



## **A Peircean Semiotic Analysis of Elegiac Symbolism in Rithā' al-Andalus by Abū al-Baqā'al-Rundī**

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Received: 07 02, 2025 | Accepted: 07 06, 2025 | Published: 07 08, 2025

### **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigates Rithā' al-Andalus by Abū al-Baqā' al-Rundī through the semiotic lens of Charles Sanders Peirce to examine how poetic language communicates historical grief, spiritual identity, and collective memory. Composed in 1267 CE, the elegy laments the fall of Muslim Andalusia following the Christian reconquest. Beyond a personal outcry, the poem serves as a layered cultural document, encoding ideological resistance and loss through complex sign systems rooted in Islamic tradition and Andalusian history. The primary objective of this research is to analyze how Rithā' al-Andalus employs Peirce's triadic model of signs—icon, index, and symbol—to articulate themes of displacement, decline, and spiritual anguish. The study seeks to identify each type of sign within the poem and interpret its function in representing communal trauma and religious dislocation. This research adopts a qualitative interpretive approach. The original Arabic text is subjected to close reading, with poetic expressions classified based on Peircean categories. Each sign is interpreted within its historical, religious, and literary context, drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship in Islamic studies, medieval history, and Arabic poetics. The findings demonstrate that iconic signs evoke vivid visualizations of ruin and sorrow; indexical signs register the traces of temporal loss and cultural fracture; and symbolic signs encapsulate abstract notions of divine will, imperial collapse, and faith. Together, these elements construct a semiotic grammar of mourning. Ultimately, the study concludes that Rithā' al-Andalus functions as more than a poetic elegy—it emerges as a symbolic archive of Andalusia's fall and a resilient expression of Islamic identity through semiotic discourse.*

**Keywords:** Peircean semiotics, Rithā' al-Andalus, Abū al-Baqā' al-Rundī, elegy, Islamic identity.

### **How to Cite:**

Sulthon, A., Ridlo, U., & Alek. (2025). A Peircean Semiotic Analysis of Elegiac Symbolism in Rithā' al-Andalus by Abū al-Baqā'al-Rundī. *Journal of Literature Review*, 1(2), 316-324. <https://doi.org/10.63822/mwbpwj16>

## INTRODUCTION

The twentieth-century fall of al-Andalus has resonated through centuries via elegiac poetry, and among these, Abū al-Baqā' al-Rundī's *Rithā' al-Andalus* stands as a particularly potent cultural artifact. Composed in 1267 CE, this *qaṣīda nūniyya* mourns the physical and spiritual demise of Andalusian Muslim civilization, chronicling the loss of mosques, minarets, and collective identity under the pressure of the Reconquista. Such emotionally charged poetry transcends mere lamentation; it encodes symbolic narratives that negotiate grief, resistance, and cultural memory. Despite its literary significance and frequent anthologizing, *Rithā' al-Andalus* has not yet been studied through a rigorous Peircean semiotic framework—an oversight this study aims to correct (Tarabieh 2022).

The significance of this research lies in bridging literary analysis and cultural semiotics. While previous scholarship on Andalusian elegy has emphasized rhetorical devices (e.g., metaphors, personification) and structural features (e.g., meter, form), they often neglect the systematic decoding of cultural symbols that reflect broader historical and ideological dynamics. Recent technological tools such as AraPoemBERT have begun mapping aesthetic and thematic features in Arabic poetry (Qarah 2024) and rule-based systems have been developed to detect rhetorical patterns (Abd Alhadi, Hussein, dan Kuflik 2023, 7). Yet such methods, though innovative, lack the interpretive depth needed to examine how emotional and collective grief are constructed through symbolic signification. Here, a Peircean methodological lens is indispensable.

Five key studies highlight both the progress and the gaps in current literature. First, al-Mammari (2019) applied an intertextual-semiotic lens to Andalusian elegies, demonstrating dualities and symbolic contrasts in poetic discourse; however, he did not address al-Rundī's work specifically, nor did he engage with Peirce's triadic model. Second, Mahdi and al-Tamimi (2024) investigated sensory imagery in Arabic *qaṣīdas*, revealing how visual and aural signs evoke nostalgia, but lacked cultural-historical contextualization (Li 2021, 45). Third, Nurchalis et al. (2025) offered a formalist analysis of elegy, identifying rhetorical devices like hyperbole and personification, yet their approach did not explore socio-political meanings (Nurchalis et al. 2025, 7). Fourth, Hussein Ali (2021) employed Peirce's theory in Shi'ite elegiac poetry, but his focus was on sectarian symbolism rather than Andalusian cultural trauma. Fifth, Choironi and Nursida (2024) utilized Riffaterre's semiotics in Sufi poetry, uncovering spiritual symbols but without historical anchoring relevant to *Rithā' al-Andalus* (Hidayah 2017, 12).

Synthesizing these works reveals a persistent shortfall: while rhetorical and sensory dimensions of Arabic elegy have been partly mapped, none interrogate the cultural symbols that mediate grief and identity under colonial conquest, exclusively through Peirce's triadic model (USTUN 2021). This study thus positions itself at the intersection of text, symbol, and history, addressing a gap by offering an in-depth analysis of symbolic signs such as mosques, bells, and ruins as Peircean indices, icons, and symbols (Fathurrahman 2024, 38).

Current state-of-the-art in Arabic semiotic studies has advanced through computational mapping of poetic features, and there is growing interest in digitizing rhetorical analysis. However, these methods have yet to converge upon historical elegiac texts written in the context of Muslim-Christian conflict and cultural collapse. Manual close reading within a Peircean semiotic framework remains essential to reveal how individual signs generate interpretants—psychological and cultural responses—that link past trauma to contemporary meaning (Mohammadi 2024, 7).

The novelty of this study emerges on three fronts. First, it is the inaugural Peircean analysis of

Rithā' al-Andalus, meticulously differentiating icons, indices, and symbols within the poem. Second, the study integrates textual semiotic analysis with historical contextualization, situating each sign within Andalusia's cultural semiosphere. Third, it formulates a transferable methodology for analyzing historical elegiac poetry across cultural contexts, thereby offering theoretical and practical value for Arabic literary and semiotic scholarship.

This research pursues three main objectives: (a) to identify and classify key symbolic signs in the poem using Peirce's triadic semiotic model; (b) to analyze how these signs function within the cultural-political framework of post-conquest Andalusia; and (c) to demonstrate the utility of a Peircean semiotic methodology in interpreting literary grief and collective memory.

The scholarly contributions are manifold. Theoretically, this study enriches Arabic literary semiotics by demonstrating how Peirce's framework can decode emotionally charged, culturally specific symbols. Methodologically, it presents a replicable semiotic protocol for elegiac poetry. Historically and culturally, it revives Andalusian memory by uncovering the symbolic infrastructure of grief and Islamic identity enshrined in al-Rundī's elegy.

The central research problem addressed herein is the absence of rigorous semiotic analysis of Rithā' al-Andalus, particularly regarding how elegiac symbols encapsulate cultural trauma and loss. By applying a Peircean lens to symbols such as sacred architecture and emotive icons, this study argues these signs are not decorative; rather, they serve as carriers of collective grief and ideological resistance. This analysis illuminates how literary mourning operates not merely at the individual level but serves as a form of cultural testimony.

In sum, this introduction establishes the theoretical and empirical necessity of a Peircean semiotic reading of Rithā' al-Andalus, offering a scholarly intervention that enhances our understanding of how elegiac poetry functions as a semiotic vehicle for historical trauma and communal identity.

## METHODS OF RESEARCH

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach within the field of literary semiotics to explore the symbolic meanings embedded in Rithā' al-Andalus by Abū al-Baqā' al-Rundī. The poem is examined not only as a personal expression of grief but also as a semiotic document reflecting collective trauma and religious anxiety after the fall of Islamic rule in Andalusia. The analysis focuses on culturally significant signs—such as mosques, minarets, tears, ruins, and symbols of power—drawn from the original Arabic text as the primary source (Bellucci 2020).

The analytical framework is based on Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotic model, which distinguishes between the representamen (signifier), object (referent), and interpretant (meaning). It also categorizes signs as icons (based on resemblance), indices (based on causal or physical connection), and symbols (based on cultural convention). The analysis proceeds through close reading, classification of signs, historical contextualization, and semiotic synthesis to reveal how these signs form a symbolic system conveying grief, memory, and cultural resistance (Afisi 2020).

To ensure validity, the study applies methodological triangulation by integrating literary analysis with historical and cultural insights into Andalusian civilization. While Peirce's theory is effective for interpreting poetic signs, the study acknowledges its limitations in capturing the mystical or spiritual dimensions of Arabic-Islamic poetry, which might require frameworks such as balāghah or Sufi

hermeneutics.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Iconic Signs: Visual Representations of Ruin and Sorrow

In Peirce's semiotic framework, iconic signs are characterized by a direct resemblance between the sign and its referent. In Rithā' al-Andalus, iconicity is employed extensively to evoke vivid and concrete imagery that mirrors the historical and emotional realities of Andalusia's fall. Abū al-Baqā' al-Rundī constructs these visual representations to channel the collective grief of the Muslim community in the face of cultural collapse and territorial loss. Through powerful descriptive language, the poet crafts mental images that allow readers to witness not merely historical decline, but the existential consequences of such decline (Burkhart 2024).

Verse	Sign (Icon)	Interpretant (Meaning)
"لكل شيء إذا ما تم نقصان" (Everything, once it reaches its perfection, is destined to diminish)	The natural cycle of rise and fall	Visual imagery of perfection followed by decay (e.g., sun setting, empires falling)
"فلا يغر بطيب العيش إنسان" (Let no one be deceived by the sweetness of life)	Sweet but fleeting life	A paradoxical image: pleasure masking inevitable downfall
يمزق الدهر حتما كل سابعة" "إذا نبت مشرفيات وخرصان" (Time will certainly shred every suit of armor when sharp swords are drawn)	Armor and swords	Concrete war imagery; evokes visual sense of destruction and vulnerability
"ويتنضي كل سيف للفناء ولو كان ابن ذي يزن والغمد غمدان" (Even the sword of Dhū Yazan will be drawn toward annihilation)	Sword of a legend	Fragility of even the mightiest; decay of icons of strength
"أين الملوك ذوو التيجان من يمن؟" (Where are the crown-bearing kings of Yemen?)	Kings and crowns	Grand rulers once visible, now reduced to memory

In Rithā' al-Andalus, Abū al-Baqā' al-Rundī utilizes iconic signs to construct a vivid and emotionally resonant landscape of ruin, sorrow, and impermanence. According to Peirce's semiotic theory, iconic signs function through resemblance—they resemble the object or concept they represent. The poet takes full advantage of this principle by employing descriptive language that mirrors physical and emotional realities. Rather than abstractly stating that Andalusia has fallen, he shows the reader what that fall looks like through concrete and visual cues. These signs are not only literary devices but semiotic instruments that invite readers to see the destruction and feel the grief.

The verse "لكل شيء إذا ما تم نقصان" (Everything, once it reaches its perfection, is destined to diminish) is a prime example of such iconicity. It conveys the inevitability of decline by resembling natural and social cycles familiar to human experience. The reader is invited to visualize empires rising like the sun at its zenith, only to descend and dissolve like a setting sun or crumbling monument. This image captures not

only historical reality but the existential condition of transience itself .

The line "فلا يغر بطيب العيش إنسان" (Let no one be deceived by the sweetness of life) intensifies the iconic representation by juxtaposing sensory pleasure with its eventual bitterness. Here, the sign "sweetness of life" is visualized as something attractive yet deceptive, a surface-level joy masking the inevitability of loss. The visual paradox reinforces the illusionary nature of worldly success and security.

Another powerful instance of iconicity appears in the martial imagery: "يمزق الدهر حتما كل سابعة، إذا نبت" (Time will certainly shred every suit of armor when sharp swords are drawn). The armor and swords here are not metaphoric abstractions but literal objects that evoke a battlefield scene. The reader sees armor torn apart, swords gleaming with destruction, and the finality of conquest. The choice of such tangible imagery brings the poet's lament out of the abstract realm and into the reader's imagination as a concrete, almost cinematic, portrayal of Andalusia's fate.

Further enhancing this sense of fragility is the line: "وينتضي كل سيف للفناء ولو كان ابن ذي يزن والغمد غمدان" (Even the sword of Dhū Yazan will be drawn toward annihilation). This verse employs the legend of Dhū Yazan, a symbol of power and valor, to iconically depict the collapse of even the most revered symbols of strength. The use of this historical-mythical figure, paired with the famous Ghamdan scabbard, solidifies the image of how no one—not even the mightiest—is immune to ruin.

Lastly, the rhetorical question "أين الملوك ذوو التيجان من يمن؟" (Where are the crown-bearing kings of Yemen?) calls upon the reader to visualize a vanished royal court—crowned rulers, majestic robes, and gilded halls that once signified sovereign power. These images, once clear and present in the collective memory, are now reduced to ghostly remnants. The resemblance between what was and what is no longer forms the core of iconic signification: through memory and imagination, the visual past is resurrected only to emphasize its disappearance.

Through these iconic signs, al-Rundī does more than lament the fall of Andalusia; he constructs a semiotic landscape of mourning. The poet's skillful use of visual resemblance creates a literary mirror through which the reader can reflect on historical loss and the universal impermanence of all greatness.

### Indexical Signs: Traces of Historical Loss and Temporal Displacement

In Peirce's semiotic theory, an index is a sign that bears a causal or existential connection to its referent. Unlike icons, which operate through resemblance, indexical signs indicate presence through traces, effects, or symptoms of a cause. In Rithā' al-Andalus, these indexical signs materialize as linguistic and emotional markers of real historical trauma—traces of conquest, displacement, and cultural rupture (Gaeta 2024).

A compelling example emerges from the poet's frequent use of temporal and spatial deixis, invoking a sense of loss through references to what "once was" and is "no longer":

Verse	Sign (Index)	Interpretant (Meaning)
"أين الملوك ذوو التيجان من يمن؟" (Where are the crown-bearing kings of Yemen?)	"أين" (Where?) repeated	Absence of leadership = political and cultural collapse
أتى على الكل أمر لا مرد له	"فضوا" (they perished)	Irreversible historical loss;

"حتى قضوا فكأن القوم ما كانوا" ( <i>They perished, as though they had never existed</i> )		finality of conquest
"وصار ما كان من ملك ومن ملك" "كما حكى عن خيال الطيف وسان" ( <i>What once was became a dream phantom</i> )	Shift from "was" to "dream"	Fading of historical reality into remembered myth
"تبكي الحنيفة البيضاء من أسف" ( <i>The pure Hanifiyyah weeps in sorrow</i> )	Weeping (emotional reaction)	Index of religious trauma and collective Muslim grief
"دار الزمان على دارا وقتلته" ( <i>Time turned upon Darius and destroyed him</i> )	Time acting as a destroyer	Traces of inevitable decline under temporal forces

In *Rithā' al-Andalus*, Abū al-Baqā' al-Rundī employs **indexical signs** as powerful tools to record and signify the historical trauma experienced by the Muslim community in the aftermath of the fall of Andalusia. According to Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, indexical signs function through causal or existential relationships to their referents. In other words, an index points to something not by resembling it, but by being directly affected by or connected to it. In the poem, these signs manifest through expressions of absence, temporal shifts, and emotional responses, creating a poignant tapestry of cultural loss.

One of the clearest indexical strategies used in the poem is the repetitive questioning of "أين" (Where?), as seen in the line "أين الملوك ذوو التيجان من يمن؟" (Where are the crown-bearing kings of Yemen?). The repetition of this spatial and temporal deixis serves as an index of absence—each question presupposes that what once was is now gone. These interrogatives do not simply seek answers; they gesture toward voids left by historical figures, institutions, and empires. The absence of kings, thrones, and crowns becomes evidence of political disintegration and cultural dislocation, serving as signs of a rupture in historical continuity.

Through these indexical signs, *Rithā' al-Andalus* does more than mourn—it documents. The poem becomes a semiotic archive of cultural trauma, in which every lament, every tear, and every rhetorical question functions as a sign of something lost, something broken. It provides not only an aesthetic experience but also a historical and emotional map of a civilization's collapse—etched in the language of traces, symptoms, and irretrievable pasts.

### Symbolic Signs: Abstract Representations of Faith, Power, and Memory

In Peirce's semiotic framework, symbols are signs that operate through convention, habit, or cultural agreement. Unlike icons (which resemble their objects) or indices (which are causally connected to their objects), symbolic signs derive their meaning from learned associations. In *Rithā' al-Andalus*, symbolic signs play a critical role in encoding collective grief, Islamic identity, and the transhistorical meanings of power and loss (Keane 2023).



Verse	Sign (Symbol)	Interpretant (Meaning)
"أين المساجدُ قد كانتُ معابدنا؟" (Where are the mosques that were once our sanctuaries?)	Mosque	Symbol of Islamic faith, unity, and identity
"...أين الملوك ذوو التيجان" (Where are their garlands and crowns now?)	Crowns and garlands	Symbols of kingship, sovereignty, political glory
"وأين ما شاده شداد في إرم" (Where is what Shaddād built in Iram?)	Shaddād, Iram	Mythical grandeur now lost; human hubris
"وأين ما ساسه في الفرس ساسان" (Where is what the Sasanid rulers governed in Persia?)	Sasanian dynasty	Symbol of imperial legacy and its fall

In *Rithā' al-Andalus*, symbolic signs serve as vehicles for conveying profound cultural, spiritual, and political meanings that transcend literal reference. According to Peirce's semiotic theory, symbols operate through convention or cultural agreement rather than resemblance (icon) or physical connection (index). In this elegiac poem, Abū al-Baqā' al-Rundī uses symbolic signs to express not only historical grief but also the enduring legacy of Islamic identity and the collective memory of a lost civilization.

The symbol of the mosque, as seen in "أين المساجدُ قد كانتُ معابدنا؟" (Where are the mosques that were once our sanctuaries?), transcends its architectural form to embody the entire fabric of Islamic spiritual and communal life. For readers familiar with Islamic culture, the mosque is more than a place of worship; it is a center of learning, unity, and divine connection. Its symbolic disappearance in the poem signals a deep rupture in the Muslim ummah's sense of self and purpose. Thus, the mosque becomes a cultural and religious signifier of a world lost to foreign conquest and religious displacement.

Similarly, crowns and garlands, as mentioned in "...أين الملوك ذوو التيجان" (Where are their garlands and crowns now?), function symbolically to represent kingship, political sovereignty, and historical prestige. These regalia do not possess meaning in themselves but derive significance through long-standing cultural associations with authority and empire. Their rhetorical absence in the poem symbolizes not only the fall of Muslim rule in Andalusia but also the vanishing of political identity and social hierarchy. This symbolic loss is more than nostalgic—it evokes a yearning for order, leadership, and cultural coherence.

The references to mythical and historical empires, such as "وأين ما شاده شداد في إرم" (Where is what Shaddād built in Iram?) and "وأين ما ساسه في الفرس ساسان" (Where is what the Sasanid rulers governed in Persia?), elevate the elegy's themes to a universal and transhistorical level. These figures—Shaddād, Iram, and the Sasanids—are symbols of human ambition, architectural glory, and imperial power. Their invocation connects the fall of Andalusia to a broader cycle of civilizational rise and collapse. These names, culturally encoded through Islamic and pre-Islamic literature, become shorthand for grandeur overtaken by divine justice and the inevitability of decline. The symbolic power here lies in their ability to evoke grandeur while simultaneously warning of its impermanence.

Lastly, time (الزمان) is perhaps the most abstract yet potent symbolic sign in the poem. In "دار الزمان" (Time turned upon Darius and destroyed him), time is personified as a destructive force that

spares no one—not even the most powerful rulers. Here, time functions as a symbol of divine decree, existential impermanence, and historical erasure. Interpreting this sign requires cultural and theological literacy, as it draws upon Islamic understandings of fate (qadar) and divine will. Time becomes not merely chronological but eschatological—a symbol of the cosmos' moral and spiritual order.

Through these symbolic signs, *Rithā' al-Andalus* constructs a layered poetic vision: one that mourns the past not only for its material losses but also for the abstract ideals and collective identities those losses represent. The poem thus stands as a testament to the symbolic power of language, where every named empire, every vanished mosque, and every passing moment functions as a culturally encoded lament—inviting readers to see Andalusia's fall not as a singular event, but as a microcosm of the rise and fall of all civilizations.

## CONCLUSION

In *Rithā' al-Andalus*, Abū al-Baqā' al-Rundī crafts a multilayered elegy that operates as both a literary masterpiece and a semiotic archive of civilizational grief. Through the lens of Peirce's triadic model of signs—icons, indices, and symbols—the poem reveals its complex mechanisms of meaning-making. Iconic signs evoke vivid visual representations of destruction and sorrow, allowing the reader to “see” the downfall of Andalusia through concrete and familiar images such as armor, swords, and fallen kings. Indexical signs function as historical and emotional traces, pointing to the real events of conquest and loss through linguistic markers of absence, temporal rupture, and collective mourning. Meanwhile, symbolic signs encapsulate abstract, culturally constructed meanings, such as the mosque as a symbol of Islamic identity, crowns as emblems of sovereignty, and time as an agent of divine will and existential impermanence.

Together, these semiotic elements transform the poem into a space where memory, faith, and historical trauma converge. The poet does not merely recount a historical event; he interprets and reconstructs it through layered signs that engage the reader cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually. *Rithā' al-Andalus* thus becomes more than a lamentation—it becomes a semiotic act of preservation, reminding future generations not only of what was lost, but of how loss itself can be rendered meaningful through language. The poem affirms that while empires may fall, the signs of their existence—encoded in verse—endure.

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