

## Book Reviews



### Camilla Adang, Maribel Fierro, and Sabine Schmidtke (eds.)

*Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba: The Life and Works of a Controversial Thinker*. Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 1, The Near and Middle East, ed. Maribel Fierro, M. Şükrü-Hanioğlu, and Kees Versteegh, no. 103. Leiden: Brill, 2013. Pp. xxii + 804. Hardback. ISBN: 9789004234246. €237 / \$329.

Neither a comprehensive reference work nor yet an ordinary collection of conference papers, this massive volume is an engaging read and a perfect starting point for anyone venturing into the study of Ibn Ḥazm. Its value stems in part from the editors' decision to include not only the papers from a 2008 workshop in Istanbul but also several previously published pieces that were translated and updated for this volume. Five major articles by José Miguel Puerta Vilchez, Adam Sabra, and Samir Kaddouri, which had not received sufficient attention in English-language scholarship, form the backbone of the book; the shorter papers build upon them, offering more tentative and focused insights in implicit dialogue with that prior scholarship and with one another. To call the papers uneven would miss the point; they have different aims and origins, and they serve complementary purposes in this magnificent collection.

The book's topical arrangement – life and times, law, linguistics, aesthetics, logic and theology, polemics, and reception history – gives it the appearance of a reference work, in keeping with the aims of Brill's Handbooks of Oriental Studies, but it cannot really function as such for several reasons: it lacks a subject index; the interpretations it offers are too often dated, tentative, speculative, or contradictory; and it is far from comprehensive. (There is little attention to Ibn Ḥazm's poetry or his views on *ḥadīth*, and the section on Zāhirī linguistics says little about Ibn Ḥazm himself.) A better way to read the book is all at once but out of order. To begin, an excellent overview of Ibn Ḥazm's multifaceted intellectual life can be gained from the "Inventory of Ibn Ḥazm's Works" by Puerta Vilchez, which includes titles of lost books and detailed summaries of extant and partially preserved ones, along with selective references to citations,

manuscripts, editions, and relevant scholarship. (Note that #75, *Mas'īl uṣūl al-fiqh*, does not appear to have been composed as a separate work; it consists of material from the introduction to #80, *al-Muḥallā*, mainly about reports, consensus, analogy, and *ijtihād*, that was republished by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī al-Dimashqī in *Majmū' rasā'il fi uṣūl al-tafsīr wa-uṣūl al-fiqh* (Damascus: Maṭba'at al-Fayḥā', 1331[1912–13]), pp. 27–52.) Turning next to the “Biographical Sketch,” also by Puerta Vílchez, one gets the other side of Ibn Ḥazm's life: a rather disjointed compilation of information about his travels, acquaintances, and variable fortunes. This supplies a helpful baseline for the three essays that follow, which reinterpret the biographical data (sometimes in mutually incompatible ways) to offer more focused interpretations of specific aspects of Ibn Ḥazm's social and political relationships. Bruna Soravia offers a revisionist account of Ibn Ḥazm's political life, stressing his involvement in an Amirid brotherhood; Alejandro García-Sanjuán investigates the rural family estate near Huelva where he eventually retired; and David J. Wasserstein explores again the puzzle (to which Soravia has just offered a persuasive answer) of his true political loyalties.

Wasserstein's entertaining essay concludes that whatever else Ibn Ḥazm may have been, a historian he was not. In the following chapter Gabriel Martínez-Gros agrees but goes on to sketch a grand tension in Ibn Ḥazm's intellectual life between universals like the rational sciences and human passions, which he saw as powerful but dangerous, and “history” in the sense of transmitted knowledge of particular events, which he regarded as the path of safety and salvation. This brief and evocative portrayal continues the tradition of Ignaz Goldziher and Roger Arnaldez, who stressed Ibn Ḥazm's reliance on traditions and his literalism, respectively. As the rest of this volume demonstrates, however, this interpretation no longer holds sway over Ḥazmian studies. When his legal and theological literalism are understood in the larger context of his general theories of universals, perception, epistemology, and language, Ibn Ḥazm turns out to be above all a confident rationalist and empiricist who, like many of the Mu'tazila, was led by that very rationalism to apply revealed texts strictly and literally within the limited domains to which he said reason had no access.

This relatively recent shift in our understanding of Ibn Ḥazm will appear most clearly if one turns next to the third foundational contribution by Puerta Vílchez, the lengthy chapter on “Art and Aesthetics,” which is far more than its title suggests: a brilliant interpretation of Ibn Ḥazm's overall theory of reality, perception, knowledge, language, emotion, and the soul. This brings together two strands in Ḥazmian studies that have too long been separate: fascination with his poetic writing on love, and a more dour preoccupation with his strident literalism. Puerta Vílchez shows that these are complementary pieces of a

remarkably coherent intellectual vision: Ibn Ḥazm's literalism and zeal for certainty in the pursuit of religious truth stem precisely from his confidence in the soul's ability to perceive rightly (by means of reason and the senses) and to express accurately (by means of language) the properties and distinctions that structure the natural world, including the outer and inner forms of beauty that give rise to love. It is precisely his confidence in human perception, understanding, and language that convince him that humans can infallibly comprehend God's speech. If that speech puts strict limits on what humans may believe and do in response to their rational inferences, sensory experiences, and natural passions, and if Ibn Ḥazm refuses to speculate about the reasons for those limits, this is not because he disapproves of reason, beauty, sensory pleasure, or even passion per se, but only because he believes in a God whose nature and will lie beyond human perception and comprehension. For that same reason Ibn Ḥazm refuses to partake of his colleagues' insatiable drive to extend revealed truths and laws by analogy, and so to bring all of life under the umbrella of a comprehensive system of theology and law. He is an optimistic, rationalistic, and remarkably tolerant kind of literalist who trusts the senses and reason in all but a few domains of human knowledge. The Qur'an, for example, he considers eloquent and inimitable in an inscrutable way not analogous to human eloquence, but that only underscores his confidence in the accessibility of beauty and eloquence in nature and literature. If Ibn Ḥazm always seems to give the last word to religious knowledge gained from tradition, that is only because it has the greatest eternal consequences for the individual's happiness, not because it supersedes reason or experience in the here and now.

This relatively new appreciation for the rationalistic side of Ibn Ḥazm's thought is due in large part to the attention now being paid to his *Taqrīb ilā ḥadd al-mantiq*, which was first published three years after the influential study of Roger Arnaldez, *Grammaire et théologie chez Ibn Ḥazm de Cordoue* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1956). The essays by Rafael Ramón Guerrero and Joep Lameer further our understanding of this key text by exploring its sources. They disagree about just how Ibn Ḥazm learned Aristotelian logic, but they agree that he did so orally and not very well. Sabine Schmidtke (in an article that will have to be updated in light of ongoing manuscript work, noted on p. 394, that is revealing new details about Ibn Ḥazm's sources) shows that his knowledge of theological schools was likewise tenuous. His information about the Mu'tazila was dated and apparently second-hand. He knew the Ash'ariyya more directly, through a few of their works and through debate with scholars recently returned from the East, but his quotations from a book by the Ash'arī Abū Ja'far al-Simnānī (d. 444/1052), which Schmidtke reproduces in an appendix, appear to be selected out of context for polemical effect with little

understanding of how the various claims he found so objectionable fit together in his opponents' system of thought. Maribel Fierro's essay makes a similar point about the anti-Qur'anic criticisms to which Ibn Ḥazm responded in his famous *Refutation*: they probably originated in the East (as recently proposed by Sarah Stroumsa), but they could plausibly have been republished by an Andalusian Jew, and in any event they reached Ibn Ḥazm only indirectly. Together these essays provide a vivid picture of the vibrant but fragmentary and indirect transmission of learning in Ibn Ḥazm's intellectual milieu.

However poor Ibn Ḥazm's knowledge of logic and *kalām* may have been, what he did with it was brilliant, far more coherent, and far less obscurantist than was once supposed. Samuel M. Behloul (referring again to the *Taqrīb*) and Dominique Urvoy both point out that his virulent anti-Christian polemics had a fundamentally rationalistic basis. Christian Lange illuminates an important connecting thread that held together his optimistic rationalism and his strict literalism: his desire to make theology useful for the salvation of the soul. This concern appears strikingly in his discussion of believers, grave sinners, and unbelievers: instead of engaging in the usual debates about how to define key terms, he sought to instil a pious anxiety about the dangerous situation of all whose works do not live up to their profession of faith.

Two contributions on language and grammar likewise help to solidify the advance that has recently been made over Roger Arnaldez's characterization of Ibn Ḥazm as a nominalist and a literalist. Salvador Peña argues that Ibn Ḥazm's suspicion of the linguistic sciences was not a radical rejection of them but only a repudiation of mystical attempts to find deep or hidden meaning in language. Kees Versteegh, focusing on Ibn Maḍā' as an heir to Ibn Ḥazm's linguistic thinking, defines the *Zāhirī* stance toward language more precisely: it is not literalism, since it readily admits the presence of nonliteral usage even in God's speech; rather, at its core lies a refusal to try to reconstruct the underlying structure of meaning that most grammarians posited behind verbal utterances.

The section on *Zāhirī* law appears to me the weakest part of the book, though perhaps that is only because it relates most closely to my own research. The two shorter articles are unconvincing. Alfonso Carmona González argues that Ibn Ḥazm's and Abū al-Walīd al-Bājī's lists of qualifications for judges both stemmed directly from al-Māwardī's famous work *al-Aḥkām al-sultānīyya*, but he assumes the outdated view that the *Muḥallā* was an early work and therefore overlooks the possibility that Ibn Ḥazm was responding to al-Bājī's list (which seems all the more likely given what this volume reveals about his indirect contact with ideas from the East). González also seems unaware of recent scholarship on the relationship between the two works titled *al-Aḥkām al-sultānīyya* by al-Māwardī

and Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā‘, and he makes no mention of al-Māwardī’s *Adab al-Qāḍī*, which contains a very similar list of qualifications of judges (vol. 1 pp. 618–643 in the edition of Muḥyī Hilāl al-Sarḥān, Baghdad, 1971). Delfina Serrano attempts to establish the possibility that Ibn Ḥazm influenced al-Qāḍī ‘Iyād where it is not even clear that the two agreed: Ibn Ḥazm classified accusations of rape as mere complaints (singular *shakwā*) and thus not subject to the penalty for calumny, whereas ‘Iyād’s *fatwā* used the term “complaint” in a non-technical sense for a woman’s initial outcry, which could serve as circumstantial evidence of rape if it was immediate but not if it was delayed; it did not reclassify her accusation before the judge as a complaint.

Nevertheless, Serrano’s article illustrates nicely that Ibn Ḥazm was not just a follower of *ḥadīth*, but one who thought practically, substantively, and even analogically about justice. Adam Sabra’s article likewise contributes to the growing recognition of Ibn Ḥazm’s peculiar kind of liberalism by emphasizing not his literalism or his reliance on *ḥadīth* but his challenge to the authority of scholarly tradition and his limitation of the law to a relatively small subset of human activity, which leaves many areas of life unregulated. This article, one of the five republished articles that form the backbone of this book, provides an excellent introduction to Ibn Ḥazm’s legal theory and includes a complete English translation of Ibn Ḥazm’s short legal theory text *al-Nubdha* (or *al-Nubadh*). Regrettably, the translation’s value is diminished by numerous errors and misleading or incomprehensible phrases. Some of these stem from problems in the Arabic text. For example, at the end of the first paragraph on page 155 there is clearly an omission in the Arabic; the text almost certainly should read: “Similarly, restricting the scope [of unrestricted expressions without textual evidence] is invalid. It is a contrary of both analogy and negative implication, because analogy is to include something unmentioned under the same ruling as something mentioned in a text, negative implication is to exclude something unmentioned from the ruling of what is mentioned in a text, [and restriction is to exclude part of something mentioned in a text] from the ruling assigned to it [by the text], which is also not allowed.”

The section on the reception of Ibn Ḥazm’s thought is a very substantial step forward. Its starting point is a long article in which Samir Kaddouri assembles, from a wide range of printed and manuscript sources, reports about scholars who debated or refuted Ibn Ḥazm. This piece, originally published in Arabic in 2003, is somewhat dated and displays unabashed sympathy and credulity towards Ibn Ḥazm’s Mālikī opponents, but it too, like the articles by Puerta Vílchez and Sabra, provides basic data around which the rest of the book is structured. It is supplemented by four new essays. Camilla Adang adds to her distinguished record of research on this subject by tracing, in a plethora of

sources, all the works transmitted by just one scholar who was authorized (by the age of five) to transmit from Ibn Ḥazm. Livnat Holtzman's detailed study shows how Ibn Ḥazm gained an indirect and long-lasting influence in the East, partly through Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's direct and rather sympathetic engagement with his textually focused and common-sense style of argumentation. Hassan Ansari shows that Shī'ī scholars did not begin to respond in earnest to Ibn Ḥazm's polemics, or to exploit his arguments against mainstream Sunni positions, until the 13th/19th century. In the process he illustrates yet again the indirect and unreliable knowledge on which Ibn Ḥazm often based his polemics. Luis Molina, in a careful and eye-opening contribution, traces the fate of two of Ibn Ḥazm's quasi-historical works, showing that for the most part they were disseminated indirectly and very partially, through the selective medium of a handful of works that quoted him directly. His article recapitulates very fittingly a major theme of the whole volume: the fragmentary and indirect transmission of knowledge in the medieval Muslim world.

The "Bibliography of Secondary Sources" compiled by Leigh Chipman is a major accomplishment and will doubtless remain the first point of reference for research on Ibn Ḥazm for some years to come. It had no hope of being absolutely comprehensive. One notable omission is the classic 1984 Harvard dissertation of Aron Zysow, "The Economy of Certainty: An Introduction to the Typology of Islamic Legal Theory" (published in 2013 by Lockwood Press), in which Ibn Ḥazm is a central figure. But it is remarkably wide-ranging, and includes some obscure works as well as some that might easily be overlooked because they are not primarily focused on Ibn Ḥazm. It spans more than a dozen languages, and their distribution is striking: there have been relatively few German contributions to this particular area of Islamic studies, whereas Spanish and Arabic scholarship have flourished. The long tradition, among English-speaking Islamicists, of giving priority to works in French, German, and classical Arabic has not served this field of study well. This volume accommodates that unfortunate circumstance by limiting itself to English and French, but also helps to overcome it by making more easily accessible several key pieces of Spanish and modern Arabic scholarship, thus highlighting the indispensability of these two scholarly traditions for anyone taking up the study of Ibn Ḥazm today.

This book marks an important milestone in the development of Ḥazmian studies: a long overdue integration of several disparate strands of prior scholarship into a coherent picture of a man whose single organizing quality turns out to be, strangely enough, a fierce optimism. Until the last few decades Ibn Ḥazm was studied as a colorful literary figure and poet of love, a dour traditionalist bound to the letter of the law, or a bitter polemicist reduced to a perpetual state

of political and intellectual exile by his own sharp tongue. This study recapitulates and incrementally advances the discoveries of the last few decades which, drawn together in this unique and timely fashion, yield a very different portrait: a man with his eye always on the far horizon of divine judgment, yet deeply engrossed in his own time, place, culture, society, and relationships, and ardently enthusiastic about the human mind and its ability to grasp and describe the worlds of nature, society, and history. His insights into the human affections are now properly contextualized within his theory of perception, which he regards as immediately God-given and thus outside the inscrutable moral limitations that God has imposed on some human activities. Thanks to the attention now being given to his work on logic, his traditionalism and literalism can now be understood not as a fundamental woodenness of temperament but as the logical outcome in the religious sciences of his great confidence in the divine gifts of perception, reason, and language. And the legendary ferocity with which he expressed his own convictions and ridiculed others now appears less as a personal weakness than as the overflow of his own emotional, moral, and intellectual passions.

It is no longer enough, therefore, to study one aspect of Ibn Ḥazm's thought in isolation. That practice, rendered all but inevitable by the overwhelming volume of available primary and secondary materials, has reduced him to a series of stick figures – a shortcoming illustrated all too well by my own scholarship on his legal hermeneutics. This book alone, had it appeared a few years earlier, would have lent to my writing a much more nuanced appreciation of this man's many-faceted yet coherent life and thought. Future work, especially in the English-speaking world, will be spared such overspecialization by the vision and diligence of Camilla Adang, Maribel Fierro, Sabine Schmidtke, and their team of researchers, translators, and contributors. All who now dare to venture into some aspect of Ibn Ḥazm's life and thought will be greatly in their debt.

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