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Enlightenment and extra-European cultures

## A centuries-long enslavement? Gender and Islam in the Hispanic Enlightenment: an exploratory approach\*

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**Abstract.** This article explores the role of gender in the construction of images of Islam in the Hispanic Enlightenment. Although Spanish Arabism has been largely neglected in international historiography, research has proved that Spanish erudites since the 16th century had an important role in the study of the Arabic language and sources; also, interest in the Islamic world was popularized via fictional works and coverage in newspapers and journals. Spain is a distinctive and particularly interesting case within European Orientalism because Islam was part of its history and cultural legacy and a close neighbour in the north of Africa, but also because orientalization of the country by European travellers and philosophers – not yet as intense as during Romanticism – had already started, notably in relation to gender. If the Enlightenment developed a less aggressive, more open – although not devoid of stereotypes – vision of Islam, is the same true in the Hispanic world? To what extent was the tendency to bracket together the Hispanic and the Islamic either accepted or challenged by Spanish and creole intellectuals? Did the country's own Islamic past help create more nuanced visions of the «Orient» or did it instead lead to highlighting the contrasts in order to claim a place for Spain in European modernity? This article will address in an exploratory way these questions, seldom considered from the point of view of gender, through an analysis of learned works and reformist essays.

**Keywords.** Gender, Islam, Orientalism, Arabic studies, Enlightenment.

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### INTRODUCTION

In his widely reprinted and translated essay *Defensa de las mujeres* (1726), a firm defence of the moral and intellectual equality of the sexes, the enlightened Spanish writer Benito Jerónimo Feijoo strongly attacked the misogyny rooted in the European intellectual tradition, beginning with Aristotle. He did so by comparing the injustice of those who «speak of the [female] sex as a common sewer of vice» with the «delirium» of Islam, which denied women entry to heaven:

*Mahomet, the false prophet, has excluded women from that chimerical paradise, which his debauched imagination has planted for his followers, and makes all their*

*felicity to consist in beholding, from without, the men wallowing in magnificence and luxury within. Married women, to be sure, must account it no small part of that blissful state of voluptuousness, to see their husbands in the arms of other women, whom that visionary has feigned to be formed anew for those gratifications. That such a chimera could ever gain credit in a great part of the world, is one of the most palpable tokens of man's weakness and depravity\*.*

It was a powerful rhetorical device: likening those Europeans reluctant to acknowledge gender equality to infidels, capable of such madness as believing that women would stand helplessly by as their husbands indulged in adulterous affairs with the *houris* promised by the Prophet to the chosen ones. Feijoo probably came across this idea in *Confutación o confusión de la secta Mahomética y del Alcorán*, published in 1515 by the mysterious Muslim convert 'Juan Andrés': a refutation based on Muslim sources, and one of the most important books published on the Islam in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, translated into Italian, German, French, Dutch, Latin and English<sup>2</sup>. More broadly, the notion that the Islamic paradise was brimming with sensual delights (delicious food and drink and willing virgins all on tap) was part of a long tradition of anti-Islamic Christian apologetics, and remained a matter of debate in 18th-century Arabist scholarship in the West<sup>3</sup>.

However, in the third edition of his work, having by this time consulted the Qur'an (in translation, as he could not read Arabic), Feijoo amended his original text to say that the holy book contained no such statement:

*What we said here about the unhappy delight that Muhammad promised his followers, can be read in some*

*authors, from whom we deduced that fact; but having afterwards examined with reflection the whole Qur'an, we do not find such a thing within its pages<sup>4</sup>.*

He does though continue to insist that there is no mention of women in its description of paradise and that they must therefore be excluded from entering that realm, an idea that Lady Wortley Montagu's *Letters from Turkey* (1763) refuted, as noted by Feijoo's anonymous English translator<sup>5</sup>. Two things in particular interest me about Feijoo's partial retraction. The first is the idea that an educator and essayist such as Feijoo himself, a man who habitually relied on secondhand testimony (including Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 1697, and Barthélemy d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale*, 1697), should go to the trouble of reading the Qur'an. The second is the fact that he recognizes his deductions have led him to exaggerate the degree to which the «Mohammedan» religion oppressed women.

The way in which this 'feminist' essay mentions the Qur'an for its own purposes serves as an introduction to two fundamental aspects of Enlightenment thinking as regards Islam. On the one hand, there was an interest in looking beyond the clichés about infidels found in Christian apologetics and learning more about Islamic culture. On the other, there was the continued belief that such disregard for women was further proof of the errors inherent in Islam, as upheld by many Christian scholars, or even of the despotism of Muslim nations, as argued by Montesquieu and other philosophers.

This article explores the role played by gender in the process of constructing images of Islam in the Hispanic Enlightenment. If, as noted by Jürgen Osterhammel, «the Enlightenment's discovery of Asia entailed a more open-minded, less patronizing approach to foreign cultures than suggested by those who see it as a mere incubation period of Orientalism», is the same true of Hispanic Orientalism, even if it were more a 'rediscovery' of something that had never really been forgotten?<sup>6</sup> Did it align with stereotypical European thinking about relationships between the sexes in Islamic territories, or was it more open to looking beyond the clichés? To what extent was the incipient tendency of many European

\* The research for this essay is part of the project CIRGEN: *Circulating Gender in the Global Enlightenment*, funded by the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (ERC Grant Agreement No 787015).

<sup>1</sup> B.J. Feijoo, *An essay on woman, or physiological and historical defence of the fair sex. Translated from the Spanish of El Teatro Critico*, W. Bingley, London n.d. [1768], pp. 5-8. This English translation adds emphasis: «weakness and depravity» for «delirio» in *Theatro critico universal o Discursos varios en todo género de materias, para desengaño de errores comunes* (1726-1740), Imprenta de Francisco del Hierro, Madrid 1729-1753, 1, pp. 331-332.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Mercedes García-Arenal for this information. On the text and its author (unconnected with the 18th-century Jesuit of the same name), see R. Szpiech, *Preaching Paul to the Moriscos: The Confusión o confutación de la secta mahomética y del Alcorán (1515) of "Juan Andrés"*, «La corónica: A Journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures», 41, 2012, 1, pp. 317-334. Also, J. Toland, *Faces of Muhammad: Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2019, pp. 91-95.

<sup>3</sup> A. Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Feijoo, *Theatro critico*, cit., 9, p. 17. Feijoo could have consulted any of the existing Latin translations, but most probably Du Ryer's French one (1647). On European translations of the Qur'an, see Z. Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an. The Politics of Translation and the Construction of Islam*, Oneworld Books, Oxford 2009; J. Loop, *Introduction: The Qur'an in Europe—the European Qur'an*, «Journal of Qur'anic Studies» 20, 2018, 3, pp. 1-20; and ERC Synergy Project The European Qur'an, <https://euqu.eu>.

<sup>5</sup> Feijoo, *An essay on woman*, cit.; see translator's footnote, pp. 5-7.

<sup>6</sup> Osterhammel, *Unfabling*, cit., p. x.

thinkers and travellers to bracket together the Hispanic and the Islamic (notably in relation to gender) either accepted or challenged by Spanish intellectuals? Did the country's own Islamic past enable such perceptions to be modulated in any way? Did it help create more nuanced visions of the 'oriental' or did it instead help underline the differences between Spain and the Orient? I will address these questions, not by attempting to deal exhaustively with an area whose ramifications are numerous and complex, but simply by indicating possible avenues of analysis.

#### OUT OF PARADISE. SPAIN AND EUROPEAN (GENDERED) ORIENTALISM

Although Spanish Arabic studies and, more generally, Orientalism have been largely neglected in international historiography, throughout the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries there was in Spain, as in the rest of Europe, substantial interest in the Islamic world, on two different levels<sup>7</sup>. Firstly, in the academic sphere, the study of oriental languages, primarily Arabic, began from the late 1500s onwards to move away from the practical functions required for evangelism or diplomacy and became more closely associated with historical research<sup>8</sup>. Secondly, in the population more generally, while interaction, coexistence and conflict between Christians and Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean region had already profoundly shaped medieval and early modern culture, a fascination with things 'oriental', usually equated with Islam<sup>9</sup>, continued to grow during the 18th century. Fuelled by the movement of people and goods linked to increased trade and diplomatic contacts, this

led to widespread consumption of factual and fictional writings (reports, press articles, travel literature, novels, short stories and plays). Rather than being mutually exclusive, the interests of scholars and ordinary people influenced one another, as is revealed by European ideas about gender and sexuality in the 'Orient'.

The Europe-wide curiosity about this matter also affected Spain, where it was heightened by specific economic and political circumstances: the peace treaties signed with the Ottoman Empire (1782) and Morocco (1767, 1780 and 1799) and the diplomatic missions that followed; the presence of Moroccan (1766, 1779-80 and 1791-92) and Ottoman (1787-88) ambassadors at the Spanish court, which left its mark on the country's literature and in some cases led to friendships, such as that between diplomat Ahmad ibn-al Mahdi al-Ghazzal (c.1726-1777) and naval officer, traveller and mathematician Jorge Juan<sup>10</sup>. The final decades of the century saw the publication of numerous works on oriental, notably Turkish, themes: articles in both Spanish and South American newspapers; descriptions of Turkey from two official expeditions (1784 and 1787)<sup>11</sup>. Two fictional pieces supposedly penned by Muslim travellers, inspired by Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721) but also by Moroccan and Ottoman visits, were José de Cadalso's *Cartas marruecas* (*Moroccan Letters*), which were written in the 1770s and posthumously published in 1789, and Juan Meléndez Valdés' *Cartas turcas* (*Turkish Letters*), of which only the first two letters between Ibrahim and Fatima were published in 1787 in two different newspapers, the *Correo de Madrid* and the *Diario de Madrid*, and the rest of the manuscript lost<sup>12</sup>. There were also a number of popular operas and plays, both comic and tragic, set in Turkey or Arabia, such as Luciano Comella's *El tirano de Ormuz* (1793), *La moscovita sensible* (1794) and *Los hijos de Nadasti* (1795).

Spain is a distinctive case in the European panorama for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, the Arabic

<sup>7</sup> Neither J. Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East. The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia* (2013), Engl. transl. by R. Savage, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2018, nor Bevilacqua, *The Republic*, cit., include any Spanish sources in their overviews. Among recent reappraisals of Spanish 18<sup>th</sup>-century Orientalism, see *El Islam y la modernidad: siglo XVIII*, ed. por J.A. González Alcantud, «Humanista» 43, 2019, pp. 1-59.

<sup>8</sup> F. Rodríguez Mediano, *Fragments de orientalismo español del siglo XVII*, «Hispania. Revista española de Historia», LXVI-222, 2006, pp. 243-276. M. García-Arenal and F. Rodríguez Mediano, *Un oriente español: los moriscos y el Sacromonte en tiempos de Contrarreforma*, Marcial Pons, Madrid 2010. (*The Orient in Spain: Converted Muslims, the Forged Lead Books of Granada, and the Rise of Orientalism*, Engl. transl. by C. López-Morillas, Brill, Leiden 2013.)

<sup>9</sup> «Moro», «mahometano», «sarraceno» (less frequently used than in previous centuries), «africano» (referring to Muslim North Africa), «Oriental», «asiático» (unusual) appear in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish sources in often imprecise and sometimes interchangeable ways; «árabe» usually refers to the Arabic language or the history of the Arabs. On the use of «Asia» or the «Orient» in European sources, see Osterhammel, *Unfabling*, cit., pp. 20-22.

<sup>10</sup> *The fruits of the struggle in diplomacy and war: Moroccan ambassador al-Ghazzal and his diplomatic retinue in eighteenth-century Andalusia*, Engl. transl. by A. al-Ruwaihan, ed. by T. Landry, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg 2017. N. Paradelá, *El otro laberinto español. Viajeros árabes a España entre el siglo XVII y 1936*, Siglo XXI, Madrid 2005.

<sup>11</sup> J. Moreno, *Viage á Constantinopla, en el año de 1784*, Imprenta Real, Madrid 1790. J. Solano Ortiz de Rozas, *Idea del Imperio Otomano*, Imprenta de Sancha, Madrid 1793. The 1803 journey of 'Ali Bey' (Domingo Badia) to Morocco, Arabia and Syria was published in Paris in 1814. *Diario curioso*, 10 December 1787, pp. 653-656; *Correo de Madrid*, 19 December 1787, pp. 622-624.

<sup>12</sup> Scholarship on Cadalso's *Cartas marruecas* is extensive. See critical edition, J. de Cadalso, *Cartas marruecas*, ed. M. Camarero, Castalia, Madrid 1984, and L. Ewald, *Del 'Hernán Cortés del género femenino': Imperial and Other Conquests in Cartas Marruecas*, «Bulletin of Spanish Studies» 92, 2015, 2, pp. 137-152. P. Deacon, *Las perdidias Cartas turcas de Meléndez Valdés*, «Bulletin hispanique» 83, 1981, 3-4, pp. 447-462.

language and Islam were part of its recent history and the North African states were its near neighbours. The last Islamic realm on the Peninsula, the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada, had been defeated in 1492 and the *moriscos* (descendants of Muslims who had converted to Christianity) had been expelled from Spain as late as 1609<sup>13</sup>. The Moorish past was a visible presence in the architecture of certain parts of the country, and a key element – albeit one so ingrained in daily usage as to go unnoticed – in its languages, material culture, and manners and customs, especially in the southern regions.

Secondly, while the orientalization of Spain in the European imagination was more a feature of Romanticism, and in the 18th century the nation was still regarded as a (fading) European power, the transnational circulation of 16th- and 17th-century Spanish literature, including novellas and ballads (*romances*) that drew on its Islamic past or featured Moorish characters, meant that various exotic elements were already associated with the country as seen through foreign eyes<sup>14</sup>. Descriptions of Spain by many French and British writers were influenced by that image and, later, by the categories of Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* (1751), which presented Southern Europe, especially Spain, as verging on oriental despotism (both politically and domestically)<sup>15</sup>. Voltaire, an armchair traveller with a particular interest in Islam, wrote in his *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756) that the «cardinal difference» between Europeans and Orientals was «the way we treat our womenfolk», and compared the alleged confinement of women in 16th- and 17th-century Spain to the gender segregation of societies lacking in civilization: «The women, who were almost as closely confined as those in Africa, comparing this slavery with the liberty enjoyed by those of their sex in France, became doubly miserable»<sup>16</sup>. Some visitors, even in the late 1700s, by which time mixed sociability was far more widespread in Spain, continued to point to its Islamic past as the reason for the earlier separation of the sexes. For Scotsman Alexander Jardine, army officer and British envoy in Spain, the Moors' «former Asiatic habits of a recluse and jealous way of living» explained «the taste and character of the Span-

iards, their neighbours and successors», which had only recently begun to give way to more sociable and civilized customs<sup>17</sup>. In 1809, Constantinople-based British merchant Thomas Thornton was still comparing female seclusion in the Ottoman Empire with women's alleged exclusion from male company in Spain<sup>18</sup>.

#### LEAVING THE ISLAMIC PAST BEHIND

On 9 September 1750, British writer Hester Chapone wrote about Feijoo's *Essay on woman* to her friend Elizabeth Carter, who had read it and promised to excerpt it for her: «I am a little surprised that a Spaniard should think so favourably of women. One would imagine, by their manner of treating them, that they had as mean an opinion of them as the Turks»<sup>19</sup>. Having never travelled to Spain or Turkey and with no knowledge of the language and culture of either, Chapone was simply parroting the cliché associating the status of women in Spain with that of their 'oriental', 'Turkish' or 'African' sisters.

References to Spain's Islamic legacy made by northern European travellers and writers were part of a growing academic and artistic interest in oriental cultures. They must also be seen, however, in the context of the intense international debate raging in the 18th century as to whether Spain had contributed in any significant way to modern European culture, a conversation inextricably bound up with that relating to its role as a conquering and civilizing power in the Americas. These discussions were in turn part of the broader process of re-establishing cultural and imperial hierarchies, with Britain and France locating themselves at the forefront of progress, while assigning a lower position to the once flourishing Italian territories and a Spain that had ruled supreme in the 16th and 17th centuries<sup>20</sup>. Spanish thinkers were divided between agreeing that Spain had yet to achieve modernity and challenging that viewpoint by claiming that the country had put its shameful Islamic past behind it. Both they and the European writers to whom they were responding saw the status of women as one of the most reliable indicators of societal progress, and held mixed sociability to be an essential requirement of civilization. And that, in Spain's case, meant

<sup>13</sup> Rodríguez Mediano, *Fragmentos*, cit.; García-Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano, *The Orient in Spain*, cit.

<sup>14</sup> M. Bolufer, *Orientalizing Southern Europe? Spain Through the Eyes of Foreign Travelers*, «The Eighteenth Century. Theory and Interpretation», 57, 2016, 4, pp. 451-467; B. Fuchs, *Exotic Nation: Maurophilia and the Construction of Early Modern Spain*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2011.

<sup>15</sup> R.M. Dainotto, *Europe (in Theory)*, Duke University Press, Durham-London 2007.

<sup>16</sup> *The works of M. de Voltaire*, transl. from the French. With notes, historical and critical. by T. Smollett, M.D., T. Francklin, M.A. and others, J. Newbery et al., London 1762, p. 215.

<sup>17</sup> A. Jardine, *Letters from Barbary, France, Spain, and Portugal*, T. Cadell, London 1788, vol. II, nr. XIX, pp. 185-186.

<sup>18</sup> W. Thornton, *The Present State of Turkey*, J. Mawman, London 1809, vol. 2, p. 191.

<sup>19</sup> *The Posthumous Works of Mrs Chapone*, John Murray, London 1807, vol. I, letter VII, pp. 36-40; pp. 38-39.

<sup>20</sup> *Southern European Passions. Nation, Gender, and Modernity (18th-19th centuries)* ed. by Xavier Andreu and Mónica Bolufer, Brill, Leiden 2022.

striving to let go of any lingering Islamic baggage.

In fact, in evoking the Orient, Spanish writers were not confronting a vague and distant Other, but taking stock of their nation's past and their own stance towards it, a position they shared – to some extent – with their fellow intellectuals in Italy and Portugal, particularly those living in the southernmost regions. In an unpublished piece about Lisbon written for the *Encyclopédie* in 1781, José Francisco Correia da Serra argued that after the 1755 earthquake his compatriots had «in part left behind the somewhat Moorish way of life of [their] ancestors» and adopted polite sociability<sup>21</sup>. The Spanish journal *El Corresponsal del Censor* (1786-1787), rejecting segregation between the sexes as unbecoming a modern, civilized society, proudly declared: «We Spaniards are no longer living as did our ancestors, nor as the Moors do even now»<sup>22</sup>. Interestingly, this sentence rejects the image of a Spain anchored in the past, in the days of its global hegemony in the 16th and 17th centuries. It also, however, discredits the analogy established by philosophers such as Voltaire and Montesquieu between Spain (past and present) and the Orient, both of which were depicted, for rhetorical purposes, as averse to change, modernity and progress.

That same desire to leave the past behind can be seen in *La Pensadora Gaditana* (1763-1764), an essay journal written by a female literary persona, 'Beatriz Cienfuegos', whose true identity is still discussed by scholars<sup>23</sup>. Essay IV criticizes the use of the *tapado* or cloak used by women to cover their face leaving just one eye visible. This custom, still very much alive in the 18th century in some parts of Andalucía and, in particular, among the Creole women of Peru, was said to conceal identity, and therefore strongly condemned for encouraging social mobility and female sexual liberation<sup>24</sup>. Western travellers said much the same of the Islamic veil, which was thought to facilitate adulterous relationships by enabling women to leave the harem unrecognized<sup>25</sup>. The image of the veiled woman had been widely disseminated since the Renaissance via illustrations in costume books (*Trachtenbücher*) which, rather than establishing a rigid duality between Europe and its Others, forged complex forms of identification, inclusion and exclusion by, for example, portraying the veil as worn in

different Mediterranean territories – eg. by *moriscas*, by Spanish and Venetian Christian maidens- within a variety of female head coverings across Europe, Catholic as well as Protestant<sup>26</sup>.

*La Pensadora* laments the survival of this custom in peninsular Spain, attributing it to the centuries of Islamic presence:

*The tapado is a shameful relic of the centuries-long enslavement we suffered under the tyranny of the Saracens. Only oriental women, imitated by all those in Africa, who share their religion and customs, do not allow themselves to be seen in the streets, and it is from them that our Andalusian women retain this practice*<sup>27</sup>.

In her view, this Muslim custom is a visible symbol of the extreme oppression of women that would even see them barred from paradise:

*Mohammedan women are the most unfortunate in all the world: they are trusted with nothing, expect nothing, are granted no powers, since the brutality of their Sect even denies them the feigned glory for which they hope; they are thought incapable of anything good; for this reason they are shut away, kept in hiding, obliged to conceal themselves from the sight of men, and made to live in the world as if they did not make up the finest part of society*<sup>28</sup>.

The essay contrasts the enslavement of Muslim women with the freedom enjoyed by women in contemporary Spain, «one of the most cultivated parts of Europe, where the rationality of its inhabitants gives us the place for which nature destined us»<sup>29</sup>. It reiterates the clichés of the «seclusion» and «enslavement» of Muslim women and of the exclusive nature of the Qur'anic paradise, ideas that had been regurgitated by numerous travellers, journalists, philosophers and essayists. Yet its insistence on classifying Spain among «the most cultivated parts of Europe» reveals that Spanish intellectuals had to argue particularly hard if they were to demonstrate that their country had thrown off the shackles of its own Islamic past.

<sup>21</sup> C. Petit, *Notice inédite sur Lisbonne en 1781*, «Bulletin des Études Portugaises et Brésiliennes», XXXV and XXXVI, 1974, pp. 93-120.

<sup>22</sup> *El Corresponsal del Censor*, IV, 47, pp. 787-802: p. 800.

<sup>23</sup> C. Canterla, *Beatriz Manrique de Lara Alberro, Marquesa de García del Postigo, autora de «La Pensadora Gaditana» bajo el pseudónimo de Beatriz Cienfuegos*, «Cuadernos de Ilustración y romanticismo» 24, 2018, pp. 741-755.

<sup>24</sup> *Mercurio peruano*, I, 12, 10 February 1791, pp. 111-114.

<sup>25</sup> Solano, *Idea del Imperio otomano*, cit., p. 85.

<sup>26</sup> G. Calvi, *Mode, modi, mondi. Per un'antropologia delle identità di genere in Europa (XVI secolo)*, «Genesis: rivista della Società Italiana delle Storiche» IV-1, 2005, pp. 99-124; M. Birriel, *Clasificando el mundo. Los libros de trajes en la Europa del siglo XVI*, in *Cultura material y vida cotidiana moderna: escenarios*, ed. por Máximo García Fernández, Sílex, Madrid 2013, pp. 261-278; S. Burghartz, *Covered Women? Veiling in Early Modern Europe* (transl. by J. Caplan), «History Workshop Journal» 80, 2015, <https://doi:10.1093/hwj/dbv028>. I thank Margarita Birriel for clarifying this issue to me.

<sup>27</sup> *La Pensadora Gaditana*, vol. I, essay IV, ed. by S. Dale, Juan de la Cuesta, Newark (DE) 2005, pp. 24-25.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

Some travellers to Muslim countries did qualify the kind of timeworn sweeping statements – about oriental sensuality (the most frequent interpretation of polygamy) and about the «confinement» of women and the association of the practice with «slavery» – which suggested that these non-universal customs were in fact common across the social spectrum. Many noted that polygamy, although allowed by the Qur'an, was in fact practised only by rulers and a small elite<sup>30</sup>. Others argued that status and class should be taken into account, pointing out that lower-class women were not confined and even elite women enjoyed more freedom of movement than Europeans usually assumed, thus querying whether they were «slaves» at all<sup>31</sup>. Spanish naval officer José Moreno, writing about his diplomatic mission to Constantinople in 1784, declared that most European portrayals of the status of Turkish women were inaccurate and hastily drawn: «So many misconceptions are formed about their customs and constrictions, that speaking of them with any certainty means treading a path between thorns and weeds»<sup>32</sup>. Already in 1718, Lady Montagu, the first western female traveller to be admitted into a Turkish harem, had claimed that male travellers distorted Turkish reality and had instead presented the harem as a lively domestic space where women socialized together and enjoyed some authority and independence<sup>33</sup>.

However, these more perceptive or empathetic accounts remained in the minority. What held a powerful grip on the European imagination were the fantasies of imprisoned women and sexual slavery that, as Osterhammel notes, «at once appalled and titillated» male writers and readers; in other words, the image of the harem as a male paradise where a host of sensual women were available to satisfy a man's erotic needs<sup>34</sup>. Even Moreno, despite his protests, endorses widespread ideas about the «domestic servitude» of women in «voluptuous and rich» nations such as Turkey<sup>35</sup>.

Clichéd views on the sexual intemperance of Orientals were also mobilized in the context of the philosophical and scientific debate on the New World that pitted the intellectuals of Europe against their counterparts in the Americas during the 18th century. Some Creole writers resorted to them in order to point up the

contrasting self-restraint of which the indigenous population was capable, and to defend the New World and the morality of its inhabitants against any criticism levelled by the Spanish metropolis and Europe as a whole. Thus, in October 1791 the *Mercurio peruano* compared the relative sexual and marital continence of the «savages» of the Pampa de Sacramento with the customs of the «Turks, Parthians and other nations of the Orient», representing harems graphically and contemptuously as henhouses in which the man is «a cockerel surrounded by innumerable hens», and concluded: «the man with no religion is capable of greater excesses»<sup>36</sup>.

#### ERUDITE KNOWLEDGE AND THE LONG SHADOW OF COMMONPLACES

In a different sphere, that of erudite knowledge, the rich tradition of Arabic study and translation in medieval Spain, where Muslims and Christians had coexisted for centuries, if not always peacefully, did not end with the Castilian conquest of Granada in 1492. As recent research has revealed, in the 1500s and 1600s a small minority of scholars closely associated with European Orientalism participated in – and contributed to – key debates on chronology and historical method that were at the root of the critical history emerging at that time in Spain, as in the rest of Europe<sup>37</sup>. Arabic studies experienced a renewed impulse in the 1700s, in the shape of monarchy-supported projects such as the cataloguing of oriental manuscripts and the publication of dictionaries, grammars and translations<sup>38</sup>. The Palace of El Escorial boasted one of the best Oriental libraries in Europe, comprising Moroccan sultan Zidan Abu Maali's entire manuscript collection of over 1800 documents, captured by a Spanish ship in 1611. These were studied and catalogued by Michel Garcieh Al Ghaziri, known as Miguel Casiri (1710-91), a Lebanese Christian scholar and former professor in Rome, in his splendid two-volume *Bibliotheca Arabico-Hispana Escorialensis* (1760 and 1770). Casiri was admitted to the Royal Academy of History, worked as royal librarian and interpreter of oriental languages, and taught Arabic to several Spanish intellectuals and politicians. His most distinguished pupil was the powerful president of the Council of Castile Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes (1723-1802). With Casiri's

<sup>30</sup> Moreno, *Viage*, cit., pp. 85-86. On discussions about polygamy, see Osterhammel, *Unfabling*, cit., pp. 460-468.

<sup>31</sup> *Women and the City, Women in the City: A Gendered Perspective on Ottoman Urban History*, ed. by N. Maksudya, Berghahn Books, New York-Oxford 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Moreno, *Viage*, cit., p. 65.

<sup>33</sup> Osterhammel, *Unfabling*, cit., pp. 450-456.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 455.

<sup>35</sup> Moreno, *Viage*, cit., part II, ch. II and III.

<sup>36</sup> *Mercurio peruano*, 3, 2 October 1791, pp. 73-80, and 6 October, pp. 81-90: p. 79.

<sup>37</sup> García-Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano, *Un oriente español*, cit.; Rodríguez Mediano, *Fragmentos*, cit.; Bevilacqua, *The Republic*, cit.

<sup>38</sup> P. Fernández, *Arabismo español: origen de una quimera*, Instituto Español del Mundo Árabe-Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, Madrid 1991.

help, Campomanes translated Arabic inscriptions and chapters of a treatise on agriculture by Ibn al-Abwan; he was patron to the finest Arabists in Spain and wrote a preface on the utility of Arabic for Francisco Cañes's Spanish-Latin-Arabic dictionary (1775)<sup>39</sup>.

Campomanes was never a full-time scholar – he was a statesman involved in regalist politics (he promoted the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767) and the improvement of agriculture and manufacturing. For him, learning Arabic had a practical purpose: if Spain's past were to be understood, crucial medieval sources had to be unearthed, translated and studied. His interest was therefore part of both his intellectual commitment as president of the Royal Academy of History and his political priorities but did not prevent him from thinking in the usual stereotypical terms about 'oriental idleness' and, more specifically, the confinement of women. In his *Discurso sobre la educación popular de los artesanos y su fomento* (1775), looking at ways to educate the urban working class so as to stimulate manufacturing and recruit female labour for industrial production, Campomanes elaborates on the north-south axis that reflected the Islamic occupation of an earlier age:

*The further south one travels in Spain, the more indolent the women become, and this in truth does not improve our customs.*

*The Moors and Orientals kept them shut away in idleness [...]. Now the women are no longer locked up, nor should they be lest harm be done to the rightful liberty which is theirs, when they do not renounce it.*

*For erroneous reasons of religion, the Mohammedans adapt their customs with respect to women; hence their seclusion, indolence and superstition<sup>40</sup>.*

He contrasts the industriousness of women in northern Spain (Galicia, his native Asturias, Santander and the Basque Provinces), never conquered by the Moors, with the alleged female inactivity – a term fraught with moral disapproval – found in those regions where the Islamic occupation, according to him, had interrupted a more sober and dynamic Christian and Germanic tradition: «Spanish women of the past, until the eighth century of the Christian era, were all occupied in life, and their current passivity is a vice inherited from the Arabs»<sup>41</sup>. In remarkably derogatory lan-

guage, he argues that this legacy, present in the southernmost territories from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, has set Spanish customs apart from «the general habits of other European nations, which have not been penetrated by Asian and African scum», customs he likens to those of Spain's North African neighbours («In Barbary the women live in idleness, surrounded by slavegirls»<sup>42</sup>).

The 'Moors' and 'Orientals' could not be exorcized as a radically alien 'Other', insofar as they were part of the country's past. As Fernando Rodríguez Mediano explains, rather than being rejected, part of the peninsula's Arab history was actively integrated into the process of writing the history of Spain, which allowed the presence of Al-Andalus in modern Spanish culture to be interpreted not «in terms of inclusion or exclusion», but as «a relatively fluid field of meaning», and not exclusively or fundamentally as a reviled otherness<sup>43</sup>.

However, not every element of that past unearthed by Arabists or immortalized in literature and folklore was equally easily integrated. The erudite Orientalism of the 17th and 18th centuries emphasized the oriental heritage that linked the sacred history of Spain to biblical and Jewish history, in that it made it possible to demonstrate the antiquity of Christianity on the peninsula, thus supporting the regalist claims of Spanish governments against the Papacy<sup>44</sup>. Likewise, reformist politicians and intellectuals such as Campomanes valued Arab contributions to agrarian techniques or bemoaned the negative demographic and economic consequences of the expulsion of the Moors. By contrast, the attempts of scholars to discover and understand Arab sources seem not to have produced interpretations of gender relations in Al-Andalus that imparted any nuance to the clichés about oriental indolence and sensuality and the confinement and enslavement of women (there are exceptions to this rule, such as the work of Juan Andrés, discussed below). These powerful images were used as the negative side of social and economic reform proposals, with Spain's Islamic past being seen as a barrier to be overcome if the country was to make progress alongside «the other European nations», particularly those which had overtaken it in terms of mercantile and imperial competition.

In this regard, the example of another intellectual with an interest in Spanish history and the historiographical problems posed by the Islamic calendar is significant. Luis José Velázquez de Velasco, Marqués

<sup>39</sup> F. Rodríguez Mediano, *Cómo aprendió árabe Campomanes: sobre el aprendizaje de lenguas orientales en la Ilustración española*, «Al-Qantara», XLI, 2020, 2, pp. 545-574 <<https://doi.org/10.3989/alqantara.2020.01>>

<sup>40</sup> P. Rodríguez, conde de Campomanes, *Discurso sobre el fomento de la industria popular* (1774). *Discurso sobre la educación popular de los artesanos y su fomento* (1775), Gea, Oviedo 1991, pp. 263-264.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 264.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, author's footnote.

<sup>43</sup> F. Rodríguez Mediano, *Al-Andalus, ¿es España? El Oriente y la identidad española en la Edad Moderna*, «eHumanista» 37, 2017, pp. 232-248: 241.

<sup>44</sup> Rodríguez Mediano, *Fragments*, cit.

de Valdeflores (1722-1772), a leading figure in Madrid's literary world and member of the Academy of History, was commissioned by the Marqués de Ensenada, minister of Ferdinand VI, to write a comprehensive history of Spain. For this purpose he spent the years 1752-55 travelling, consulting archives, drawing up maps and transcribing inscriptions, mainly Latin, but also Greek and Arabic<sup>45</sup>. This led to the publication of his *Viaje de las antigüedades de España* (1765), covering Spanish history up to the Visigothic period, before the Arab Conquest. Velázquez also left a 30-volume *Colección de Documentos de la Historia de España hasta 1516*, and a *Cronología de los árabes en España*, among other historical writings. In 1764 he published anonymously the *Colección de diferentes escritos relativos al cortejo*, a set of short pieces poking fun at gallantry and, more specifically, at the accepted form of companionship between married women and male friends known in Spain as *cortejo* or *chichisveo* (in Italy, as *cicisbeo*)<sup>46</sup>. In his satire, Velázquez subverts the clichés about excessive or deviant Oriental sexuality in order to criticize European customs. The opening piece is signed by a fictitious Moroccan traveller in Spain who presents it as a travel narrative, in the vein of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721) and other similar works:

*The observations contained in this Writing are the fruit of the annual journey I make through the Land of our former enemies, and just part of the many things I see and note in its main inhabitants, through whose heads I travel incognito, as is the habit of all good philosophers*<sup>47</sup>.

Dated 18 Ramadan, Hijri 1177, the text claimed to have been translated into Spanish by «a pedant in Arabic», in an ironic nod to Arabist scholars. Its humorous dedication reads, «To the Most-Impotent Mohammed Ben Abdallah, ben Juzeph, Chief of the Black Eunuchs of the Seraglio of Fez». The fiction stops at the dedication, as the rest of the *Colección* does not follow the structure of a travel narrative. However, its initial framing as an Oriental fantasy (or rather, a European fantasy of the Orient) is particularly telling, as it implicitly equates the defective masculinity both of the tolerant husband and of the feminized *cortejo* with the castrated virility of eunuchs.

While both Campomanes and Velázquez had a genuine interest in the way Arab culture had influ-

enced the history of Spain, to the point that they collected and studied manuscript and epigraphic sources and even, in Campomanes' case, learned Arabic, both men resorted to using the stale commonplaces of oriental sensuality and indolence in their reformist or satirical texts. We have no way of knowing whether this was a deliberate strategy, aimed at striking a chord with the deeply rooted ideas of the readers they wanted to convince or amuse, or an unconscious expression of their own mindset which their studies, undertaken for different purposes, had neither contradicted nor tempered. Perhaps it was simply that these categories allowed them to make sense of cultural differences: to understand them, systematize them and, if necessary, try to neutralize them. Differences that were appreciable between the various regions of a profoundly diverse country, and also between Spain and other European nations, those towards which Spain's ruling elites were looking as they tried to improve their nation's position in the international arena and transform its economy and social customs. After all, as Homi Bhabha has written, «the stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive», which, rather than being «a false representation of a given reality [...] is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation»<sup>48</sup>.

#### GENDER AND THE «ARAB THEORY»

In 18th-century Spain there were other, if less common ways of representing relationships between the sexes in the Islamic world, seen among those who attributed a fundamental role to that culture during the dark years of the Middle Ages. Such ideas were primarily expressed in the context of scholarly debates on literary history but had wider implications for the manner in which the progress of civilization and Islam's place in it were depicted – Islam having taken up the torch after the fall of the Roman Empire and preserved the legacy of Ancient Greece, passing it on to the West. The debate about the origins of medieval European poetry in vernacular languages pitted those who believed it had emerged from the courts of Provence against those who saw it as rooted in the Arabic poetry of Europe's Islamic territories (Al-Andalus and, secondarily, Sicily). The latter position was upheld by, among others, French scholar Pierre Daniel Huet in 1670, and was systematically developed by Juan Andrés Morell (1740-1817), a Spanish Jesuit exiled to Italy after the 1767 expulsion from Spain

<sup>45</sup> L.J. Velázquez de Velasco, Marqués de Valdeflores, *Viaje de las antigüedades de España* (1752-1765), ed. de J. Maier Allende, Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid 2015.

<sup>46</sup> See M. Bolufer, *Gallantry and sociability in the South of Europe. Shifting relationships and representations*, in *Southern European Passions*, cit.

<sup>47</sup> L.J. Velázquez de Velasco, Marqués de Valdeflores, *Colección de diferentes escritos relativos al cortejo*, M. Martín, Madrid 1764, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, Abingdon 1994, pp. 70 and 75.



of the Society<sup>49</sup>. Andrés took the idea beyond the strictly intellectual argument and turned it into a sweeping critique of the hegemony of France as the centre and pinnacle of modern European culture<sup>50</sup>. His eight-volume *Dell'origine, progressi e stato attuale d'ogni letteratura* (1782-99), which ran into numerous editions in Italian, and in Spanish and French translation, is a brilliant example of Jesuit encyclopedism, designed to counter the influence of French encyclopedism and neoclassicism. It offered an alternative view of European culture past and present, one recognising the dominant contribution made by the Mediterranean South, which for Andrés had been underestimated and, in the case of Spain, was as incomprehensibly and unjustly neglected as was Arabic literature<sup>51</sup>.

Despite his vast erudition, Andrés had no interest in learning Arabic, though he supported his claims with data taken from the leading European and Spanish Arabists of the day (J.H. Hottinger, Edward Pococke, his friend Casiri, among others)<sup>52</sup>. What fascinated him was the process by which Classical Greek texts and technologies such as the compass and gunpowder, as well as valuable mathematical and astronomical knowledge and exquisite poetry, had been transmitted from Arabic to European culture. As noted by Roberto Dainotto and Niccolò Guasti, this did not lead to his adopting a non-Eurocentric position or valuing present-day Islamic civilization. If Andrés dignifies the literary, intellectual and scientific output of Al-Andalus, he does so to vindicate the role of Spain (and, secondarily, that of Italy) in European culture.

His is a «literary» history, that is, in the language of the age, a history of culture, thought and knowledge, not a philosophical history of customs such as that of the French encyclopedists or Scottish conjectural historians. However, Andrés is aware of the social logics that help explain intellectual production, including relation-

ships between the sexes. He therefore highlights the fact that Al-Andalus, an intellectually and socially sophisticated society, particularly valued poetry written by women: «And in the Arab domains there shone not only illustrious poets, but also excellent poetesses, who easily not only equalled but surpassed in number those who flourished in the Greek Parnassus»<sup>53</sup>. He also emphasizes that Provençal poetry, rooted in the Arabic tradition and fundamentally dealing with the theme of love, was a courtly social practice, proper to noble ladies and gentlemen rather than professional men of letters, and as such was part of the proprieties of the élite whose rules were institutionalized in the so-called «courts of love», poetry contests in which «the most noble personages and most distinguished ladies acted as judges»<sup>54</sup>. Andrés actively participated in the social and literary life of the noble and learned circles of Ferrara (1768-74) and Mantua (1774-96), cities in which he lived, and that of other places he visited (Rome, Parma). He was employed by and enjoyed the protection of the Marchese Giuseppe Ambrogio Bianchi and his wife Massimilla Bianchi Murari Bra, to whom he was escort or *cicisbeo*, and he maintained epistolary relations with other ladies and female intellectuals, such as Laura Bassi<sup>55</sup>. His experience and position therefore gave him an awareness of the implications of gender in culture, even if he granted them only secondary importance in his encyclopedic work.

The idea that mixed sociability and gallantry were prerequisites of an advanced level of civilization and proof of modern Europe's superiority over other societies both past and present was, by the late 18th century, not only a firm principle of programmatic texts such as Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs* or the works of Adam Ferguson, John Millar or William Alexander, but also, more broadly, a commonplace of Enlightenment thinking<sup>56</sup>. The usual argument was that the spirit of medieval chivalry had produced the refined sort of love that French historian Jean-Baptiste La Curne de Saint-Palaye (1697-1781) dubbed *amour courtois*, setting Europe above Classical Greece and Rome and also above other civilizations (such as those of Asia) which, despite their economic or

<sup>49</sup> C. Valcárcel, *Juan Andrés y la literatura española: la tesis árabe y la polémica sobre el Barroco*, in *Juan Andrés y la teoría comparatista*, coord. por P. Aullón de Haro, S. Navarro Pastor, J. García Gabaldón, Biblioteca Valenciana, Valencia 2002, pp. 245-266.

<sup>50</sup> I have used the modern Spanish edition: J. Andrés, *Origen, progresos y estado actual de toda la literatura*; trad. esp. de C. Andrés; ed. de J. García Gabaldón, S. Navarro Pastor y C. Valcárcel Rivera; dir. Pedro Aullón de Haro, Verbum, Madrid 1997-2002, 6 vols. On his vision of Southern Europe, see R.M. Dainotto, *The Discreet Charm of the Arabist Theory: Juan Andrés, Historicism, and the De-Centering of Montesquieu's Europe*, «European History Quarterly», 36, 2006, 1, pp. 7-29; p. 22.

<sup>51</sup> «Spanish literature, almost as little known to many as is that in Arabic» (Andrés, *Origen*, cit., I, p. 14).

<sup>52</sup> N. Guasti, *Between Arabic Letters, History and Enlightenment: The Emergence of Spanish Literary Nation in Juan Andrés*, «Diciottesimo Secolo» 6, 2021, pp. 149-159. On Arabic studies in Italy, see D. Siragusa, *Lo storico e il falsario. Rosario Gregorio e l'arabica impostura* (1782-1796), FrancoAngeli, Milano 2019.

<sup>53</sup> Andrés, *Origen*, cit., 1, pp. 116-117.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 54-55, 57.

<sup>55</sup> N. Guasti, *Juan Andrés e la cultura del Settecento*, Mimesis, Milano 2017, pp. 140-144; C.D. Fuentes Fos, *Ilustración, neoclasicismo y apología de España en la obra de Juan Andrés (1740-1817)*, Diputación de Alicante, Alicante 2017; E. Giménez López, *Juan Andrés. Un erudito en el exilio de Italia*, Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alicante, Alicante 2021, pp. 57-59, 97-100.

<sup>56</sup> S. Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2013. K. O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009.

cultural development, could not compete in this field<sup>57</sup>. However, some writers also recognized that Islamic culture (the Islam of medieval Europe rather than contemporary Islam) had left a valuable legacy in this field, perhaps harking back to a literary tradition which in late medieval and early modern Spain had admired the chivalry of Moorish knights as much as it had that of their Christian counterparts<sup>58</sup>. Antoine-Léonard Thomas's *Essai sur les mœurs, l'esprit et le caractère des femmes* (1772), hugely successful in France and across Europe (through its various translations), claimed that the Spanish court of the early 17th century had taught the French court, through its queen consorts, chivalrous manners shaped in part by the legacy of Al-Andalus: «a relic of the ancient and glorious gallantry of the Moors married to the graceful pomp and majesty of the Castilians»<sup>59</sup>. He presents the oriental sensuality of the past as a delicate art, instead of equating it with crude desire or excessive and 'deviant' passions, as so many works of fiction and travel narratives had done. Andrés too dealt with this cliché in defending Arabic culture against those scandalized by its erotic poetry. For him, the fact that such literature existed in Arabic was a way of demonstrating the moralizing work of the authorities in continually seeking to eradicate it, and the sexual decorum of Al-Andalus society generally, given that this poetry was shunned by the majority:

*Pederasty, so reviled among the Greeks, did not excite their poets' enthusiasm as much as it did that of the Arabs, among whom we do not know that it had many followers [...] The freedom and impurity of some Arabs in their love poems, while revealing their damaged and corrupted spirit, also show that the nation had modesty and honesty. There was no licentious poet whose verses enjoyed common approval and were not banned, however commendable their poetic graces might have been*<sup>60</sup>.

If the contribution made by the Arabs (and through them, by Spain) to European civilization was to be reassessed, therefore, it had to be shown that the oft reiterated idea that Orientals indulged in excessive sensuality in their heterosexual relations and were inclined towards the most reprehensible vices of sodomy and pederasty was false or, at least, ambiguous. For an intellectual such as Andrés, it meant having to prove that, in the idealised past of Al-Andalus, there was evidence of sexual restraint and refined amorous customs in Arab culture.

## SOME FINAL REMARKS

Historians and literary critics have elaborated on – and often overstated – the Orientalization of Spain in European thought and culture, its strongly gendered dimensions inspiring such powerful myths as the eponymous heroine of Merimée's *Carmen* (1845), a sensual and racially distinctive gypsy. Spain's own early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romantic Orientalism, overlooked by Edward Said, has recently come under the spotlight in the context of studies on the gendered political cultures of liberalism in a period of nation-building and imperial crisis. Far less research has been done into the gender aspects of Spanish Orientalism in the age of Enlightenment and Bourbon reformism, when the country was still a vast empire, but struggling in an international balance of power where it had lost its former hegemonic position, and in an intellectual landscape where its contributions to European culture were being questioned. The exploration undertaken here shows that, at its most erudite, 18th-century Spanish Orientalism did not often directly engage with issues of gender. Scholars learning Arabic in order to study manuscript and epigraphic sources, and writers and reformers drawing on that erudition, were primarily interested in writing the sacred history of Spain and/or in celebrating the technical, scientific and intellectual contributions of Al-Andalus as they asserted their country's position in modern Europe. A closer reading, however, reveals that gender implications do occasionally underlie scholarly enterprises with such patriotic agendas: the best example is Juan Andrés's encyclopedic project, in which hints of a socially embedded, gendered vision of culture make their way into what is, in essence, an intellectual history. More generally, when it comes to the proposals for economic, social and moral reform and regeneration forged by intellectual and government elites, what emerges as regards the gender models of Spain's Islamic past are the old stereotypes of indolence, sensuality and female confinement and enslavement, similar to those found in the rest of Europe in reference to a vaguely defined Orient. While sometimes latent, these clichés are at other times explicitly and emphatically invoked, in order to make it clear that they are in the past, and to affirm Spain's membership of a civilized Europe, characterized by complementarity between the sexes, restraint of the passions and mixed sociability.

It remains for future studies to explore in greater breadth and depth the place occupied by the representation of Islam (in the present or as part of a Spanish past) in the vast array of other genres consumed by different audiences in both peninsular Spain and colonial Spanish

<sup>57</sup> L. Passerini, *Storie d'amore e d'Europa*, L'ancora del Mediterraneo, Napoli 2008; Bolufer, *Gallantry and sociability*, cit.

<sup>58</sup> Fuchs, *Exotic Nation*, cit., pp. 33-45.

<sup>59</sup> A.-L. Thomas, *Historia o pintura del talento, carácter y costumbres de las mujeres en los diferentes siglos*, M. Escribano, Madrid 1773, pp. 173-174.

<sup>60</sup> Andrés, *Origen*, cit., I, p. 47.

America: essays on the status and education of women, travel narratives (real and fictitious), costume books, press articles, novels and plays. And, in the process, to focus on one particular aspect: the contrast so frequently drawn between the «enslavement» of oriental women and the freedom and reasonable treatment enjoyed by European women, looking also at the more occasional opposite arguments which – famously, in the case of Lady Montagu, less so in that of Josefa Amar – pointed out that Muslim women had little reason to envy Western women, since the latter were simply subject to a different form of oppression. Finally, all this material needs to be compared with the accounts of Turkish and Moroccan travellers in Spain, who also elaborated on women's condition, and whose presence piqued the curiosity and imagination of writers and ordinary people. Offering a view from the other side of the looking-glass, their writings will allow us to reflect on how the Western (and Spanish) imagination interacted with Islamic visions of Europe.