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Editorial

Ibn Hazm: Profile of a Muslim Scholar

As one of history's most prolific Muslim writers, the theologian and jurist Ibn Hazm (d. 1064) had a remarkably successful intellectual career. Scholars continue to argue over him, perhaps due to his own diverse perspectives, potentials, and achievements. I consider his multiple achievements, notwithstanding any deserved negative impressions, a cause for celebrating this intellectual giant. Consequently, it is appropriate that he be profiled here. While this format may be restrictive, I hope to pursue some specific aspects in subsequent editorials to paint a more comprehensive and coherent picture of this multi-faceted scholar. Charles Pellat, in his article on "Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusi" writes: "Abū Muḥammad 'Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd ibn Ḥazm, a poet, man-of-letters, historian, polemist, juriconsult, theologian, logician, metaphysician, and psychologist, was certainly one of the most refined and productive representatives of the Arab culture in Spain."¹

His Genealogy

One of the most complete genealogies of Ibn Hazm is Abu Muhammad Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Sa'īd ibn Hazm ibn Ghalib ibn Salih ibn Khalaf ibn Sufyan ibn Yazid.² Ibn Hazm was born at Cordoba (Andalusia/Islamic Spain) in 994 to an influential family and died in 1064 in Manta Lisham,³ which came to be known as Casa Montija⁴ and is believed to be near present-day Seville. Evidence exists, however, that he was of Persian descent. Thus some modern scholars speak of the "obscurity" of his origin.

According to one authority, Ibn Hazm's ancestor Yazid was a Persian convert and freedman (*mawlā*) of Yazid ibn Abi Sufyan.⁵ Ibn Hazm, in fact, mentions his Persian origin with pride. One of his students, al-Humaydi (d. 1095), used to repeat it on his teacher's direct authority. In addition, Ibn Hazm's contemporary Muhammad ibn Mu'adh al-Jayyani (d. 1105) confirms its validity. Other scholars, most notably Ibn Hayyan (d. 1075), challenged it. In any case, Ibn Hazm's family had moved to Spain during the time of Khalaf, his grandfather of five generations ago. This must have occurred sometime around the eighth century, when Khalaf settled in Manta Lisham.⁶

Ibn Hayyan, the first scholar to proclaim Ibn Hazm's origin among Spain's non-Arab peoples, also suggested that Ibn Hazm fabricated a Persian lineage to enhance his prestige.⁷ Meanwhile, Eric Ormsby concludes that "although he [Ibn Hazm] claimed descent from an early Persian convert to Islam, there is evidence that his family was of indigenous Iberian stock and that one of his ancestors had converted from Christianity to Islam."⁸

It is necessary to stress Ibn Hazm's Spanish identity – he, his father, and his grandfather were all born there – because scholars have indulged in pointless debates and assigned clandestine motives to each other. Ihsan Abbas has accused many "European" scholars of insisting on Ibn Hazm's Spanish origin in order to link him with Spain and Christianity so they can study him in that light. Muhammad Abu Laila points to most western scholars' "nationalistic" tendencies, claiming that they insist upon Ibn Hazm's Spanish origin "to ascribe the ancestry of a great scholar to Europe rather than Persia."⁹ The truth is, however, that his intellectual stature renders the debate about his origin almost superfluous. As Asin Palacios proclaims, "the genealogy of ibn Hazm – be it noble or plebeian, Christian or Muslim, Arab, Persian or Spanish – could hardly influence the formation of his mental outlook and character."¹⁰

Among the western scholars who stress Ibn Hazm's Spanish origin are Dutch scholar R. Dozy, who characterizes him, among other things, as "the most Christian" Muslim poet. Others are F. J. Simonet and E. Garcia Gomez. Such contemporary Muslim and Arab scholars as Taha al-Hajiri also incline toward this opinion. In contrast Muhammad Abu Zahra, one of the best modern scholars on Ibn Hazm, tends to believe in his Persian heritage.¹¹

It is ironic that Ibn Hazm, who wrote the genealogical classic *Jamharat Ansāb al-'Arab*, never defended himself "against the claims by some of his contemporaries that he was of 'ajamī blood."¹² He acknowledges his western roots¹³ and does not seek to claim either an Arab or a Muslim origin. The only difference is that the Persian lineage gives him slightly earlier Muslim forefathers. But whichever scenario is correct, its significance, at least as far as Ibn Hazm is concerned, is negligible. The majority of scholars consider him to be Spanish.

His Early Life and Education

Ibn Hazm's "privileged childhood" was marked by more than the advantages of early education, for as he himself insists, he was raised and taught exclusively by his father's female slaves: "In fact, I have witnessed (*shāhadtu*) women and knew their secrets to the extent nobody else could know. This is because I was raised in their rooms, and I grew up among them. So I did not

know any one beside them ... And they taught me the Qur'an, recited to me many poems, and drilled me in calligraphy."¹⁴

Scholars have tried to justify this rather unusual upbringing on the grounds of "infant ill health." Several symptoms are mentioned: palpitations, dry eyes, and occasional losses of consciousness. Thus it is understandable that his father Abu 'Umar Ahmad (d. 1012), who in late 991 was appointed Ibn Abi 'Amir al-Mansur's (d. 1002) vizier, would have kept him indoors. Ibn Hazm might have needed such close attention, and the female slaves were well-equipped to provide him with a primary education.

Another explanation contends that his father sought to raise and educate his favorite child away from the obscenities of male society in Cordoba. This was particularly feasible when there were women who had mastered all of the relevant disciplines. Scholars insist that this conclusion is supposedly based on Ibn Hazm's own account of Ahmad ibn Fath, an outwardly pious and innocent man who nevertheless fell in love with Ibrahim ibn Ahmad.¹⁵ Although possible, this conclusion perhaps reads too much into Ibn Hazm's story, for it neither offers a complete picture of Cordoban society nor explains his father's motives. After all, Ibn Hazm did not relate this story as a child or use it to explain his father's decision. So the best explanation may be the simplest one, namely, that the father was overprotective of his sickly favorite son. The clearest proof that his father's close supervision was motivated by intellectual concerns is Ibn Hazm's remarkable progress. His *Ṭawq al-Hamāmah* reveals his effective early learning in the form of surprising scholarship and his account of how he began writing poetry at an early stage.

Being raised and educated among female slaves also led him to believe that he had an intimate knowledge of women. Another impact was his "sensitivity to women," as reflected in, for example, his argument that women and men feel the same measure of desire.

In fact, I hear many people say that "ability to curtail the desires is found in men rather than women." And I have long been surprised about that. I therefore say something in which I will never stop believing. [That] men and women, in their inclination toward these things, are equal.¹⁶

A further impact may have been his subsequent favorable view on the possibility of female prophets. Intriguingly, his acquaintance with women did not lead to an obsession with them, for he claimed to have preserved his virginity and never became actively involved with either them or sex. This does not mean, however, that he never fell in love, for he recounts in his *Ṭawq* how, as a youngster, he once pursued a girl in his father's mansion – but to no avail.¹⁷

His Breadth of Knowledge

From his father's slave women, Ibn Hazm learned the Qur'an, poetry recitation, and calligraphy. He later studied from scholars of Qur'anic exegesis, tradition, and Arabic language. At the western side of Cordoba's mosque he studied Arabic grammar, other Arabic-language disciplines, astronomy, philosophy, logic, and several human sciences. After equipping himself with a wide variety of learning, Ibn Hazm embarked upon his career. Even Ibn Hayyan, his best-known critic, confirmed that he was a master of tradition, jurisprudence, debate, genealogy, all that is related to literature, logic, and philosophy.

Ibn Hazm was not ashamed to boast of his knowledge.¹⁸ According to his son Abu Rafi', he produced about 400 volumes (containing about 80,000 pages) on a variety of subjects. Ibn Hazm was thus almost as prolific a writer as Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923). But the majority of Ibn Hazm's works did not survive; most were burnt, especially in Seville, by his political detractors who also caused him to be imprisoned more than once. Ibn Hayyan does, however, mention about ten titles of Ibn Hazm's work that he considered to be the most popular.

Out of his presumed immense corpus of writing, Carl Brockelmann identifies about thirty-six surviving titles,¹⁹ while 'Abd al-Halim 'Uways' *Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī* provides a list of fifty-three titles.²⁰ Al-Humaydi mentions that his teacher's most important works are *Al-Īṣāl ilā Faḥm Kitāb al-Khiṣāl*, *Al-Iḥkām li Uṣūl al-Aḥkām*, *Al-Fiṣal²¹ fī al-Mīlal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥal*, *Al-Ijmā' wa Masā'iluh*, *Marātib al-'Ulūm*, and *Al-Taqrīb li Ḥadd al-Manṭiq*.²²

My subsequent editorials will address Ibn Hazm's legal and theological contributions, including his *zahirīyah* perspectives as well as his theory of female prophets.

This Issue

We open the second issue of 2013 with "Combating Terrorism through an Education for Democratic Iteration" by Yusef Waghid and Nuraan Davids. Arguing that democratic iteration can mitigate contemporary terrorism, they insist that this iteration should be among people who conduct as well as suffer from such acts. They assert that such an iteration would also be emancipatory and instill in people the willingness and openness to engage in interculturalism.

Next is Md. Mahmudul Hasan's "An Introduction to the Islamization of English Literary Studies." Hasan tries to establish not only the urgency but also the feasibility of Islamizing English literary studies. He contends that among all western disciplines, English literature is arguably the most culturally charged carrier of western value-laden ideas. As a result, looking at it from

Islamic perspectives would allow Muslims to maintain their sociocultural and religious values and traditions.

Zahra Seif-Amirhosseini follows with her “A Critical Reassessment of Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’ Thesis.” This detailed and sustained critique from an Islamic perspective, as well as from the perspective of political science and sociology, reveals Huntington’s inaccurate views that Islam is an inherent threat and stumbling block to democratic development. Seif-Amirhosseini also analyzes this thesis’ impact on policymaking and its consequences for the United States.

Finally, we present “Humanity as Homo Culturus” by Mahmoud Dhaouadi. Stating that human beings are first of all Homo Culturus before they are Homo Politicus, Homo Sociologus, or Homo Oeconomicus, he insists that humanity is distinguished from all other species by “human symbols” (HS), namely, language, thought, religion, knowledge/science, myths, laws, and cultural values and norms. In his words, all of these are central to the human identity and are lacking in all other species.

In the forum section, we feature Sulaiman Kamal-deen Olawale’s “The Emergence of a Muslim Minority in the Ado-Ekiti Kingdom of Southwestern Nigeria.” In addition to providing a sociological reinterpretation of Islam’s presence there, he traces the factors that facilitated Islam’s spread and the problems faced by local Muslims.

I hope that our readers will find these papers not only thought-provoking and stimulating, but also sources of inspiration and motivation for their own research.

Endnotes

1. C. Pellat, “Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī,” *Journal of the Pakistani Historical Society* 9 (1961): 71.
2. Yaḡut al-Hamawī, *Irshād al-Arīb ilā Ma‘rifat al-Adīb* (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Ma‘arif, 1999), 4:479.
3. Roger Arnaldez, “Ibn Hazm,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Lieden: E.J. Brill, 1937), 3:550.
4. Ihsan ‘Abbas, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-Andalus: ‘Aṣr Siyādat Qurṭuba* (Beirut: Dar al-Thaqafah, 1960), 247.
5. Muhammad ibn Fattuh al-Humaydi, *Jadhwat al-Muqtabis fī Tārīkh ‘Ulamā’ al-Andalus* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1983), 2:489.
6. A. G. Chejne, *Ibn Ḥazm* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, Inc., 1982), 20.
7. Muhammad Abu Laila, “An Introduction to the Life and Work of Ibn Hazm,” *Islamic Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1985): 75.

8. Eric L. Ormsby, "Ibn Hazm," *Dictionary of Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph Strayer (New York: Scribner, 1985), 6:117.
9. Abu Laila, "An Introduction," 76.
10. A. G. Chejne, *Ibn Hazm* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, Inc., 1982), 21.
11. Muhammad Abu Zahra, *Ibn Ḥazm: Ḥayātuh wa 'Aṣruh, Ārā'uh wa Fiqhuh* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1954), 26.
12. Peter C. Scales, "The Search for Ibn Hazm, the Historian, and the Discovery of his *Ḥubb al-Waṭan*," *Boletín de la Asociación Española de Orientalistas* (1985), 21:197-98.
13. Ibn Fattuh, *Jadhwat*, 2:491. In poetic verses addressed to Judge 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Ahmad Cordoba, Ibn Hazm boasts of his knowledge and acknowledges his roots that: "I am like the Sun, bright in the sky of knowledge... / But my fault ('aybī) is having risen from the West. / And if I were to rise from the East / Even the robber (*nahab*) would have persevered for my lost remembrance."
14. 'Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Hazm, *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāmah fī al-Ulfa wa al-Ullāf*, ed. Ihsan Abbas (Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah, 1993), 166.
15. Muhammad Mahjubi, *Ibn Ḥazm al-Zāhiri: Ḥayātuh wa 'Aṣruh* (Rabat: Dar al-Qalam, 2000), 15.
16. Ibn Hazm, *Ṭawq*, 269.
17. *Ibid.*, 223-24. For a very elaborate and romantic description of this girl, see 249-50.
18. *Ibid.*, 492. Ibn Hazm justifies his bold assertion in the following poetic verses: "For I have in Joseph, a best example (*uswah*)... / Since there is no sin for whoever follows a prophet's example. / He says, according to the Real and the True [God], "I am... / the most guarding, the most knowledgeable," and a speaker of truth carries no blame ('*atb*)."
19. C. Brockelmann, *G.A.L.* S1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1937), 694-97.
20. 'Abd al-Halim 'Uways, *Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī: Juhūdūhū fī al-Baḥth al-Tārikhī al-Ḥaḍārī* (Cairo: al-Zahra' li al-I'lām al-'Arabi, 1988), 114-17.
21. C. Brockelmann and other scholars identify this book as *al-Faṣl*, which would mean that Ibn Hazm considers the entire book a "chapter" or a single collection of ideas in which he discusses various sects. Other scholars, including myself, maintain that it should be read as *al-Fiṣal* (chapters). Another reason for the latter choice is that scholars during Ibn Hazm's time liked to rhyme their titles. Thus *al-Fiṣal* seems more appropriate than *al-Faṣl* (consider: *al-Fiṣal*, *al-Milal*, and *al-Niḥal*). Perhaps as a result of this *al-Fiṣal* came to be more popular.
22. Al-Humaydi, *Jadhwa*, 2:490. I believe that al-Humaydi's list is correct for what he includes, but incomplete for what he leaves out. For instance, *Ṭawq* and other works should have been included.

Zakīy Ibrahim, Editor
Comparative Religion Department
California State University Fullerton
zibrahim@fullerton.edu