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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 multifaceted scholar. Charles Pellat, in his article on "Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusi" writes: "Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī ibn ʿAbī Ḥamad ibn Saʿīd ibn Ḥazm, a poet, man-of-letters, historian, polemist, jurist, theologian, logician, metaphysician, and psychologist, was certainly one of the most refined and productive representatives of the Arab culture in Spain."

His Genealogy

One of the most complete genealogies of Ibn Hazm is Abu Muhammad Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Saʿīd ibn Hazm ibn Ghalib ibn Salih ibn Khalaf ibn Sufyan ibn Yazid. Ibn Hazm was born at Cordoba (Andalusia/Islamic Spain) in 994 to an influential family and died in 1064 in Manta Lisham, which came to be known as Casa Montija 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 (mawla) of Yazid ibn Abi Sufyan. 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 Muʿadh 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.
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 ‘ajami 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 (shāhādatu) 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.”

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. 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 Tawq al-Hamâmah 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. Therefore say something in which I will never stop believing. [That] men and women, in their inclination toward these things, are equal.

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 Tawq how, as a youngster, he once pursued a girl in his father’s mansion – but to no avail.
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. 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, while ‘Abd al-Halim ‘Uways’ Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusi provides a list of fifty-three titles. Al-Humaydi mentions that his teacher’s most important works are Al-Iṣāl ilā Faḥm Kitāb al-Khiṣāl, Al-Iḥkām li Uṣūl al-Ahkām, Al-Fiṣāl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwā’ wa al-Niḥal, Al-Ijmā’ wa Masā’il iluh, Marātib al-‘Ulūm, and Al-Taqāb li Ḥadd al-Manṭiq.

My subsequent editorials will address Ibn Hazm’s legal and theological contributions, including his zahiriyyah 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

13. Ibn Fattuh, Jadhwat, 2:491. In poetic verses addressed to Judge ʿAbd 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 (ʿayb) 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.”
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 (ʿātb).”
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-Mīlal, and al-Niḥal). Perhaps as a result of this al-Fiṣal came to be more popular.
22. Al-Humaydi, Jadhwat, 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.

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Localizing Islam in Europe: Turkish Islamic Communities in Germany and the Netherlands
Ahmet Yüksel

During April 2012, Salafi Muslims in Germany launched a Qur’an giveaway program to save non-Muslims from hell. Soon after, public debates emerged in the national media concerning broader Muslim transgressions in Europe. Especially the Turks, 3 million strong and two-thirds of Germany’s Muslims according to the Federal Migration and Refugees Office, underwent further scrutiny. The August 17, 2012, issue of the popular news magazine Der Spiegel posited why Turkish Muslims escaped the backlash against Islamist radicalism this time: Despite their proud Muslim identity, Turks living in Europe yearn to be integrated and feel at home in Germany. Until recently, migration scholars emphasized the incompatibility between Islam and western values, thereby portraying European Turks as another Muslim community that defied assimilation. Localizing Islam challenges this scholarship and explains why Turks feel at home in Europe. It compares several Turkish Sunni organizations in Germany and the Netherlands, reinvents ways they interpret Islam, and argues that Islam’s inner diversity has endured within the European context.

The opening chapters, “Turkish Islamic Field” and “Islamic Authority and Knowledge,” consider specific Islamist organizations as principals to supplying and consuming religious interpretations. These organizations pursue dissimilar courses of actions: “The National Vision” (Millî Görüş) is political Islamist, the Kaplan is radical Islamist, the Gülen is education-oriented, the Diyanet is Turkish state-sponsored, and the Süleymanlı is mystical Sufi. They negotiate vertically between the host state and their followers, and compete horizontally with other organizations by claiming that their path is the “true” Islam. Operating through such avenues as religious rituals, reading circles, and public meetings, each organization seeks to reinforce its authority within the broader Turkish community.

Chapters 3 and 4, “Islamic Activism” and “State Policies and Islam in Germany and the Netherlands,” respectively, explore dimensions of rivalry between Islamist organizations by demonstrating the extent to which particular “socio-religious activism” (khidmat) helps followers exploit opportunistic spaces provided by state policies. Significantly, these chapters find that the manifestation, shape, and adaptation of Islamic organizations depend on the host government’s policies. For example Millî Görüş, which must deal with
the difficulties created by the parameters of Germany’s exclusionist policies, functions quite freely within the Dutch multicultural system.

The final chapters, “Islamic Organizations and Muslim Integration” and “The Kaplan Community,” trace the discourse of Muslim integration into Dutch society and the formulation of the Kaplan’s revolutionary message. These chapters suggest that heightened religiosity has both pros and cons: it inspires a sense of belongingness in the community, but simultaneously leads to communal isolation.

Localizing Islam takes a novel perspective by looking at the problem of integration from the community outward and as one involving dialectical processes among stakeholders. It convincingly contests existing assumptions about the formation of Turkish communities and the ability of several Islamic organizations to claim religious authority among their followers in Germany and the Netherlands. The book’s valuable contribution comes by way of concluding that, for Turks, being Muslim in Europe is a double-edged sword: Islamic identity exposes them to discrimination and rejection, but the European space simultaneously allows them a freedom to organize and function in a way that would not be possible in the Turkish or Arab worlds. Thanks to sectarian divisions, however, the multiplicity of competing organizations loom large and thus both divides them and limits their chances to confront their societal grievances as a united front. This book enriches the extent of research in the field by its resourceful use of participant observation, surveys, and interviews with several generations of Turks in Europe.

Localising Islam has several flaws in approach, content, and structure, however. To begin, the margins of comparative analysis are not cogently drawn: The introduction considers Europe’s larger Muslim community (viz., Arabs in France and Indo-Pakistanis in Britain), yet the following chapters discuss Turkish communities in Germany and the Netherlands exclusively. Thus French assimilationist policies and British multicultural projects are not presented as they relate to Turkish migrations to these countries.

Two of Yüksel’s major contentions are that the migration experience increased religiosity among Turkish Muslim immigrants in Europe and that during the 1980s Turkish Muslim organizations struggled to control each mosque. If this is the case, then the Turks’ reorientation toward a stronger Islamic identity and inner communal struggles also requires examining “other Turks,” those who identify themselves more with Kemalist values and less with Islamic norms, and the “alternative courses” that Turks have used to cross over organizational lines. Evidently, Turkish families in Europe simultaneously attend activities of multiple organizations: They perform the Eid
prayers in the Diyanet mosque and send their children to both the Gülen and the Süleymani (Qur’anic) schools; some even join the summer picnics of Milli Görüş.

Localising Islam would have been well served by providing a more balanced account of Turkish Islamic organizations. Perhaps because the author supports the Gülenists, the book is clearly silent on the movement’s shortcomings, especially its lack of appeal to the lower classes and its increasingly notorious image as a pretentious “money- and prestige-loving” group concerned more with networking host country leaders and less with community problems. A more objective approach to Islamic groups (especially when comparing the Milli Görüş, Diyanet, and Gülen organizations) would have added immensely to the book’s overall quality of analysis.

The book is often quite repetitive in its descriptions, and the style tends to be rather sluggish (it is an issue this reviewer finds in multiple monographs published by the same publisher. See, for instance, Nizar Hamzeh’s In the Path of Hizbullah (2004)). Arguably, a more rigorous editing would have turned the author’s dissertation into a better book.

Advanced readers in the field may find the book’s depiction of historical developments somewhat shallow. For instance, “since the middle of the nineteenth century,” it states, “the Ottoman Empire emulated European military and political administration, equating modernization with westernization” (p. 13). As such Ottomanists as Şükrü Hanoğlu and Kemal Karpat have argued, “the Late Ottoman Empire” (government, intellectuals, institutions, and peoples) can hardly be reduced into a monolithic, passive entity that, having reached a consensus on westernization as the only way to modernization, emulated Europe unconditionally. The socio-historical developments in Turkey and Europe seem to deserve a deeper analysis, even though they relate only indirectly to the book’s central themes.

Minor points may confuse rather than inform general readers. At one point, Islamic organizations are said to help youths build self-confidence by learning their own history, culture, and religion. In another case, the author states that there is no central authority that theologically defines or represents Sunni Islam as there is, for example, in the hierarchical Catholic Church. In these cases, the type of history, culture, and religion “owned” by youths and why Sunni Islam is compared to the Catholic Church must be explained at greater length.

Notwithstanding its flaws, Localising Islam is a valuable contribution to the field. Ruth Mandel’s Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) and Philip Martin’s The Unfinished Story: Turkish Labour Migration to Western Europe: With Special Reference to the Federal Republic of Germany
(Geneva: International Labour Office, 1991) might remain the field’s reference books, but Localising Islam is certainly of great interest to students of Turkish migrations eager to learn about Turkish Islamic organizations inside out.

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Ottoman Ulema, Turkish Republic: Agents of Change and Guardians of Tradition
Amit Bein

Much has been written about religion and secularism in Turkey over the past decades, but detailed histories of the late Ottoman and modern Turkish ulema have been few and far between. Therefore, this recent book by Amit Bein is a welcome and a much needed contribution to the literature on the Turkish ulema and to the literature on religion in modern Turkey in general. It charts the vicissitudes of the ulema during a period of dramatic change from the late nineteenth century until roughly 1960. Bein shows the multiple challenges the ulema faced during successive rounds of political and social reform and the various approaches that they took in response. The diversity of opinion and political orientation within the ulema corps are on full display from the most ardent nationalist figures, who supported state reforms in all respects, to the staunchest enemies of the republican regime. This book conveys a nuanced understanding of who the Turkish ulema were and how they navigated the empire-to-republic transition.

Over the course of this history, Bein charts out the key issues for the marginalization of the ulema with attention to both rhetoric and actual initiatives. Chapter 2 demonstrates how French Revolutionary anticlerical attitudes informed public perceptions of the ulema in late Ottoman times. Much of the Ottoman intelligentsia came to see the ulema as the primary obstacle to modernization and progress, an attitude which continued into and intensified during the Turkish Republic. After the 1908 Revolution, the ulema experienced unprecedented public attacks in the media, which the author illustrates here with diverse primary materials. It was not only secular nationalists but also devout “Islamic intellectuals” non-ulama intelligentsia who criticized the ulema and demanded a thoroughgoing reform of religious education. Moreover, Islamic intellectuals viewed the government as the primary mechanism for modernizing and imposing reform upon the men of religion. In fact, both