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Source: *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Oct., 1923), pp. 30-36

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/528141>

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IBN ḤAZM'S TREATISE ON ETHICS

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Abū Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Aḥmad b. Saʿīd Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī az-Zāhirī (994-1064), generally known as Ibn Ḥazm, has received somewhat unjust treatment at the hands of his Spanish-Arab countrymen and of Arab scholars in general. Though Ibn Baškwāl¹ says that next to Ṭabarī Ibn Ḥazm was the most prolific writer in Islām, very few of the latter's works have come to light. Quotations made from his *Māratib ul-idjmāʿ* by Ibn an-Naqqāf were translated into French and annotated by M. Belin, *J.As.*, 4. Série, Vol. XVIII (1851), p. 500 ff. The most important of his theological works, *Al Milal wan-Nihal*, was published in Cairo in 1903 and used in his studies on Shiism by Friedländer.² A detailed analysis and study of the whole of this work so important for the history of the Islamic religion in Spain has thus far not appeared. In 1914 Pétroff published the unique (Leyden) MS of Ibn Ḥazm's treatise on love³ which is of considerable importance for the study of the origins of Troubadour poetry. This book is not mentioned by Haġġī Khalifa in the list of Ibn Ḥazm's works. Of the works enumerated by Haġġī Khalifa there is one whose title is similar to the work I am studying,⁴ though no positive proof can be given as to their identity. In 1908 there was published in Cairo, edited by Aḥmad ʿOmar al-Mahmasānī of Al-Azhar, Ibn Ḥazm's Treatise on Ethics, under the title *Al-Akhlāq was-siyar fī mudāwāti-n-nufūs*. This was exceedingly well translated and commented upon by the Spanish scholar Miguel Asín Palacios, under the title *Los Caracteres y la Conducta*.⁵

¹ *Kitāb aṣ-ṣilla*, Biblioteca Arabico-Hispana, I (1882), 408, and II (1883), 409.

² "Zur Komposition von Ibn Ḥazm's *Milal wan-Nihal*," in the *Oriental. Studien* in honor of Th. Noeldeke (Giessen, 1906), p. 267; *JAOS*, XXVIII (1907), 1-80, XXIX (1908), 1-183; *Zeitschr. für Assyriologie*, XXIII (1909), 296-327; XXIV (1910), 1-46.

³ *Tauk-al-Ḥamāma*, D. K. Pétroff, Leyden, 1914.

⁴ V, 471. Title given: (*Al-Akhlāq was-siyar*) *Mudāwāt un-nufūs*.

⁵ Madrid, 1916. Published by the Junta para ampliación de estudios e investigaciones científicas (Centro de Estudios Históricos).

The translator is inclined to believe that the MS published in Cairo is not identical with the work mentioned by Ibn Ḥazm's biographers, since the editor, in a list of Ibn Ḥazm's works given in the Preface, quotes them as two different works, one: *Mudāwāt un-nufūs* (*Akhlāq was-siyar*) named after the headings of chapters i, ix, and iv, and dealing mostly with the author's personal experience, while the other book is given as *Kitāb Akhlāq an-nafs*, which the translator surmises to correspond to a rather technical and systematized treatise on the model of Aristotle's *Ethics*.

The translator tells us that the published text covers 106 pages, 8vo, that it was carefully corrected by the editor who has also added a few brief lexicological notes in order to facilitate the understanding of the somewhat archaic and ultra-classical terms of Ibn Ḥazm. There is also a brief prologue and a bio-bibliographical note concerning the author, drawn from well-known sources. No mention has been made as to the manuscript from which the text was printed. Most likely it must have belonged to some private library.

Three years later the Cairo bookseller Muḥammad efendi Edhem published another edition, considerably smaller (78 pp., 8vo), bearing on the inside page the title: *Mudāwāt un-nufūs wa tahzīb un-nufūs waz-zuhd fir-razā'il*.¹ I had begun the translation of this edition when Asín's Spanish translation came to my notice. On comparing my text with Asín's I found that the omissions are much more considerable than indicated by the Spanish translator in a footnote where he attributes them to an inferior MS. My impression is that the omissions were rather intentional possibly with the view of reducing the size of the book. Otherwise the two editions may proceed from the same original. In the second edition nothing really important for the general reader is omitted, the longest passages taken out being those wherein the author confesses and analyzes his own

¹ Both the first and second editions are without date, but Asín assumes as probable dates 1908 and 1911. As regards the second his copy has two titles, the outside title reading: *نلسفة الاخلاق السمة مداواة النفوس و تهذيب الاخلاق* *كلمات في الاخلاق او مداواة النفوس*. He also mentions a hybrid book, published in 1913, 108 pp., 8 vo, under the title: *البعث عن الرذائل لان حزم*. of which the first 53 pages contain Ibn Ḥazm's work and the remainder is taken up by a collection of thoughts on social morals by Qāsim Bey Emin.

weaknesses and cites anecdotes which in the eyes of the general reader would be apt to lower his prestige and authority.

The book is divided into twelve chapters. The translator subdivided these very appropriately into 349 paragraphs. The titles and the corresponding paragraphs are as follows:

- Prologue, 1-2
- I. Healing of souls and correction of wicked traits of character, 3-12
- II. Concerning reasonable behavior and peace of soul which consists in disregarding what people say and paying attention to what God says, 13-30
- III. Concerning knowledge, 31-55
- IV. Concerning character and conduct, 56-119
- V. Concerning friends, true friendship and giving advice, 120-154
- VI. Concerning kinds of love, 155-175
- VII. Concerning kinds of beauty of forms, 176-180
- VIII. Concerning social intercourse based on character types, 181-222
- IX. Concerning methods of healing of corrupt characters, 223-318
- X. Concerning strange things in the characters of the soul, 319-325
- XI. Concerning the endeavor of the soul to discover what has been hidden away from it in things heard or hankering after things conducive to praise or perpetuation of memory, 326-333
- XII. Concerning attending scientific gatherings, 334-349

Edhem's edition omits the following paragraphs:

- 27-30, inclusive of chapter ii.
- 55, inclusive of chapter iii.
- 64, 71, 74, 76, 77, 78, 81, 82-85, inclusive, part of 87, 88, part of 89, 95-104, inclusive, 106-111, inclusive, part of 113 and 114 of chapter iv.
- Part of 125, 132, 134, parts of 135, 136 of chapter v.
- A sentence in 155, chapter vi. Some discrepancy in wording in 163, 165, chapter vi. In my edition paragraph 175 of chapter vi appears as a heading of a new chapter, without anything following.
- 207, 212, 222, in chapter viii.
- 239 (part), 247 (part), 256 (part), 268 (part), 272-277 inclusive, 279, 304, in chapter ix. The last paragraph, 318, of this chapter appears on page 42, chapter viii, in Edhem.
- Last sentence in 325, chapter x.
- 340, 341, 344-349, inclusive, in chapter xii.

Of these omissions the most important are those in chapter iv, which contain the best examples of Ibn Ḥazm's method in the use of self-analysis, reminding one of Al Ghazzālī's *Confessions*, those of

St. Augustine, Petrarch's *Secretum*, and the essays of Montaigne. They also are illustrative of the manner in which he arrived at the thesis defended in the book, which I shall mention later. He says:

I have had some vices, but have made assiduously a great effort to correct them by means of ascetic discipline and by studying what the prophets and the most prominent ancient and modern philosophers teach concerning moral habits and the curbing of passions. God has helped me with his mercy to correct most of these vices; but I believe that a public confession of the same behoves a righteous soul which has already overcome its passions and knows how to hold in its hand the reins of reality, in order that some day this confession may serve as an example and exhortation to others.

One of these defects was bad humor and violent anger, which I have not ceased to combat until I succeeded in suppressing its external manifestations, namely, outbursts of anger in cursing, blows and attacks on others, and I have suppressed even illicit desires of secret vengeance. In order to achieve it, I had to suffer great inconvenience and put up with grievous displeasures which at times almost made me become ill, this again preventing me from being in good humor: besides I believed in the beginning that the suppression of anger and bad humor was the sign of baseness of character, and therefore suppressed myself less.

Another defect was an irresistible inclination to mockery by speaking jestingly, because to speak seriously seemed to me tedious and characteristic of proud people. My correction in this respect limited itself to withholding myself from every jest which might provoke the anger of the victim of my mockery.

Another defect was a great vanity; but my reason, which was very well aware of the defects of my soul, argued with it until it succeeded in dissipating all this vanity without leaving, thanks to God, any trace; I even compelled my soul to recognize the unworthiness of its being and to practice humility.

Another defect was the love of glory and scientific prestige; in the cure of this defect I only succeeded in avoiding all that religion considers as forbidden, and I hope to God that he will help me to correct the rest.

Another defect was such an excess of bashfulness that I finally contracted an absolute repugnance and an instinctive aversion toward marriage, and even the impossibility to overcome this exaggerated bashfulness, the imperfection of which I recognized. The cause of this defect were some adverse events which happened to me, against which only God's help is of avail.

I had two other defects which God permitted to remain hidden, and helped me besides with his mercy to combat them. One of them has already disappeared forever, thanks to God, and since then it seems to me that happiness has clung inseparably to me. It reappears at times, like a flash of lightning, but I suppress it. The second has stayed with me for a long time.

Each time when the impulse of its attack rushes upon me, the channels through which it circulates are stirred up and its appearance seems imminent, but God through His mercy makes it always easy to suppress it and persevere in the path of virtue.

Another defect was excessive rancor which with the help of God I succeeded in keeping well hidden and in suppressing even the manifestation of some of its effects; but I never was able to uproot it absolutely. Besides, it has always prevented me from establishing friendship with those who at any time were my enemies.

As regards the accusation which my ignorant enemies are launching against me, saying that when I consider a thing true I do not hesitate to oppose anyone, though it may be the whole of the inhabitants of the earth, and that I care little to adjust myself to the usages and customs adopted without any reasonable cause by my countrymen; I must say that this quality with which they reproach me is rather one of my greatest virtues, not to be compared with any other of my qualities. And by my life I assert that did I not possess it (which God forbid) it would be one of the favors which I would desire most and ask of my Creator. And the same thing I advise to all those to whom these words of mine may come; he will derive no profit from following others in vain and superfluous things, when by it he provokes the anger of God or betrays the judgment of his own reason or does harm to his body or soul, or imposes upon himself a painful, completely useless work.

Then he defends himself against the accusation that he did not answer the slander which was spread about him or did not defend absent friends who were being slandered in his presence. He claims that such things take care of themselves without it being necessary to interfere actively, for such interference might lead to blows and would be irrational.

The main purpose of his work is stated in the first chapter, thus:

I was endeavoring to discover a goal which all people unanimously approve and seek, and I found that there is but one, namely, the avoidance of pain. The avoidance of pain is a principle upon which are agreed all the peoples since God created the universe. There is not in the universe since it came into existence until it ends anyone who would like pain and would not wish to repel it from himself. And when this lofty knowledge became clearly and firmly established in my spirit and this wonderful secret was revealed to me, I began to investigate the path by which to reach the truthful method by which to avoid pain. There is but one road to attain it, namely, work for the sake of Allah, Most High, and anything that is contrary to this is aberration and stupidity. Do not exert your soul except in things which are on a higher plane. He who exerts his soul in purposes of this world is like unto him who buys pebbles for precious stones.¹

¹ This reminds one strongly of Spinoza's *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*, chap. i.

The method recommended pivots largely on the well-known Buddhist categorical imperative: Do not desire (لا تطمع). Vanity, pride, craving for fame, riches and worldly pleasures, propensity to anger are the chief vices to be avoided. In order to achieve it one has to free himself from ignorance and acquire knowledge for the purpose of correcting one's judgment. However, not everyone has the God-given gift to acquire knowledge. Ibn Ḥazm does not believe in democracy. "The imparting of knowledge to one who is not born to it is detrimental to him, for it is like feeding honey or sweet things to one who has fever. Profound knowledge is like strong medicine which heals strong bodies and kills weak bodies." Preparedness, frankness, magnanimity, generosity, justice, patience, honesty, courage, abstinence, and sincerity in friendship are the qualities which if practiced wisely and without the desire of praise or reward will maintain for him who unswervingly adheres to this principle the good will of his fellow-men and thus free him from worries, preoccupation, troubles = pain.

The book is very valuable for the better understanding of Ibn Ḥazm's *Tauk al Ḥamāma* as it gives the exact definitions of various terms he uses to describe certain virtues. In the chapter on love he gives an interesting classification of the degrees of love, altogether five in number. (1) The approval (الاستكسان) when after seeing a person, our imagination represents that person to us as a beautiful thing or reminds us of his or her moral qualities as good: this first degree love has in common with friendship. (2) Admiration (الاعجاب) when one finds pleasure in looking at the person beloved and in being near him or her. (3) Falling in love (الالفة) which is to feel sadness when the beloved is absent. (4) Obsession (الكلف) when the lover is dominated by the preoccupation or fixed idea of the beloved: in sexual love this is called passion (عشق). (5) Amorous madness (الشغف) which means loss of sleep and appetite for food and drink or becoming ill or coming into ecstasy, speaking to one's self like a madman or even dying of love. Beyond this degree there is none. The certain criterion of love having disappeared is when jealousy is gone. In chapter vii he gives the definition of terms applying to various kinds of beauty of forms: Sweetness, (الحلاوة) = delicacy of lines or features, graceful suavity of motions, refinement in gestures and the harmonious adaptation of the soul

to accidents of the physical form, though the latter may lack beauty. Correctness (القوام) is beauty of the form in every one of its qualities considered separately; hence it is possible that the form of a person may be correct, if each one of its qualities is considered, but since his face is cold in expression it may not be graceful, beautiful, attractive, or sweet. Prettiness (الروعة) is the correctness of the physical form, animated besides by lightness of expression. It is also called vivacity (الغراهة) or frankness (العتف). Beauty (الحسن) is a thing which cannot be expressed because there is no adequate term in the dictionary to express it, but which all who see it unanimately feel in the depth of their souls. Gracefulness (اللاحة) is the combination of these various qualities.

Taken as a whole, the book is not a systematic treatise, but as the author says in the Prologue, an assembly of observations which he had jotted down in the course of years as he was pondering the main problem. This autobiographical and personal touch constitutes the main value of the work. Here Ibn Ḥazm reveals himself as a sincere, earnest seeker after truth, uncompromising and rigid, not the flighty poet of love as Dozy makes him out to be on the basis of excerpts from *Tauk al Ḥamāma*.¹ Earnestness is the basis of his versatile personality. It was this quality and his confessedly excessive combativeness (which he blames on his bile) that brought upon him the disfavor of his contemporaries and drove him into the solitary confinement of Niebla. This disfavor lasted after his death and made some believe that he was a hopeless crank.² However, the more one studies him, the more his sterling qualities appear. As a representative of his time he is by far more vivid and frank than other Spanish Arabs whose fame overshadowed his.

¹ Cf. A. von Schack, *Poesie u. Kunst der Araber*, 2d ed., pp. 112 ff.

² Macdonald, *Muslim Theology*, p. 110.