

IBN HAZM

IBN HAZM (An 384-456/994-1064 CE), more fully Abu Muhammad 'Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Sa'id ibn Hazm; Muslim theologian and man of letters. Born in Cordova to a rich and influential family, Ibn Hazm received a distinguished education in religious sciences, literature, and poetry. Nonetheless, he grew up in a period of disruptive ethnic and clan rivalries that saw the decline of the Umayyad caliphate at Cordova and the formation of tiny kingdoms fighting among themselves. His own childhood was marred by the disgrace of his father after the fall of Caliph Hisham II and by the destruction of the family home at Balat Mughith in the course of bloody battles between Arabs and Berbers.

As a result of his political activities on behalf of the legitimist (Umayyad) party, Ibn Hazm met with imprisonment, banishment, and flight but was appointed to high positions as well, serving as vizier at least twice, under 'Abd al-Rahman III al-Murtada and 'Abd al-Rah-man V al-Mustazhir, and possibly a third time under the last caliph, Hisham al-Mu'tadd. Profoundly disappointed by his political experience and offended by the conduct of his contemporaries, Ibn Hazm subsequently left public life and devoted his last thirty years to literary activities.

His writings are quite personal, shaped by the intensity of his own reactions and rigorous in their condemnation of what is, in fact, only human nature. *Tawq al-hamamah* (The Dove's Neck-Ring), a youthful work that was clearly revised later, is interesting in several respects. As a collection of prose passages and poetic illustrations on the subject of love and lovers, it offers a fairly standard treatment of a popular theme in Arabic literature. What sets it apart, however, is Ibn Hazm's penetrating observation of human psychology, a trait found in his later study of characters and conduct, *Kitab al-akhlaq wa-al-siyar*, as well. Underlying the delicate charm of the prose and poetry in *The Dove's Neck-Ring* is an uneasy sensibility. Questioning, for example, the sincerity of exchanges between women and their lovers, Ibn Hazm finds a gap between what is said and what is thought and concludes that language often serves to mask thought. This otherwise commonplace discovery of dishonesty provides him in turn with a basis for profound reflection on language and its wider uses, and it is here that he introduces the notion of *Zahir*, the "apparent" or literal meaning of words.

This line of thought is further developed when Ibn Hazm examines the word of God. In opposition to the *Malikiyah*, he argues that people are bound to obey only the law of God, in its *zahir* or literal sense, without restrictions, additions, or modifications. Although he was originally a *Shafi'i* jurist, Ibn Hazm joined the *Zahiri* school and brought to it a systematic structure of logic. For the interpretation of sacred texts, he put together a *Zahiri* grammar in which he specifically eliminates the ambiguities that grammarians were using to explain certain syntactical forms. He takes the position that language itself provides all that is necessary for the understanding of its content and that, therefore, God, who revealed the *Qur'an* in clear (*mubin*) Arabic, has used the language to say precisely what he means. Each verse should be understood grammatically and lexically in its immediate and general sense: when God wants a verse to have a specific meaning, he provides an indication (*dalil*), in the same verse or elsewhere, which allows the meaning to be restricted.

The significance of a Qur'anic text can also be determined by a hadith recognized as authentic after careful critical examination; a verb in the imperative, for example, can be taken as a command, but also as a suggestion: the meaning can be determined only from the literal sense of the context. From this position, it follows that Ibn Hazm strongly criticizes the use of reasoning by analogy (qiyas) and the principles of personal evaluation: the pursuit of what is considered good (istihsan), the pursuit of values for the common good (istislah), and most of all, the recourse to personal opinion (ra'y) by which the jurists sought to extend divine law to cases not mentioned in the texts (nusus). In the same spirit, he limits the basis of consensus (ijma') to the companions of the Prophet; the agreement of the community of scholars on a legal question does not authorize the derivation of a law.

In *Al-ihkam fi usul al-ahkam* (Judgment on the Principles of Ahkam), Ibn Hazm develops his method for classifying human acts within the five established juridical categories (ahkam) of obligatory, recommended, disapproved, forbidden, and lawful: for an action to fall into one of the first four categories, there must be a text (Qur'an or authentic hadith) that establishes its particular status; otherwise, the act is lawful. This method is further applied in his voluminous treatise on Zahirī law, *Kitab al-muhalla* (The Book of Ornaments).

Ibn Hazm is also famous for his great work, the *Fisal* (Detailed Critical Examination), in which he offers a critical survey of different systems of philosophical thought in relation to religious beliefs among the skeptics, Peripatetics, brahmans, Zoroastrians and other dualists, Jews, and Christians. Using the examination of these religions to establish the preeminence of Islam, he also attacks all the Muslim theologians, the Mu'tazilah and the Ash'ariyah in particular, along with the philosophers and mystics. His main objection is that each of them raises questions about the revealed text only to resolve them by purely human means. Ibn Hazm does not deny recourse to reason, since the Qur'an itself invites reflection, but this reflection must be limited to two givens, revelation and sense data, since the so-called principles of reason are in fact derived entirely from immediate sense experience. Thus reason is not a faculty for independent research, much less for discovery.

By submitting humans exclusively to the word of God, Ibn Hazm's literalism frees them from any choice of their own. His drive for synthesis leads him to demonstrate the harmony of all the Qur'anic and prophetic texts through the application of Zahirī principles. As a result, his work constitutes one of the most original and important monuments of Muslim thought.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A general work for the study of Ibn Hazm is W. Montgomery Watt and Pierre Cachia's *A History of Islamic Spain* (Edinburgh, 1965), which provides a useful summary of cultural and political history as well as a detailed bibliography. D. B. Macdonald's *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory* (1903; reprint, New York, 1965) and Ignaz Goldziher's classic work *The Zahiris: Their Doctrine and Their History*, translated and edited by Wolfgang Behn (Leiden, 1971), shed light on the legal and theological currents of which Ibn Hazm was a part.

A work that specifically concerns Ibn Hazm is my *Gram-maire et theologie chez Ibn Hazm de Cordoue: Essai sur la struc-ture et les conditions de la pens a musulmane* (Paris, 1956). Mi-guel As?n Palacios's *Abenh?zam de C?rdoba y su historia cr?tica de las ideas religiosas*, 5 vols. (Madrid, 1927-1932), is an ana-lytical edition and partial translation of Ibn Hazm's most famous work, *Kitab al-fall fi al-milal wa-al-ahwa' wa-al-nihal*. His *Tawq al-hamamah ft al-ulfah wa-al-ullaf* has been translated by A. R. Nykl as *A Book Containing the Risala Known as the Dove's Neck-ring, about Love and Lovers* (Paris, 1931) and by A. J. Ar-berry as *The Ring of the Dove* (London, 1953).

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