CHAPTER 2

“MANY A ZAYD AND ‘AMR”: MEDIATION AND REPRESENTATION IN AL-ANDALUS

It was forbidden to a Muslim to take delight in hearing the melodious voice of a strange woman, because the first look would be made at you and the second against you.

—Ibn Hazm, The Dove’s Neck Ring

The go-between reemerges in Iberian letters some hundred years after Ibn Hazm created a space for her in the Andalusi courtly discourse of love elaborated in the Dove’s Neck Ring. The taifa courts, the inheritors of Umayyad splendor and culture, were in their infancy as Ibn Hazm was composing The Dove’s Neck Ring, but by the end of the eleventh century they have fallen to the Berber Almoravids. Unlike Ibn Hazm, whose Dove’s Neck Ring reflects a hopeful attitude that Andalusi caliphal splendor might be restored, Abū l-Tāhir Muhammad al-Saraqustī, al-Andalusi, Ibn al-Ashtarkūwī (d. 1143) (al-Saraqustī) turns a critical eye to Andalusi splendor and its legacy—the literature of Andalusi Arab identity—exposing this cultural model as an illusion no longer viable in a changed Iberian cultural landscape. Mediation and mediators figure prominently in al-Saraqustī’s collection of fifty brief narratives, the Maqāmāt al-luzûmiyyah, both as characters within the narrative and in the very literary form he has chosen for such representation, the maqāmāt, which itself is defined by formal and stylistic conjuncture (discussed in detail below). In her new context the go-between is no longer part of a codified courtly discourse. The go-between and the rhymed prose with which she was created have been displaced from the caliphal court and now begin to roam in a new Andalusi landscape, that of al-Saraqustī’s maqāmāt. In “Maqāma 9” we witness as she
creates her own erotic discourse, offering the lover fictional accounts of a nonexistent beloved in order to manipulate him to her own ends.

Al-Saraqūstī was a learned Andalusi born and educated in the taifa kingdom of Saragossa. The patrons of the young al-Saraqūstī included the Arab aristocracy of the taifa kingdoms, including the Banū Hūd, taifa kings of Saragossa, al-Mu’tasim ibn Sumādīh, king of Almería, and probably al-Mu’tamīd of Seville.1 Al-Saraqūstī’s participation in the literary production of these taifa courts is significant for it brings him into contact with the Andalusi codes of courtliness as elaborated in Ibn Hazm’s *Dove’s Neck Ring* (chapter 1). The taifa court of al-Saraqūstī’s native Saragossa was one of the most important twelfth-century Iberian loci of court culture. “The court of the Banū Hūd, represents the site where...‘courtliness’ as an appropriate and overriding characteristic of the ideal royal persona, along with an accompanying ‘culture of courtly love,’ was elaborated, displayed and, above all, enjoyed for the first time in the history of medieval Western European courts.”

Monroe describes al-Saraqūstī as “a young Arab poet who associated with and eulogized sovereigns of the politically privileged Arab ethnicity.”3 The subject matter of his early court poetry may have been formulaic and conventional, but that of his maqāmat was not. Unlike Ibn Hazm’s *Dove’s Neck Ring*, al-Saraqūstī’s maqāmat do not attempt to unite Andalusi under the pretext of a self-styled, hybrid culture of love, but, on the contrary, illustrate how such a discourse and the courtiers who cultivated it contributed to the divisions and factionalism that would bring about the destruction of Andalusi court culture.4 In al-Saraqūstī’s maqāmat, Andalusi desire is not a universal force capable of overcoming linguistic and religious boundaries, but an artifice of the Arabo-Andalusi past. A witness to the fall of the Andalusi taifa kingdoms, al-Saraqūstī creates a fictional world in which the discourse of courtly erotics—the discourse of Arabo-Andalusi power—proves to be a lie. This discourse, like the voice of the strange woman Ibn Hazm describes in *The Dove’s Neck Ring*, tempted the best and brightest of Andalusis away from what al-Saraqūstī implies mattered most, their identities as Muslims.5 The discourse of Arab courtly desire in al-Saraqūstī’s maqāmat must be read in the context of the arrival of the Almoravids who censured the lax morality of the Andalusis, reframing the debate of national identity in the religious terms of Islam instead of the Andalusi erotic.

*Mulūk at-Tawā’if and the Almoravids*

Ibn Hazm attempted to self-consciously unite the diverse Andalusis of the caliphate under the construction of an ideal Andalusi court identity, but this construction was shaky at best, and as the caliphate fell apart, the ethnic,