of his nobility; see the essays of Cynthia Robinson, Rosa María Rodríguez Porto and Ana Echevarria in the present volume.

³¹ Strickland, *Medieval Bestiaries*, 222, n. 60.

³² Robinson argues in her essay in this collection that the savvy Lady often appears to serve as a reminder that frontier courtliness is being maintained.

³³ Barber, ed., *Bestiary: An English Version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford Ms Bodley 764*, 35.

like” of the stories associated with the magpie, such as its purported prophetic talent or divinity, but “the sound of its voice may mean either the loquacity of heretics or the discussion of philosophers,” thus implying the ambiguous duality of the bird’s symbolism.³⁴ For the Nasrid patron of these paintings, whoever he may ultimately have been, the magpie may serve as a reminder that one’s allies can quickly become threatening, and that being prepared for the words of either the heretic or the philosopher may protect one’s interests. On a visual level, such ambiguities as those associated with the magpie may have also served to draw the viewers’ interests to the animals and the background in general,³⁵ and attest to the importance of the background scenes to the overall comprehension of the paintings.

Resting on the ground to the right of the magpie is another curious animal: a strange brown creature whose body is contorted by an effort to position his head in the area of his genitals (the reasons for my determination that the animal is male will be made clear shortly) (Illustration 15). This animal is a beaver (*castor*), and his position, remarkably common in both bestiaries and in the margins of many illuminated manuscripts, depicts the act of self-castration (Figure 2). In the Middle Ages, it was believed that the beaver’s testicles had medicinal value; depicted in these images is the beaver’s act of removing his testicles himself when threatened with death by the hunter. According to both Latin and French versions of the bestiary, when he saw the hunter approaching, the beaver would bite off his testicles and toss them to the hunter, and would then be left alone; subsequently, if another hunter approached him, he simply displayed the absence and the hunter would go away.³⁶ The Latin bestiary text then

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ In her essay on a fifteenth-century Italian Arthurian manuscript, Amanda Luyster makes a similar argument for the significance of animals, stating that “in a sense it is the ambiguity of the animals which stimulates our interest in them;” Amanda Luyster, “Playing with Animals: The Visual Context of an Arthurian Manuscript (Florence Palatino 556) and the Uses of Ambiguity,” *Word & Image* 20, no. 1 (2004), 13.

³⁶ White, trans., *The Book of Beasts*, 28-29; Baldwin, *Brunetto Latini’s Tesoro: Study and Edition*, 43. See also Barber, trans., *Bestiary: An English Version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford Ms Bodley 764*, 43-44. Pierre de Beauvais’ French version echoes the sentiments of the other bestiaries: Mermier, trans., *A Medieval Book of Beasts: Pierre de Beauvais’ Bestiary*, 95-97. For more on the beaver, see Strickland, *Medieval Bestiaries*, 84-92. In one of many inaccuracies found in bestiaries, the beaver’s testicles are internal, and therefore could not

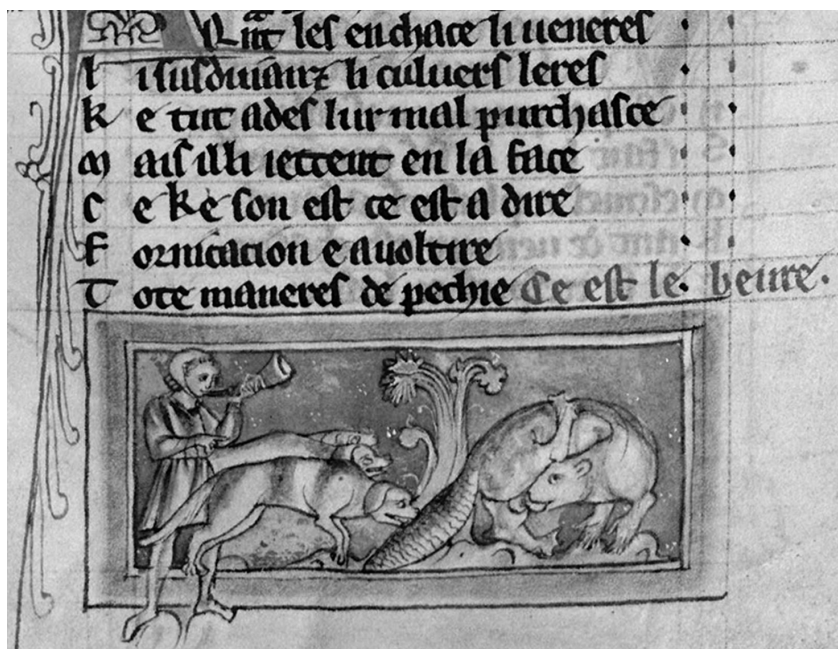


Figure 2. Beaver, MS fr. 14969, fol. 28v (Bibliothèque nationale de France), London or Oxford, 1265-1270. Reprinted with permission.

explains that “hence every man who inclines toward the commandments of God and who wants to live chastely, must cut himself off from all vices, all motions of lewdness, and must cast them from him in the Devil’s face.”³⁷ Pierre de Beauvais’ French rendition is a bit more explicit, explaining that the beaver’s genitals represent these vices, and that the hunter’s face stands for the Devil, “who is always chasing him.”³⁸ The beaver’s persistent appearance in bestiary manuscripts demonstrates its useful didactic function, presenting a clear moral message advocating chastity.

This image was depicted frequently in medieval European contexts, including nearly every existing illuminated bestiary manuscript, as well as in manuscripts having to do with medicine, such as herbals, and in the

be bitten off; moreover, the actual beaver substance used for medicine was in a different gland, not the testicles: White, trans., *The Book of Beasts*, 29, n. 1.

³⁷ White, trans., *The Book of Beasts*, 29.

³⁸ Mermier, trans., *A Medieval Book of Beasts: Pierre de Beauvais’ Bestiary*, 95.

margins of books of hours (Figure 2). In the context of the ceiling, a relationship is suggested between the beaver and the Christian knight on horseback above him (Illustration 15). The beaver's activities contain religious resonances not only of chastity but also of ascetic living and noble behavior, indicating that the knight's battle is perhaps not only with his Muslim counterpart, but with his own corporeal urges as well.

In the context of the culture of courtly love, however, the argument for chastity is problematic, for it seems to suppress the erotic play that occurs between lover and beloved. Thus, instead of suggesting any connection between the beaver's genitals and his own, male sexuality, Richard of Fournival initiates a gender inversion, equating the beaver's behavior with that of a pursued woman, whose heart is desired by her pursuer: "so fair, sweet beloved, if my pleading annoys you as much as you say, you might as well deliver yourself from it by giving up your heart, because I am pursuing you only for that."³⁹ Although Master Richard attempts to resituate this Christian symbol of virtue within the ostensibly secular context of his *Bestiary of Love*, it is unlikely that the well-known religious connotations of the beaver could be completely erased. Nevertheless, Richard's reading of the beaver's courtly meanings suggests that more than one association may have been brought to bear on the Alhambra's beaver image. In the context of the ceiling paintings, the beaver becomes yet another animal with multivalent associations, the interpretations of which become slightly less complex if considered relevant not only for an individual figure, but also for the relationships between that figure and others depicted in the paintings. While the position of the beaver in the ceiling initially conjures ideas of celibacy and nobility on the part of Christian knight, the animal's other associations with the heart of the "sweet beloved" provide an alternative, complementary reading. The Christian knight, after all, suffers a serious wounding in this scene, while nearby, the Lady views this battle and gestures towards the two fighting knights. Master Richard's rhetorical strategy often indicates that he will "die from love," and perhaps the noble Christian knight here, unsuccessful in his battle and in gaining the Lady's heart, is also soon to suffer such a death. Although the image is somewhat ambiguous and it is probable that he is not literally killed, the Christian knight seems to succumb to his desires for the Lady, and thus becomes "less" of a noble figure,

³⁹ Fournival, *Master Richard's Bestiary of Love and Response*, 20-21. See also Beer, *Beasts of Love*, 75-77.

therefore losing her. In her contribution to this collection, Cynthia Robinson reads this scene as one in which the nobility of the Christian knight (as Palomades) is further diminished by the Lady's courtly intervention on his behalf during the battle.⁴⁰

As this example shows, the positioning of the animals in the ceiling is not random, but instead reflects a strategic use of juxtaposition and association, indicating that the creators were well versed in this subtle, nuanced method of creating symbolic meaning. We might recall that the beaver exists in close proximity to a magpie, a bird that, as argued earlier, may stand in ambiguously for both victim and prey. In this area of lush undergrowth, however, there are also other animals: a rabbit, and the sleeping lion on a chain leash held by the Lady. The rabbit leaps away from the knight and toward the castle, the Lady, and the other animals, suggesting (according to the probable Islamic reading of this animal) a turning of good fortune in the lady's direction, or at least away from the Christian knight.⁴¹ The lion's size indicates that he is part of the narrative episodes rather than the surrounding margins, and yet his slumber naturally indicates his vulnerability, as well as his submission to the Lady. These four animals together create an environment rich with allusions to love, its dangers, and its victories, all facets that remind us of the role of strategy in both courtly romance and in the frontier culture that both connected and separated al-Andalus and the Christian kingdoms to its north, where maintenance of chivalric ideals facilitated good (or at least manageable) relations between the Nasrids and their allies.

Large, frontally represented, symmetrical bees also appear throughout the southern "hunting" ceiling, hovering in three different places (Illustration 6, high left of castle; Illustration 9, center; and Illustration 11, just left of center). These creatures are small and difficult to make out, and my identification of them as bees may be met with some skepticism. A comparison of them with other medieval representations of bees, however, demonstrates that they are usually shown in a specific and uniform manner. Bees are consistently depicted from above, as though the viewer were

⁴⁰ See Robinson's essay in this collection.

⁴¹ The associations of the rabbit (and the hare) with good luck and fecundity seem to be primarily from an Islamic tradition; in European bestiaries, the rabbit is a relatively late addition, and most frequently was seen simply as an animal associated with hunting and sustenance (through food and clothing). See Daneshvari, *Animal Symbolism*, 11-28, and Strickland, *Medieval Bestiaries*, 48.

looking down upon their backs, with their wings held open on either side to create a symmetrical form that is repeated in the representation of all individual bees in a given image (Figure 3). While it might seem strange to us that the artist singled out an insect for such emphasis, in the Middle Ages bees were actually understood as a kind of bird.⁴² Additionally, bees were seen as model citizens, in part because they were not governed by a king who inherited his rule, but by one chosen according to natural signs of greatness: "they maintain his right to judgment and are devotedly faithful to him because they recognize him as their elected leader, and honor his great responsibility."⁴³ Bees respected their king and were hard-working, industrious, and obedient, all character traits that were also very important to a medieval knight.⁴⁴ Even the symmetry with which the bees' bodies were frequently represented speaks to the notions of "rational organization and order" associated with them by medieval writers and readers.⁴⁵

At least two of the bees on the "hunting" ceiling hover near knights (Illustrations 9 and 11). In the first case, a turbaned knight is flanked by two companions who lead his horse, as he presents a boar to the Lady. The bee is positioned directly above the knight's head, perhaps suggesting that he is especially valorous and responsible. In the second example, the bee is placed between a Christian knight and his horse as they do battle with a lion (Illustration 11). Again, this juxtaposition indicates the chivalrous nature of this knight. However, in contrast to the Muslim knight, this gentleman has not yet killed his prey. Moreover, the bee is actually positioned above the heads of his horse and the lion, and it is possible that the lion's regal reputation means this knight will not be quite as successful as his Muslim counterpart opposite him on this ceiling. The lion's symbolism is a topic that will be revisited later in this paper, but it does seem likely in this particular instance that the lion may simultaneously represent strength,

⁴² Strickland, *Medieval Bestiaries*, 54.

⁴³ Barber, trans., *Bestiary: An English Version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford Ms Bodley 764*, 178-179. Not until 1609 did Charles Butler first publish the discovery that the drones were male and the queen female; see Charles Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie, or a Treatise Concerning Bees, and the Due Ordering of Them* (1609).

⁴⁴ For example, see Barber, trans., *Bestiary: An English Version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford Ms Bodley 764*, 177-179; White, trans., *The Book of Beasts* 153-155; Baldwin, *Brunetto Latini's Tesoro: Study and Edition*, 24-25.

⁴⁵ Strickland, *Medieval Bestiaries*, 55. See also Mary Baine Campbell, "Busy Bees: Utopia, Dystopia, and the Very Small," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 36 (2006), 619-642.

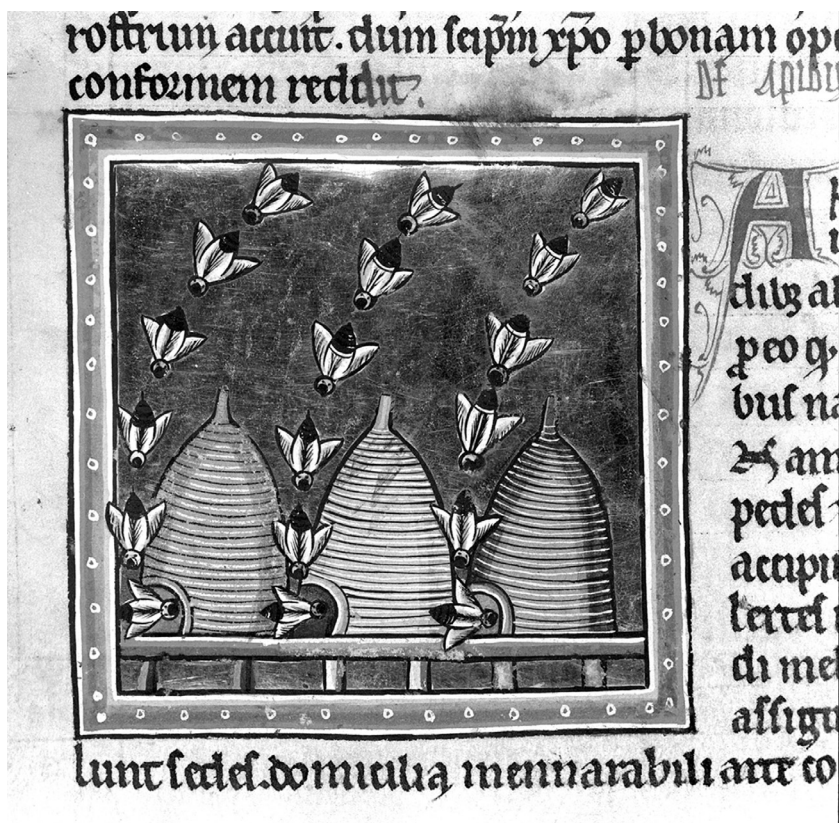


Figure 3. Bee, MS Ashmole 1511, fol. 75v (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford), England, c. 1200. Reprinted with permission.

as a formidable opponent for the Christian knight, and the weakness of the knight (an association which might be suggested by texts such as those mentioned earlier in which a lion king is duped), which would appear to augur an unsuccessful result for this knight's battle with the lion.

Bees and their dwellings were often compared to the order and restraint of life in the monastery, for "work is common to all, food is in common, and labor and the habit and enjoyment of flight are all in common."⁴⁶ Also associated with virginity, bees were understood as having no sex at all,

⁴⁶ White, trans., *The Book of Beasts*, 154.

and were therefore completely unencumbered by carnal desires or other illicit thoughts that inhibit a chaste life.⁴⁷ The interpretation of bees as models for the ideal human devotional life, in which the hive is considered the Church and Christ as the leader, was also put forth by Thomas of Cantimpré in his thirteenth-century treatise, *Bonum universale de apibus* ("the universal good of bees").⁴⁸ The bee's connection to virginity and obedience seems to explain why the third bee appears above and to the right of the Lady receiving the boar, high in the sky between a tree and the rooftop of the octagonal building behind the smaller fountain (Illustration 6).⁴⁹

This bee is not perfectly aligned with any specific character, but is located between hierarchically different scenes. Near the lady, this bee also hovers above the young lad in the lower left archway, above whom the arms of the Order of the Band are displayed. The Order of the Band (*La Orden de la Banda*) was a chivalric society founded by Alfonso XI of Castile, to which it has frequently been argued that both Pedro I, the King of Castile, and Muhammad V belonged, and the coat-of-arms appear several times in the ceilings.⁵⁰ Muhammad V maintained an advantageous relationship with Pedro I of Castile, which followed several generations of an alliance originally forged by Nasrid Sultan Muhammad II and the Castilian King Alfonso X.⁵¹ The inclusion of the coat-of-arms in this scene seems to suggest that the lady and the young man are connected through just such a noble alliance, which is reinforced by the presence of the bee in this vicinity of the painting.

Although not emphasized in most bestiaries, another connotation was sometimes suggested by bees in an English context, where the bee had been associated, since Anglo-Saxon times, with the Virgin Mary.⁵² The Virgin's unsullied pregnancy and delivery can be easily linked to the sexual purity of bees, and her piety aligns with the bees' roles as models of the pious life in

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Thomas de Cantimpré and Henri Platelle, *Les Exemples du "Livre Des Abeilles": Une Vision Médiévale* (Paris: Brepols, 1997).

⁴⁹ We might even read this building as a gatehouse, in which case it may be meant to indicate a protected threshold, and another reference to the Lady's virginity.

⁵⁰ See Ana Echevarria's contribution to this issue.

⁵¹ Rachel Arié, *L'Espagne musulmane au temps des Nasrides (1232-1492)* (Paris: É. de Boccard, 1973), and Rachel Arié, *El reino Nasrí de Granada, 1232-1492* (Madrid: Editorial MAPFRE, 1992).

⁵² Strickland, *Medieval Bestiaries*, 57.

contemporary *exempla* such as that of Thomas de Cantimpré.⁵³ Indeed, the bee in this scene also tilts to the right, and thus points toward the Lady in the scene opposite this one as well, where she kneels at the fountain. The bee's position between these two images of the Lady links the two episodes in which she appears, reinforcing the association of the bee and the Lady, but also emphasizing a relationship between these two episodes. In one, she displays proper courtly behavior in accepting the boar; in the other, she is shown involved in a clandestine meeting at the fountain. Although it might initially appear contradictory, I propose that this juxtaposition suggests the moment or process of her enlightenment, by indicating a transition from improper behavior to perfect courtliness. Collectively, these connections seem to reinforce suggestions that the Lady is especially virtuous and devoted.

The northern "hunting" ceiling is also home to monkeys, animals with a unique status that positions them as apt allegories of human behavior.⁵⁴ High in the treetops above the lady and the turbaned man who presents her with a boar, two monkeys appear to imitate this human interaction with a similar act of exchange. The two monkeys face one another, mimicking the symmetrical relationship between the two figures below, the tree itself maintaining the central axis for both couples. Although difficult to make out, the monkey to the right appears to present the fruit of the tree to the other, creating a simian reversal of the scene taking place underneath the tree.

Monkeys and other apes had a variety of associations for medieval viewers, including the idea, taken originally from Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, that the term "simian" refers to the beast's "similitude of human reason."⁵⁵ Bestiaries also assumed a similarity between these animals and humans, suggesting that apes were drawn by their very nature to

⁵³ In a forthcoming essay, Robinson sees the figure of the Lady as "defending" the lion against the Wildman, who appears as a symbol of a knight's baser instincts; as a result, she functions as an allegory of all that is good, the "sum total of courtly virtues," very much in keeping with the similar virtue associated with the Christ's virginal mother; see Cynthia Robinson, "Marginal Ornament: Poetics, Mimesis and Devotion in the Palace of the Lions," *Muqarnas* (forthcoming).

⁵⁴ See White, trans., *The Book of Beasts*, 34-35; Barber, trans., *Bestiary: An English Version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford Ms Bodley 764*, 48-49; Mermier, trans., *A Medieval Book of Beasts: Pierre de Beauvais' Bestiary*, 123-125.

⁵⁵ Beer, *Beasts of Love*, 36.

imitate humans. For instance, a version of Pierre de Beauvais' text explains how the monkey's enjoyment of mimicking people may be used to snare or entrap it: by tying and untying one's shoes in front of the monkey and then leaving behind untied shoes, the monkey would immediately put on and attempt to tie the shoes, trapping itself in the process.⁵⁶ Monkeys also appear frequently in medieval manuscript margins, cavorting recklessly and generally fostering havoc. Sometimes they are associated with evil or the devil, and in many cases, they highlight the shortcomings of human nature.⁵⁷ For instance, monkeys appear in the margins of a Missal in order to mock a scribe: chewing on their quills and baring their bottoms, they remind readers of the flawed nature of even the most noble of human activities (Figure 4). Monkeys and apes, then, are particularly appropriate animals to use when allegorizing the behavior of humans.

The monkey's relationship to humans is also evident in several of the fables included in *Calila e Dimna*, the collection of animal stories translated from Arabic into Castilian in the thirteenth century previously discussed. Framed in a broader narrative that deploys these stories as *exempla* or "mirrors for princes," these fables are explicitly linked not only to the human realm, but also to the specific realms of king and Sultan. For instance, "The Monkey and Tortoise" tells the story of two friends who destroy their friendship due to hasty decision-making and unconsidered consequences. A deposed, aged king of the monkeys made friends with a tortoise, whom he has met after settling in a fig tree near a pond and dropping figs, one of the tortoise's favorite delicacies, on the ground. The tortoise's wife, however, feels neglected, thinking that he spends too much time with his monkey friend. She concocts a plan to convince the tortoise to get rid of the monkey: she writes a letter to her husband informing him that she is ill, and the only remedy for her illness is the heart of a monkey. The tortoise decides to bring the monkey to an island and wait for him to die of starvation and thirst, but when the monkey becomes suspicious, the tortoise confesses his plan. The monkey cleverly suggests that he left his heart back at the pond, and they should go back to retrieve it, for he does

⁵⁶ Mermier, trans., *A Medieval Book of Beasts: Pierre de Beauvais' Bestiary*, 124. This reference is in the longer version of Pierre's text. See also Beer, *Beasts of Love*, 34.

⁵⁷ The association with evil and the devil is mentioned in many bestiaries. See White, trans., *The Book of Beasts*, 34-35. This is also suggested in Guillaume le Clerc's *Bestiaire*; see Strickland, *Medieval Bestiaries*, 162.

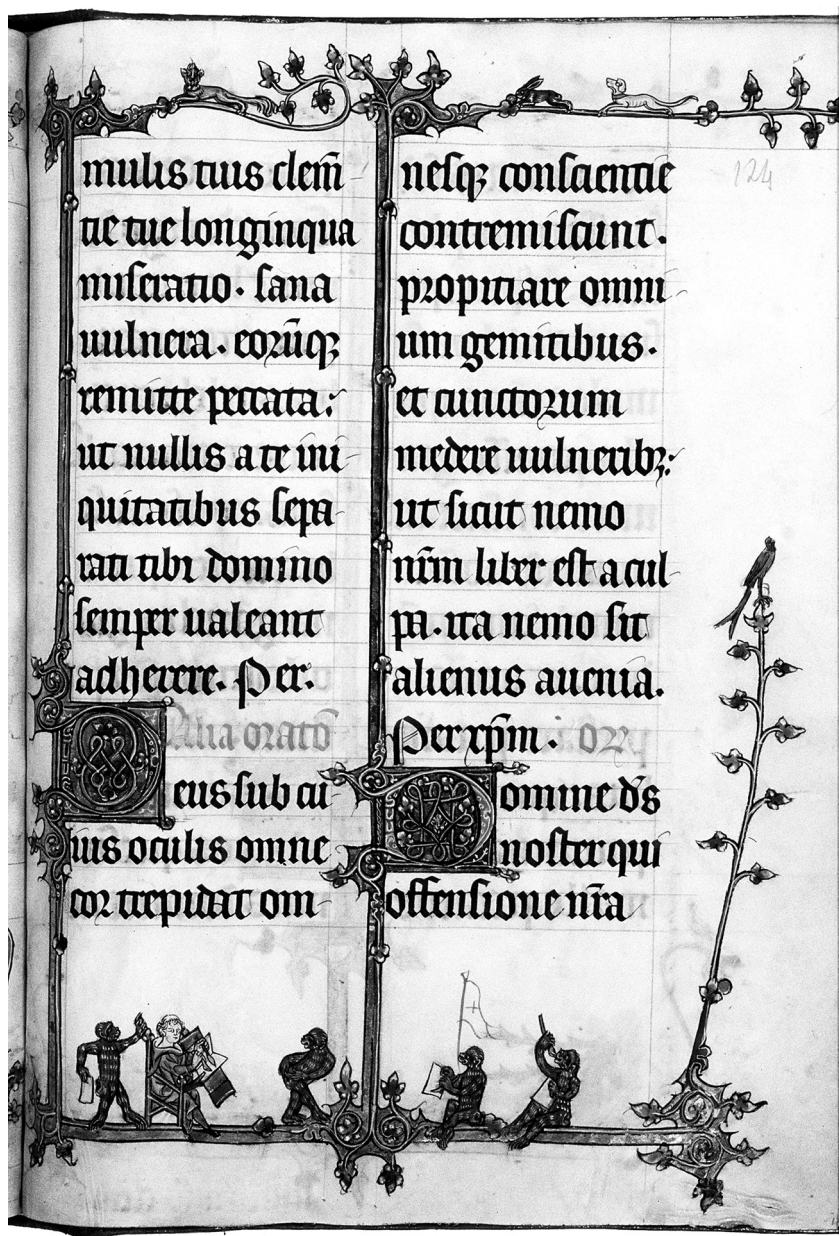


Figure 4. Monkeys in the Margins, Missal, Illustration by Petrus de Raimbeaucourt, MS D.40, fol. 124r (Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, Netherlands), 1323. Reprinted with permission.

not need it in order to survive and the tortoise is therefore welcome to it. Upon returning to the pond, the monkey climbs up in the tree and publicly accuses his friend of dishonesty, after which the tortoise is very apologetic. Although the monkey wishes his friend peace, they part, and the tortoise returns home humiliated and saddened by the loss of his friend.⁵⁸ This story asserts that wealth (symbolized by friendship), while fairly easy to acquire, is difficult to manage or keep; the moral is that a ruler must value and protect his possessions, or they may slip away.

There are strong visual affinities between the monkeys in the hunting ceiling of the Hall of Justice and the depictions of this fable in manuscripts of the *Calila e Dimna*. Illustrated versions, such as the fourteenth-century Mamluk manuscript now in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, depict several scenes from this story, including two images of the monkey perched in the branches of the fig tree near the pond (Figure 5). Except for their similar stylization, the trees in the manuscript images and the tree on the "Hall of Justice" ceiling have few features in common, but it seems likely that both are meant to represent fig trees. It is possible that the fables from this collection, well known throughout the Arabic-speaking world for centuries and recently introduced to a wider Iberian public, may have played a role in the ceilings' conception.⁵⁹ The monkeys in the tree, then, can be understood as offering further commentary on the scene below, where the turbaned knight presents a boar to the Lady. The boar is not necessarily a possession that the knight is unwisely relinquishing to the woman; on the contrary, the gift of the boar is like the gift of the fig, used to cultivate a friendship, an alliance, a love affair, or even the benevolence of a holy figure.⁶⁰ Once again, the valuable entity in this exchange is not the object given (the boar), but the relationship that is fostered with it.

⁵⁸ Atil, *Kalila wa Dimna*, 46-49. See also Cacho Bleuca and Lacarra, *Calila e Dimna*, 253-262.

⁵⁹ Although none of the surviving illuminated manuscripts of this narrative were made in Iberia, several date from the period of the Nasrid Sultanate (the thirteenth through the fifteenth century), and it is difficult not to see stylistic affinities between these manuscripts and the *Hadith Bayad wa Riyad*, an illustrated courtly romance that was likely produced in Iberia in the thirteenth century, and which also contains animals in the margins; See Robinson, *Medieval Andalusian Courtly Culture*.

⁶⁰ Robinson has begun to conjecture about the possibility of the Lady's connection to the Christian Virgin, a figure successfully involved in conversions, in part through her accessibility; for instance, she cites Ibn 'Arabi's description of the divine beloved as a "female Guardian of a Woodland Sanctuary." See Robinson, "Marginal Ornament"



Figure 5. Scene of the monkey in the tree, *Kalila wa Dimna*, MS Pococke 400, fol. 114v (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford), 1354. Reprinted with permission.

The monkeys appear in the tree just to the left of the smaller-scale scene of the castle beside a fountain; directly opposite, to the left of the “tryst” fountain, is found another figure in a tree. This figure has been identified,

(forthcoming). This Lady could also reflect Lady Intelligence, the allegorical figure in the form of a woman on a horse who is met by the three wise men in Llull’s *Llibre del gentil*; see Hames, “Conversion via Ecstatic Experience,” 184.

both by Dodds and, more recently by Robinson, as the dwarf Frocin, who fills in here for King Mark, who is usually depicted hovering in a tree above the lovers Tristán and Isolda.⁶¹ The visual parallel between Frocin and the monkeys seems to link two scenes, also connected by the bee that floats above the Lady and, at the same time, points across the ceiling to towards the tryst scene. Just as the two depictions of the Lady seem both to suggest and link different perspectives on her character, perhaps the two occupied trees are meant to comment similarly on the challenges inherent to the creation of alliances. While the monkeys seem to reflect the successful fostering of a relationship, the tryst scene may indicate the risks also involved when forging alliances, especially in secret.

Although the connections implied by the *Calila e Dimna* offer up a fairly positive connotation of the monkey—the aged monkey is giving and friendly, but he is also no fool—the more common associations suggested by monkeys involve foolishness and gullibility. Returning to the story of the monkey trapped by human footwear, Richard of Fournival writes that he is trapped by his love like the monkey with shoes on, while the Woman's Response attached to his text argues specifically that she will not be like the monkey, i.e. not susceptible to the trap that Richard or any other man might set for her, implying that a trapped woman is one that is overly curious and naïve.⁶² The woman on the ceiling does not seem especially foolish or naïve; indeed, just the opposite would appear to be the case. It is thus perhaps noteworthy that the monkeys in the tree wear no shoes. Instead, the inverted events in the tree, in which the gift-giving goes in the opposite direction of the exchange below, appear to indicate reciprocity and to suggest that the relationship between the turbaned knight and the Lady is a convivial one. Moreover, both a bee and a magpie are found in close proximity to the monkeys in the tree: the magpie flutters just behind and to the right of the monkey, while, on the other side of the tree, a bee hovers above the turbaned man. The symbolic resonances of the bee (chivalry, obedience, virginity) and magpie (pursuit), conflated with those of monkeys (both intelligence and foolish curiosity), bring forth a confusing amalgam of meanings; these nevertheless come together to inform the relationship

⁶¹ Jerrilynn D. Dodds, "The Paintings in the Sala de Justicia of the Alhambra," 192-194; Robinson, "Arthur in the Alhambra."

⁶² Fournival, *Master Richard's Bestiary of Love and Response* 7, 52. See also Beer, *Beasts of Love*, 34, 125.

based on chivalrous exchange whose referents may include both romantic pursuit and political alliance.

Over the turbaned man and the bee above him, another bird contributes to the complexities of this zone in the northern painting. A sizable white bird, with a long neck, a narrow beak, and partially opened wings, seems to be in a state of transition, preparing either to soar beyond the treetops upon clearing the foliage, or to alight on one of branches of the aforementioned tree, joining the monkeys and the other birds that perch there. This white bird is difficult to identify, but based upon comparisons with several bestiary images and descriptions, the representation seems to most resemble a Caladrius (Figure 6). The Caladrius was thought to have the ability to determine whether a person was going to live or die, for "when sickness is mortal, as soon as the Caladrius sees the patient he turns his back to him, and then everybody knows that the fellow is doomed."⁶³ If, however, death is not imminent, the Caladrius sits and faces the patient. Bestiaries explain that the Caladrius was often kept in the halls of kings, presumably because of its talents for prognostication, and the bird's presence above the turbaned knight might thus indicate the knight's royal status. In addition, the bird's complete whiteness conjured associations with Christ, alluding to virtue, honesty, and a general lack of sinfulness. In addition to its ability to predict an individual's death, the Caladrius was credited with taking on a person's illness and dispersing it through the act of taking flight. Such miraculous healing suggests another link to the virtues represented by Christ.⁶⁴

This bird's identity as a Caladrius seems further supported by its open wings, a detail which would also imply that the figure above which it hovers has need of its curative properties. The figure positioned most directly beneath the bird is the turbaned man; all other signs, however, point to this figure as one of utmost honor and robustness rather than suffering from disease. Richard of Fournival's interpretation of the Caladrius may aid us in making sense of these apparent contradictions, for in his version of the bestiary, his lady is like the Caladrius, her evasiveness and averted gaze exacerbating his love-sickness.⁶⁵ This may be what ails the

⁶³ White, trans., *The Book of Beasts*, 115. See also Mermier, trans., *A Medieval Book of Beasts: Pierre de Beauvais' Bestiary*, 27-30; Baldwin, *Brunetto Latini's Tesoro: Study and Edition*, 26.

⁶⁴ White, trans., *The Book of Beasts*, 116. See also Beer, *Beasts of Love*, 43.

⁶⁵ Beer, *Beasts of Love*, 43.

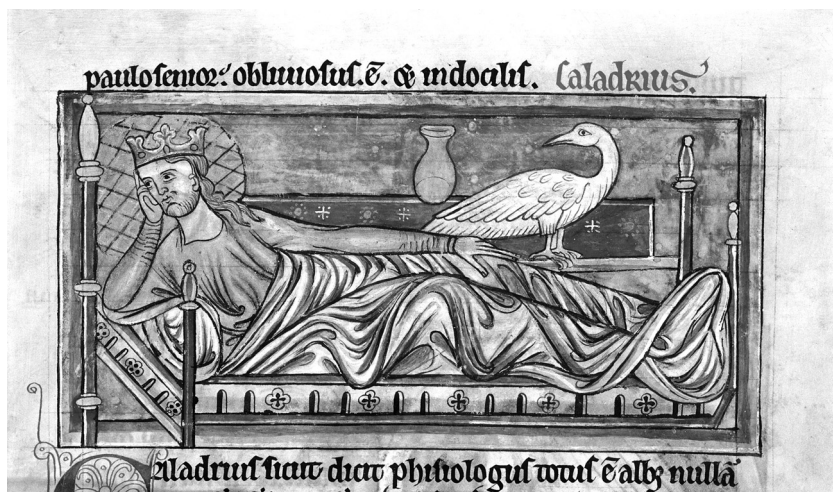


Figure 6. Caladrius, Harley MS 4751, fol. 40r, 1230-1240. © British Library Board. All rights reserved (Harley MS 4751).

turbaned knight, in which case the Caladrius' flight would signal the moment of reciprocity demonstrated by the lady's direct and willing gaze.

The congregation of several of these creatures in and around the tree reminds us that the plant life is also an important component of the paintings' layout and meaning. But, in contrast with many of the depicted animals, this flora is often more difficult to identify. In the northern (hunting) ceiling, the monkeys reside in a fig tree, and in the southern (chivalric) ceiling, a tree with pinecones shades the game of chess (Illustrations 9 and 14). Many other trees are differentiated by a variety of leaf shapes and distribution, but rarely do these attributes contribute to a clear identification. Nevertheless, these trees and other plants fulfill a number of formal functions: they serve as spatial dividers between many of the scenes, filling what would otherwise be large empty spaces in the center of the ceilings, and offer resting places to many birds and even the occasional monkey. If we recall that the narrative scenes themselves are not clearly delineated by frames, borders or other dividing features, the formal function of the trees appears even more significant. Furthermore, all of this lush plant life aids the viewer in situating the events unfolding on the ceiling within a "natural" environment, one which may be meant to suggest either a garden, the constructed landscape of a royal hunting park, an expanse of untamed

forest, or even all three. These associations will most certainly come into play as we consider the actual space in which these paintings reside, that of the Alhambra itself.

Framing the Forest within the Alhambra

Now that some of the activities taking place in the “margins” of the ceilings have been established and their implications for the figures in the primary scenes briefly discussed, we shall consider what, if any, relationship those background settings have to the physical spaces that surround them, namely the architectural contexts of the Alhambra in general, and the “Palace of the Lions” in particular. This exercise is a particularly important one to carry out, because the paintings have, with the exception of the essays in this collection, been treated almost exclusively as separate entities, rather than as a constitutive part of the building. My goal in this section will be to demonstrate that the resonances we have thus far identified in the margins of these paintings, which serve in particular to highlight the relationships depicted, are not contradicted by the paintings’ larger context. On the contrary, the readings I have put forth suggest that the ceilings are well integrated within the Alhambra’s larger program of signification.

The so-called “Lions” complex is somewhat enigmatic in part because it remains unclear just how its buildings and spaces functioned. The “Palace of the Lions” consists of a large rectangular court at the center of which is a fountain and around whose perimeter are placed relatively small, probably at least semi-private architectural units. Thus, as many scholars have noted, the “Lions” complex is unique among the larger spaces that compose the Alhambra complex. An examination of its plan reveals a structure that involves many smaller, intricate spaces, with walls, corners, and openings strategically placed to create unexpected and internalized relationships between its components.⁶⁶ Oleg Grabar has pointed out that, in contrast to the so-called “Court of the Myrtles,” the “Lions” complex seems more private or restricted, in part because its construction indicates that most of its spatial units were meant to be seen from the center of these spaces, rather than from the outside of the palace looking in, or through an elaborate façade.⁶⁷ Specific compositional elements, such as the slender

⁶⁶ Grabar, *The Alhambra*, 182–184.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 166, 84, 208.

columns, elaborate *muqarnas*, dense and intricate surface ornament, manipulation of light, and privileged view-points, produce an effect which is remarkably open and airy, and which makes many of these spaces seem larger than they actually are.⁶⁸ In the arches just beyond the patio, for example, within the so-called “Hall of the Kings” itself, the seemingly infinite division of parts into smaller elements dissolves the masses of walls, ceilings and other surfaces and creates mesh-like membranes between mutually penetrable spaces. Combined with the often-noted interiority of the “Lions” complex, the strategies used here create a series of spaces full of illusions, meant to surprise and even confuse inhabitants, apparently requiring that visitors engage in further contemplation or study in order to fully understand that “things are not quite what they seem to be.”⁶⁹

As discussed in several of this volume’s essays, the recent work of Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza has provided a promising theory regarding the function of exactly these spaces, one which has eluded many earlier students of this enigmatic structure.⁷⁰ The most important element of Ruiz’s argument for my study is his suggestion that the “Palace of the Lions” was constructed as a royal *madrassa*, most specifically a school for Sufi learning. If true, Ruiz’s interpretation would be particularly significant because it encourages associations with Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, in relation to numerous of the building’s salient elements and distinctive features. Moreover, it has been convincingly argued, on the one hand, that Sufism was inextricably intertwined with Grenadine court culture and, on the other, that certain of its tenets parallel Christian concepts of chivalry.⁷¹ Such

⁶⁸ Ibid., 184.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 185.

⁷⁰ Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza, “El Palacio de los Leones de la Alhambra: ¿*Madrassa*, *Zawiya* y Tumba de Muhammad V? Estudio Para Un Debate,” *Al-Qantara* 22 (2001), 77-120.

⁷¹ Robinson, “Marginal Ornament” (forthcoming). Important sources cited by Robinson on Sufism in al-Andalus include Ramon Llull, *Libro de la Orden de Caballería: Nota preliminar y traducción de Luis Alberto de Cuenca* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2000); Luis Alberto de Cuenca, *Floresta española de varia caballería: Raimundo Lulio, Alfonso X, Don Juan Manuel* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1975); José Miguel Puerta Vilchez, *Historia del pensamiento estético árabe: al-Andalus y la estética árabe clásica* (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 1997); idem, “La cultura y la creación artística,” in *Historia del Reino de Granada* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2002); Maribel Fierro, “Opposition to Sufism in al-Andalus,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, ed. Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999); eadem, “The Ansâris, Nasr al-Dîn and the Nasrids in al-Andalus,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 31 (2006), 232-249.

associations suggest a highly-charged significance for each of the elements of the ornamental program of the “Lions” complex, and for the paintings in particular.

Much of the scholarship concerned with the Alhambra has characterized its decorative motifs, including inscriptions, plant motifs and geometric forms (some of which may be argued to possess celestial associations), as lacking much, if any meaning.⁷² The painted ceilings under discussion here have often been treated similarly, being considered too different and disconnected from the traditional iconography of Islamic art and architecture to be relevant. And yet, the animals in the ceiling paintings, the rich significances of which I have attempted to demonstrate, suggest even more provocative associations when considered in relation to certain tenets of Sufism. For instance, the beaver’s behavior may not only reference the celibacy of a Christian monk or the nobility of a warrior; it also resonates with the specific intellectual ideals of Sufism, in which thought and enlightenment are attained by moving beyond, if not directly denying, one’s earthly shell. The bees also serve to extend the metaphors of good citizenship, civilized rule, rationality, and diligence. By taking the time to contemplate and uncover the mysteries of the universe, the work of an Islamic mystic is quite adequately represented by the almost monastic nature of the bee’s obedience.

Among the ceilings’ animals, the most explicit connection to Sufism may be that suggested by the flight of the Caladrius, given that it is similar in many respects to the bird imagery that often appears in Sufi treatises on spiritual experience. Sufi author Ruzbihan Baqli (d. 1209) employed a wide range of metaphors concerned with birds and flight to express different aspects of mystical experience.⁷³ For instance, his work suggests that before a spirit can soar, it must first take flight by “opening,” a concept that seems literally depicted by the Caladrius as it hovers directly above

⁷² For example, Grabar describes them as “very impoverished and limited” Grabar, *The Alhambra*, 191. Gonzalez suggests that the stylized vegetation is simply another kind of pattern used in the Alhambra, which “carries no value of sense as such;” see Valérie Gonzalez, *Beauty and Islam: Aesthetics in Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Institute of Ismaili Studies (London & New York: I.B. Tauris; in the United States of America and in Canada distributed by St. Martins Press, 2001), 76.

⁷³ C. W. Ernst, “The Symbolism of Birds and Flight in the Writings of Ruzbihan Baqli,” in *The Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London and New York: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1992).

figure of the Muslim knight (Illustration 9). Of course, the Caladrius is not the only bird depicted in the ceilings, and indeed Ruzibhan speaks of several birds that are also common in medieval representations, some of which may appear in the Alhambra paintings as well: nightingales, hoop-ees, peacocks, and crows, to name a few.⁷⁴ Therefore, despite being visually suppressed as part of the background of these paintings, these beasts serve to encapsulate several concepts central to the “Lions” complex: the assertions of victorious and honorable leadership expressed in many of the building’s inscriptions,⁷⁵ the ideals that connect Christian and Nasrid forms of chivalry, and references to the methods of attaining enlightenment that are so essential to Sufism.

I have already proposed that the plants represented in the ceiling paintings are not inconsequential, for not only do they help establish the setting in which the events occur, but they also serve numerous formal functions. Similarly, the vegetal motifs sculpted in stucco that decorate the “Lions” complex do much more than simply represent paradisiacal beauty. These plant motifs surely reference the numerous gardens associated with the “Palace of the Lions”: the actual gardens that would have been present and visible from locations such as the “Mirador de Lindaraja” in the so-called “Hall of the Two Sisters,” the metaphorical gardens that appear in the corpus of poetic inscriptions that adorn numerous surfaces, and finally, the garden-like environment depicted on the ceiling paintings in the so-called “Hall of Justice.” According to the medieval sources recently investigated by José Miguel Puerta Vilchez, it is clear that the “Palace of the Lions” was known as al-Riyād al-Sa`id (Garden of Delights), indicating the centrality of garden both as concept and as actual component for this part of the Alhambra.⁷⁶ In fact, several of the same plants appear in both of these visual realms. The plant life of the ceilings finds echoes in certain elements

⁷⁴ Ibid., 358-359. Ruzibhan Baqli’s work, of course, is an example that is thirteenth century and Persian, but my use of this source highlights the very little, to date, that we know about the religious life of the Nasrid kingdom. Robinson discusses this issue more extensively; see Robinson, “Marginal Ornament” (forthcoming).

⁷⁵ José Miguel Puerta Vilchez, *Los Códigos de Utopía de la Alhambra de Granada* (Granada: Diputación Provincial de Granada, 1990).

⁷⁶ See José Miguel Puerta Vilchez, “El vocabulario estético de los poemas de la Alhambra,” in *Pensar la Alhambra*, ed. J. A. González Alcantud and A. Malpica Cuello (Granada: Diputación Provincial de Granada, 2001), 8, n. 12, as well as Robinson, “Marginal Ornament” (forthcoming).

used in the stucco decoration, derived from pinecones or leafy, oak-like trees. The ornament itself can even be perceived as mimicking a forest, the courtyard's columns creating a spatial experience that resonates throughout all of these facets of the building.⁷⁷

The forest had important connotations in many of the cultural traditions of medieval Europe. For example, it serves as an important place of retreat in Ramon Llull's writing, especially *The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men* (*Llibre del gentil e dels tres savis*), which is evocative of the interiority and seclusion of the "Lions" complex, as well as the ideals of both Christian and Muslim mysticism.⁷⁸ At the same time, however, the forests of medieval chivalric romances tended to be places that were *outside* the civic world and its laws. The term "forest" (and its various cognates in European languages: *foresta*, *forêt*, *forst*) was derived from the Latin *foresta*, which appears first in Merovingian times and seems to be derived from the Latin term *foris* ("outside") or the Latin verb *forestare* ("to keep out, to place off limits, to exclude").⁷⁹ Developed as a term that was used in forest law, referring to land that was protected by royal decree, forests were outside normal jurisdiction while also sometimes physically located outside the walls of a traditional royal garden.⁸⁰ The hunting scenes in the ceiling paintings certainly evoke a royal hunting park, off limits to normal citizens and filled with protected animals. Therefore, the paintings' backgrounds, on the edges of the central courtly dramas, literally visualize the cultural "outsideness" of the forest while also suggesting the status of the Nasrid court. Although many historians indicate that the Nasrid court was deeply intertwined with the broader culture and politics of Iberia, a unique character has been attributed to the "frontier" zone of Castile/Granada borderlands.⁸¹ It is thus possible to see the paintings' forests as idealized

⁷⁷ I thank Andrei Pop for sharing with me an unpublished paper, in which he makes this observation.

⁷⁸ Ramon Llull, *Llibre del gentil e dels tres savis*, trans. Anthony Bonner (Palma: Patronat Ramon Llull, 2001). See also Hames, "Conversion via Ecstatic Experience."

⁷⁹ Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 69.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ For example, see José Enrique López de Coca Castañer, "Institutions of the Castilian-Grenadine Frontier: 1369-1482," and Angus MacKay, "Religion, Culture, and Ideology on the Late Medieval Castilian-Granadan Frontier," both in *Medieval Frontier Societies*, ed. Robert Bartlett and Angus MacKay (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1989), 127-150, 217-243.

representations of Granada as a zone “protected” from the conflicts of wider Iberia, projecting a courtly ideal rather than the likely reality.

The protected nature of the forest and its animals is reinforced by the inclusion of the rabbit or hare in the paintings. Several appear partially hidden in the grass in scenes on the “hunting” ceiling, and at least one is included in the “chivalry” ceiling as well (Illustrations 10-12, 15). Rabbits and hares most often appear in scenes of hunting, are often shown chased by dogs, and were traditionally seen as protected under forest law. They were rarely added to European bestiaries before the thirteenth century, in part because within that tradition they were usually not moralized, but were seen instead to simply represent food and clothing.⁸² In contrast, the rabbit/hare was associated in Islamic contexts with good luck and survival, as well as protection, as demonstrated in the narratives of both *Calila e Dimna* and *Varqa and Gulshah*. In Chapter Three of *Calila e Dimna*, “The Lion and the Ox,” the story is told of a clever hare who outwits a lion that is intent on eating the hare for lunch. The hare fools the lion into believing that his own reflection is another lion intent on his destruction, which ultimately leads to the lion’s drowning.⁸³ The demise of the lion, an animal traditionally associated with royal power, and the good luck of the rabbit, remind us of the conflicts and contradictions inherent in the ceiling paintings, where many of the figures negotiate an ambiguous position between triumph and defeat.⁸⁴ Although elsewhere in the Alhambra the lion appears as a clear symbol of power, the presence in the ceiling paintings of rabbits in several different scenes may allude to the precarious relationships Muhammad V maintained with his Iberian allies beyond his protected realm.

In Llull’s *Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*, the forest functions as much more than the setting for his story, in which a Gentile, depressed and searching for knowledge about God, follows a path into a forest, where he encounters three wise men: a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim. After hearing of the Gentile’s suffering and confusion, they take pity upon him, and enter into a cordial debate in order to help him choose the

⁸² See n. 41.

⁸³ Atil, *Kalila wa Dimna*, 18-22. Cacho Bleuca and Lacarra, *Calila e Dimna*, 146-149. And, as Robinson points out in her reading of the ceiling, the Lady (as Isolda) also outwits Palomades in a similar way: Robinson, “Arthur in the Alhambra.”

⁸⁴ In his animal narrative *The Book of the Beasts* (*Llibre de les bèsties*), Ramon Llull also depicts the lion king as an unsuccessful ruler; see Peers, trans., *The Book of the Beasts*.

best religion.⁸⁵ The forest here is presented not only as a place of retreat, where the Gentile goes to find solitude for contemplating his concerns about God, but also as a place where representatives of these three religions, central to life in medieval Iberia, convene for polite, civil dialogue.⁸⁶ As stated above, the medieval forest was conceptualized as a place outside regular society and its laws and traditions; in Llull's text, the Gentile leaves his habitual surroundings for the forest to gain greater understanding.⁸⁷ This distance and the seclusion it brings are essential to achieving this knowledge, for the forest becomes a place where day-to-day concerns are suspended and other avenues of thought can be pursued. Beyond these general notions of the forest as a place, however, Llull's forest possesses qualities that clearly link it to the forests in the Alhambra. Beautiful, fruit-bearing trees are described as essential sustenance, allowing the Gentile to settle into his time in the forest without concern for food (the plentiful springs and pools of water, likewise, prevent his thirst). The tree in Llull's text is aesthetically pleasing and provides food, but the flowers, leaves and branches of trees also serve as a metaphor used by the wise men to prove the existence of God.⁸⁸ The Gentile finds the forest's flora and fauna pleasing as well, for the birds sing beautifully and the flowers smell sweet, and the various beasts, including deer, gazelles, and rabbits, are "pleasing to the eye" as they lounge beneath the trees.⁸⁹ Not only do the forests depicted in the ceiling paintings share many of the specific qualities, plants and animals of the forest described by Llull; they also seem to resonate with Llull's characterization of the forest as a place of retreat and contemplation.

When the surfaces and spaces of the Palace of the Lions are considered in conjunction with the ceiling paintings, it is evident that the visual strategies and spatial effects they display are interconnected. The uniform and ubiquitous stucco ornament present in the Alhambra reflects composi-

⁸⁵ As summarized in Hames, "Conversion via Ecstatic Experience." See also Ramon Llull, "The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men (Abridged)," in *Doctor Illuminatus: A Ramon Llull Reader*, ed. Anthony Bonner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); and Llull, *Llibre del gentil*.

⁸⁶ Llull, "The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men (Abridged)," 79-80; See also Llull, *Llibre del gentil*.

⁸⁷ Hames, "Conversion via Ecstatic Experience," 188.

⁸⁸ See plates VIII-XII in Llull, "The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men (Abridged)."

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

tional decisions that stress every part of the whole as equally important, suggesting cosmic importance in the smallest of elements—a concept that has been linked with Islamic mysticism, and which I propose also speaks directly to the formal characteristics of the paintings.⁹⁰ Numerous motifs, combined in complex and dense compositions, require time and effort to unpack, and these aspects of the Alhambra's decoration foster a contemplative experience of the space that resonates with the contemplative forest of Lull. Such intricacies are clearly evident in the ceiling paintings as well, which almost force contemplation—or, at the very least, sustained examination—through their multivalent and enigmatic narrative references, the complex relationships between scenes, characters and the background, and the multiple associations they are meant to simultaneously conjure.⁹¹ Furthermore, the seclusion and interiority that characterize the spaces of the “Palace of the Lions” are also echoed in the paintings: their circular formats collapse the numerous, unfolding stories, connecting them to one another in unexpected ways and denying the viewer a clear beginning or end, thus obliging her or him to remain “inside.”

This circularity aligns the paintings with the other ceilings of the Palace of the Lions, all of which evoke the celestial realm, although in decidedly different ways. Along with the many associations that circles (and ovals) may bring to the ceilings,⁹² the effect of this circularity works differently from the non-representational ceilings elsewhere in the Alhambra. In the painted ceilings, the surfaces remain the primary mode through which identifiable images are presented; at the same time, the organization of

⁹⁰ Grabar, *The Alhambra*, 197.

⁹¹ This technique of using overlapping or interwoven images or patterns to induce contemplation is reminiscent of abundant use of interlace decoration by Irish, British, and Scandinavian cultures throughout the Middle Ages; for example, see Mildred Budny, “Deciphering the Art of Interlace,” in *From Ireland Coming: Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and Its European Context*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton, NJ: Index of Christian Art and Department of Art and Archaeology, in association with Princeton University Press, 2001), 197-98.

⁹² These include what Robinson explains as the significance of the Aljafería's octagonal space: “it is within this completed octagon that full, true enlightenment is given;” Cynthia Robinson, *In Praise of Song: The Making of Courtly Culture in al-Andalus and Provence, 1005-1134 A.D.* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2002), 393, or Camille's explanation of the connotations imbedded in the gift of the chaplet, “the circular sign of the sexual,” in Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (New York: Abrams, 1998), 56.

these images suppresses narrative clarity in exchange for a cyclical, flowing trajectory. Such complex organization seems to provoke precisely the sort of associative experience of viewing that appears to be pervasive throughout this building.

Stars are included in a center band in all three of the painted ceilings, formally orienting the spaces. Another connection is thus created with the overall decorative program in the Alhambra, for celestial motifs are prevalent in other ceilings, as well as on a number of walls throughout the structure. Such visual associations suggest to a viewer probably already disposed to think in such terms connections between garden and celestial motifs.⁹³ The spiritual realm that is simultaneously a garden is articulated in the poetic inscriptions contained within the Lions complex itself. Extending through the "Hall of the Two Sisters" is an inscription in which the building itself states, "I am a garden."⁹⁴ Moreover, certain animals that appear in the paintings also have associations with the heavens or the garden, expanding the relationships evident between the ceilings and their context. For example, in addition to bringing good luck, elsewhere in the Islamic world rabbits sometimes appear depicted within stars.⁹⁵ This conflation, though it does not appear in the Alhambra, might well have been made by viewers who had seen it in other contexts, and it might have suggested to them a broader understanding of prosperity and all-encompassing good fortune for the Sultanate emitted from both the earthly and heavenly realms. Sufi authors also associated birds with the paradisiac garden of the Koran, in which scriptural understanding is described as a long flight. The "celestial habitat of the soul-bird" is not only in heavenly paradise, but may also be found as it takes up roost in a metaphoric rose bush or Tuba tree.⁹⁶ As Robinson has pointed out, the "Tree of Love" was also a prominent image in the works of Iberian authors, such as court poet Ibn al-Khatib, a practicing Sufi and member of the court of Muhammad V.⁹⁷

⁹³ Elsewhere, Robinson considers these connections more extensively than I do here: see Robinson, "Marginal Ornament."

⁹⁴ Gonzalez, *Beauty and Islam*, 80-82, which includes a translation of the poem by Ibn Zamrak quoted in the inscription. See also Robinson, "Marginal Ornament" (forthcoming).

⁹⁵ Daneshvari, *Animal Symbolism*, 26.

⁹⁶ Ernst, "The Symbolism of Birds and Flight," 360.

⁹⁷ Robinson, "Marginal Ornament" (forthcoming). See also Cynthia Robinson, "Trees

The mystical resonances in the paintings and their contextualization in the Palace of the Lions are further supported by returning to the forest of Ramon Llull. Harvey Hames has argued that in *The Book of the Gentile*, Llull's forest represents a place where a "mystical approach to God and ecstatic experience" unfolds.⁹⁸ Such reflections of mystic ideas remind us that Llull was greatly influenced by Sufism, perhaps most strongly in his work *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved* (*Llibre d'amic e amat*).⁹⁹ A text that describes the mystical experience of love, it resonates not only with the Islamic mystical tradition, but also with treatises on love prevalent throughout medieval Europe, of which Richard of Fournival's text is but one example. Not surprisingly, Llull brings together several intellectual traditions in his works, and in *The Book of the Gentile*, this is manifested in the conflation of ecstatic experiences of love or knowledge through seclusion and contemplation within a space conducive to such thought. Llull's forest is literally a "physical depiction of where the ecstatic experience happens."¹⁰⁰ The forested spaces of the ceilings, functioning in tandem with the spaces of the Alhambra, indicate exactly this, especially if we accept Ruiz' proposal and agree to understand the Lions complex as a *madrasa* (or, at the very least, as a place in which knowledge was sought and contemplation encouraged), an architectural space filled with opportunities for seclusion, such as those offered by the small alcoves that hold the paintings themselves.

The forests of the paintings, as well as the forest-like space of the Lions complex itself, seem to represent places conducive to religious contemplation of the kind that may have occurred in the Palace of the Lions itself. And these forests, as spaces for seclusion and distance from the distractions of daily life, may also serve as a metaphor for the Nasrid court itself. The worldly Muhammad V was savvy in negotiating his relationship with Castilian kings to the north, as well as rulers in North Africa to the south, and the ceilings of the Hall of Justice express this strategic negotiation by integrating associations that had been deliberately culled from the visual repertoires of several cultures, all of which would have been known

of Love, Trees of Knowledge: Toward the Definition of a Cross-Confessional Current in Late Medieval Iberian Spirituality," *Medieval Encounters* 12, no. 3 (2006), 388-435.

⁹⁸ Hames, "Conversion via Ecstatic Experience," 185.

⁹⁹ Ibid.: 186. See also Llull, "The Book of the Lover and the Beloved," Introduction, 180-81.

¹⁰⁰ Hames, "Conversion via Ecstatic Experience," 192.

to most Iberian elites. They appear to offer something of an oasis, where intellectuals of various religious and cultural affiliations would have been encouraged to engage in study, contemplation and dialogue—perhaps even concerning the resonances suggested by the imagery found on the ceilings above them.