

Course Title (English)	Hidden Figures of Al-Andalus: Women's Role in History
Academic Institution	University of Granada (UGR)
City	Granada
Country	Spain
Course Title (Spanish)	Figuras ocultas de Al-Andalus: el papel de la mujer en la historia
Course Number	WRIH 456
Sessions (Terms)	Semester
Instructional Language	English
Contact Hours	45
Credits (semester credits)	3
Credits (quarter units)	4.5
Prerequisites	None
Track	CLCE (Language & Culture)

Course Description	This course examines the roles, experiences, and representations of women in al-Andalus (Islamic Iberia, 8th–15th centuries) through a gender-sensitive and interdisciplinary approach. Drawing on legal texts, biographical dictionaries, poetry, chronicles, and material culture, the course explores how women participated in family life, education, religious practice, economic activity, political power, and cultural production. Particular attention is paid to legal pluralism and the ways religion, social status, and class shaped women's rights and opportunities. The course also engages critically with modern historiography and orientalist narratives concerning Andalusí women.
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Course Content	Module 1 – Introduction and Historical Context (5 hours)
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1.1 al-Andalus: Historical Overview (2 hours)

- Political periods: Umayyad Emirate and Caliphate, Taifa kingdoms, Almoravids, Almohads, Nasrids
- Urban and rural society
- Social stratification and diversity

1.2 Sources and Methodologies for Studying Women (3 hours)

- Biographical dictionaries (ṭabaqāt)
- Legal texts and fatwas
- Poetry, adab, and chronicles
- Archaeology and material culture
- Problems of visibility, silence, and bias in sources

Module 2 – Gender, Law, and Family Structures (8 hours)

2.1 Women in Islamic Law in al-Andalus (4 hours)

- Marriage, divorce, and mahr
- Legal capacity and court participation
- Guardianship and marital authority
- Inheritance as a background factor: women's guaranteed shares under Maliki law

2.2 Family, Honor, and Gender Norms (4 hours)

- Patriarchal structures and negotiation
- Sexuality and moral discourse
- Public and private space
- Comparative notes on Christian and Jewish family law, including differences in inheritance and property control for women according to religion

Module 3 – Education, Knowledge, and Literary Culture (8 hours)

3.1 Women and Learning (4 hours)

- Qur'anic education and literacy
- Women as teachers and transmitters of knowledge
- Scholarly networks and patronage

3.2 Women's Literary Production (4 hours)

- Poetry by Andalusī women
- Adab culture and salons
- Gendered voices and self-representation
- Key figures include Lubna of Córdoba, 'Ā'isha bint Aḥmad al-Qurṭubīyya, and Wallāda bint al-Mustakfī.

Module 4 – Power, Politics, and the Court (7 hours)

4.1 Elite and Royal Women (4 hours)

- Mothers of rulers and regents
- Informal political influence
- Patronage and cultural authority

4.2 Enslaved Women and Courtly Power (3 hours)

- Jawārī (concubines)
- Slavery, manumission, and mobility
- Absence of inheritance rights and reliance on patronage and favor

Module 5 – Economic Life and Daily Practices (6 hours)

5.1 Women's Economic Roles (3 hours)

- Property ownership and management
- Trade, crafts, and agricultural labor
- Inheritance, dowries, gifts, and waqf as sources of wealth

5.2 Daily Life and Material Culture (3 hours)

- Housing and domestic space
- Clothing, adornment, and consumption
- Health, medicine, and childbirth

Module 6 – Religion, Piety, and Spirituality (5 hours)

6.1 Women and Religious Practice (3 hours)

- Participation in religious life
- Charity and endowments
- Religious authority and limitations

6.2 Female Piety and Mysticism (2 hours)

- Ascetic women and spiritual models
- Sufism and devotion
- Comparative perspectives within the Islamic world

Module 7 – Representation, Memory, and Historiography (6 hours)

7.1 Medieval Representations of Women (3 hours)

- Male-authored narratives

- Idealization, criticism, and moral example
- Gendered language and imagery

7.2 Modern Historiography and Debates (3 hours)

- Orientalism and its legacy
- Feminist and revisionist approaches
- The question of ‘exceptionalism’ of Andalusí women

Methodology

The course will be delivered through an active, critical, and interdisciplinary methodology aimed at enabling students to understand the essential role of women in al-Andalus and to analyze it from both historical and contemporary perspectives.

The main methodological strategies include:

Contextualized lectures

Theoretical lectures supported by visual materials (maps, timelines, images of manuscripts, and material objects) to present the historical, social, and legal frameworks of al-Andalus, consistently integrating a gender perspective.

Primary source analysis

Guided reading and commentary on original texts (in translation)—including chronicles, Mālikī legal texts, biographical dictionaries, poetry, and notarial documents—with particular attention to issues of visibility, representation, and silence surrounding women.

Critical discussion seminars

Structured debates based on contemporary scholarly readings, encouraging reflection on key concepts such as gender, power, law, religion, social class, and interreligious coexistence.

Case studies

In-depth analysis of specific female figures (Muslim, Jewish, and Christian women of al-Andalus) in order to explore diverse experiences shaped by social status, religion, and historical context.

Comparative and intersectional learning

Comparative examination of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities in areas such as family law, inheritance, education, and economic participation, integrating variables of gender, religion, and social class.

Student oral presentations

Individual or group presentations on specific course topics, designed to develop research skills, analytical synthesis, and academic communication.

Past–present connections

Reflective activities aimed at linking the historical study of women in al-Andalus with contemporary debates on gender, cultural identity, historical memory, and coexistence.

This methodology seeks not only to foster the acquisition of historical knowledge but also to promote critical thinking and the ability to apply analytical tools to contemporary contexts.

Assessment

- Participation and discussion: 20%
- Oral presentation on a female figure or theme: 20%
- Primary source analysis paper: 20%
- Final research paper/ exam: 40%

Bibliography

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