

Gendered Self-Expression and Muslim Medieval Women's Participation in the Creation and Production of Islam's Literary Heritage

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Abstract : Contrary to modern misconceptions, women in the Muslim Middle Ages enjoyed a generous degree of liberty both in the public and private sphere. Poetry was a significant component of public life throughout the Muslim Civilization as its vitality and multi-generic nature acted as a way for medieval Muslims to communicate with each other. As such, a continuity of poetic literary heritage was preserved through multiple centuries and dynasties. This paper will argue that Muslim women were active participants in medieval Muslim society's social and public sphere and therefore, can be seen as vital contributors to the intellectual and literary creation of the Muslim Civilization. This paper will examine poetry written by Safiyya al-Baghdadiya and Salma bint al-Qaratasi from the Abbasid period, as well as Wallada bint al-Mustakfi from the Andalusian period and focus particularly at the poetesses' modes of self-expression regarding beauty and sexuality to argue that Medieval Muslim women enjoyed creative and literary liberty thus allowing them to proclaim their subjectivity publicly through poetry. By emphasizing women's involvement in the social aspects of Medieval Muslim societies, this paper will ultimately urge for a more thorough investigation of Muslim women's role and function in the making of the Muslim Civilization.

Keywords : Arabo-Islamic society, medieval Muslims, Muslim poetesses, self-expression

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