

Nawal NASRALLAH
*Best of Delectable Foods and Dishes
 from al-Andalus and al-Maghrib:
 A Cookbook by Thirteenth-Century Andalusī
 Scholar Ibn Razīn al-Tujībī (1227–1293)*

English Translation with Introduction and
 Glossary
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Nawal Nasrallah, a world-renowned, award-winning expert in Arab historical cookery, continues to broaden access of Arab culinary heritage for English-speaking audiences. After providing two excellent translations and new editions of cookbooks from the eastern parts of the Middle East – *Kitāb al-Ṭabikh* from Iraq⁽¹⁾ and *Kanz al-fawā'id* from Egypt⁽²⁾ – in *Best of Delectable Foods* she turns her attention to the western shores of the Mediterranean and to the two existing cookbooks from thirteenth-century al-Andalus and North Africa. In this book, she takes Ibn Razīn al-Tujībī's *Fiḍālat al-khiwān fī ṭayyibāt al-ṭā'ām wa-l-alwān* and gives it new life – for the first time in its full version, and also, for the first time in English.

Until today, this cookbook had been translated into French by Mezzine and Benkirane and into Spanish by Manuela Marín,⁽³⁾ but both were based

(1) Nawal Nasrallah, *Annals of the Caliphs' Kitchens: Ibn Sayyār al-Warrāq's Tenth-century Baghdādī Cookbook*, English Translation, with an Introduction and Glossary. Leiden, 2007.

(2) Nawal Nasrallah, *Treasure Trove of Benefits and Variety at the Table: A Fourteenth-Century Egyptian Cookbook*, English Translation, with an Introduction and Glossary. Leiden, 2018.

(3) Ibn Razīn al-Tujībī, M. Mezzine, L. Benkirane (trad.), *Saveurs et parfums de l'occident musulman. « Les délices de la table et les meilleurs genres de mets »*. Traduction du livre « *Fudalat al-khiwan fī tayibat al-ṭā'ām wa-l-alwān* », Fès, Publications Association Fès-Saïs, 1997; Ibn Razīn al-Tujībī, *Relieves de las mesas acerca de las delicias de la comida y los diferentes platos* (Fuḍālat al-Ḥiwān fī ṭayyibāt al-ṭā'ām wa-l-alwān), Manuela Marín (trad.), Gijón, Ed. Trea, 2007.

on Bin Shaqrūn's partial edition text, itself derived from the Berlin and Madrid manuscripts. N. Nasrallah, in collaboration with the British Library, which possesses the only complete manuscript known today, used this copy to produce a new translation and edition. Her translation was made independently of the Spanish and French versions and based directly on the manuscripts rather than on previous edition.⁽⁴⁾

Luckily for the reader, N. Nasrallah provides a long introduction (p. 1-102), divided into several sub-chapters, beginning with the natural abundance of the Iberian Peninsula and ending with the incognito life and the concealed food habits of the Conversos and Moriscos after the Catholic *Reconquista* in 1492, whose culinary practices often betrayed their cultural identity to the Inquisition. The author guides her readers within and around the foundations and characteristics of Andalusī cuisine in vivid language that leaves the reader mouthwatering. Placing the book in its environmental, climatic, social, cultural, and political context sets the stage for the “main course”: the annotated translation of the text.

N. Nasrallah starts the introduction with the essentials, reconstructing the making of the text and tracing its genealogy: identifying the main scholars who previously studied it, discussing the first edition by Bin Shaqrūn in 1981,⁽⁵⁾ the existing manuscripts, their current locations, and the paleographic challenges they pose. Bin Shaqrūn produced an edition based solely on the Berlin and Madrid manuscripts, unaware of the third manuscript held in the British Library.

A few points deserve attention: first, the cookbook's title receives special attention from N. Nasrallah, who carefully addresses its correct pronunciation. She convincingly argues that it should be read *fiḍāla*, derived from the word *fiḍāl* (“contending for excellence”), rather than *fuḍāla* or *faḍāla* (“leftovers”, “remains”), as previously read (p. xxix). Second, she incorporates many proverbs that exemplify how deeply food is embedded in Andalusī cultural language.

The story of this manuscript – and of the text in general – could easily serve as material for a thriller film. N. Nasrallah masterfully guides her readers through its twists and subplots: beginning with

(4) Daniel Newman has also produced an English translation to this cookbook: Ibn Razīn al-Tujībī, Daniel L. Newman (trad.) *The Exile's Cookbook. Medieval Gastronomic Treasures from al-Andalus and North Africa*, Londres, Saqi Book, 2023.

(5) Muḥammad Bin Shaqrūn, *Fann al-ṭabkh fī al-Andalus wa-l-Maghrib fī bidāyat 'aṣr banī Marīn: Fadālat [sic] al-khiwān fī ṭayyibāt al-ṭā'ām wa-l-alwān*, Rabat, Maṭba'at al-risāla, 1981.

the tragic circumstances under which the author, Ibn Razīn al-Tujībī, fled his hometown Murcia in al-Andalus (*Mursiya* in Arabic) for North Africa, where he eventually settled in Tunis and likely composed his cookbook. She then recounts the manuscript's later misidentification as a pharmaceutical compendium and its rediscovery in the British Library, which ultimately led to this beautifully produced book by Brill – the book features no fewer than 218 illustrations and images. This publication would have looked and read entirely differently were it not for Bink Hallum, curator of Arabic scientific manuscripts at the British Library, and specialist in historical pharmacology Leigh Chipman, who recommended that Hallum show the manuscript to Nawal Nasrallah.

The question of eastern influence – how Abbasid cooking practices, dishes, and tastes affected Andalusī cuisine – was previously addressed by Manuela Marín and others, and N. Nasrallah likewise gives it close attention in her excellent introduction. She explains how Andalusī cuisine differed from its Abbasid counterpart, citing al-Tujībī himself, who admits to having included only a few eastern recipes: “The majority [of dishes in this cookbook] are from al-Andalus, and only a small number from al-Mashriq – the finest among them – are included here” (p. 108). One debated figure associated with this cultural transmission is Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Nāfi’, known as Ziryāb (d. 857). His contribution remains contested because the earliest source mentioning him, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, omits any reference to his role in transmitting culinary habits and manners.⁽⁶⁾ N. Nasrallah handles this issue with nuance, noting that the earliest mention of Ziryāb’s impact on gastronomy appears in Ibn Ḥayyān’s eleventh-century writings (p. 46-52). Cross-referencing Ibn Ḥayyān’s information with the association of certain dishes – such as *baqliyyat Ziryāb* (a meat dish with cabbage) in the contemporaneous Andalusī cookbook *Kitāb al-Ṭabīkh* – further reinforces Ziryāb’s possible influence.⁽⁷⁾

Nasrallah’s introduction also enables readers to learn much about Ibn Razīn al-Tujībī (1227-1293) himself and to better understand the motivations behind his decision to compose a cookbook (p. 15-20). Drawing on a recent Arabic biography of the

author by Muḥammad Bin Sharīfa,⁽⁸⁾ she offers a deeper glimpse into his life and intellectual project, shedding light on the broader reasons for writing historical cookbooks – this time as a personal endeavor rather than merely an elite pastime, as seen in earlier Baghdadi works such as *Kitāb al-Ṭabīkh*, also translated by N. Nasrallah for Brill in 2007.

While *Fiḍālat al-khiwān* reflects Ibn Razīn al-Tujībī’s considerable erudition, often without explicit citations, Nawal Nasrallah’s meticulous scholarship brings these underlying sources to light. By identifying and comparing them with other texts – such as *Kitāb al-Aghdhiya* by the physician Ibn Zuhr – she clarifies the text’s technical vocabulary and deepens our understanding of its intellectual foundations (introduction, part I.3, p. 21-24).

The cookbook itself is divided into twelve parts, each devoted to a different food category, with a varied number of chapters in each: 1) On bread, *tharāyid* (bread sopped in rich broth), soups, pastries (5 chapters); 2) On meats of quadrupeds (6 chapters); 3) On poultry (7 chapters); 4) On a dish called *Ṣinhājī* and on cooking tongue and tripe (3 chapters); 5) On fish and eggs (2 chapters); 6) On dairy foods (3 chapters); 7) On vegetables (10 chapters); 8) On varieties of dishes with beans and pulses (3 chapters); 9) On *mu’assalāt* and varieties of confectionery (7 chapters); 10) On *kawāmikh* (pickled foods and condiments) and related preparations for various vinegars and *murrī*, extracting oils, and remedying spoiled olive oil and foods (12 chapters); 11) On cooking locusts and freshwater shrimp; 12) On handwashing preparations.

As Nasrallah notes, al-Tujībī’s meticulous organization reflects his mastery of the culinary arts (p. 11). The total number of recipes – 475 – places this work at the higher end among Arabic cookbooks, which range from 44 recipes (*Kitāb al-Ṭibākha*) to 830 (*Kanz al-fawā’id*). The variety of dishes, preparations, and condiments, both meat- and vegetable-based, opens a window onto the richness of Andalusī and North African cuisines, grounded in local produce, as Nasrallah details in her introduction (Part II: “Food and Foodways in al-Andalus” and Part III: “The Andalusī Cuisine as Depicted in the Book of *Fiḍāla*”).

Best of Delectable Foods concludes with what has become, by now, Nasrallah’s signature: an elaborate Arabic-English glossary organized thematically (beverages, breads and grain-based dishes, dairy, prepared dishes, etc.), enabling both historians and novice cooks to grasp the original Arabic terminology of

(6) Dwight F. Reynolds, *The Musical Heritage of al-Andalus*. London, 2021, p. 82.

(7) Limor Yungman, “Transcultural Taste: Brokers of the Arab Cuisine,” in Uriel Simonsohn and Luke Yarbrough (eds.), *Cultural Brokerage in Premodern Islamic Societies*. Edinburgh, 2026, p. 126.

(8) M. Bin Sharīfa, *Ibn Razīn al-Tujībī: Ḥayātuhu wa āthāruhu*. Casablanca, 2009.

Andalusi kitchens. These terms often require deeper cultural understanding, as their Modern Arabic equivalents can be misleading; N. Nasrallah provides precisely this depth, along with comparisons to modern Spanish and other languages, and notes on their possible cultural contexts.

The final part of the book also includes two appendices: one identifying the ingredient *bunk* as *bunn* (coffee bean husks, p. 803-813), and another offering modern adaptations of twenty-four recipes from *Fiḍālat al-khiwān*, covering all categories – condiments, main dishes, snack foods, side dishes, desserts, pastries, soups, and even breath fresheners (p. 814–854). Readers will be delighted to discover

that *mujabbana*, the cheese buns that Nasrallah identifies as “one of the foodstuffs that evolved in al-Andalus and characterized Andalusi cuisine in the rest of the Arabo-Muslim world” (ii.5.2, p. 55), is among them. Finally, there is no need to wait for Nasrallah’s translation of the second Andalusi cookbook, as it was already published earlier in 2025 under the title *Smorgasbords of Andalusi and Maghribi Dishes and Their Salutary Benefits*, again with Brill.

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