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## ‘Alī ibn Ḥazm, *Risāla fī rithā’ madīnat Qurṭuba* (A Treatise on Lamenting the City of Cordova) (Cordova, 1031)

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### Introduction:

*Risāla fī rithā’ madīnat Qurṭuba* (A Treatise Lamenting the City of Cordova) is a treatise composed by ‘Alī ibn Ḥazm (b. Cordova 994—d. Niebla 1064) to lament the devastation of his home city of Cordova<sup>1</sup> during the period of *fitna* (civil war) between 1009 and 1031, which led to the collapse of the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordova.<sup>2</sup> Ibn Ḥazm was born to a family with obscure origins that worked its way to power when his father, Abū ‘Umar Aḥmad (938–1013), became vizier under the Umayyad ruler of Cordova, al-Ḥājib al-Manṣūr al-‘Āmir (Almanzor, d. 1002), and his son Muẓaffar (al-Muzaffar, d. 1008). Ibn Ḥazm lived the first stage of his life in the palace of his father. Ibn Ḥazm’s family was known for their loyalty to the Umayyad royal family, both in the Levant and then in al-Andalus, which eased his way to being in the inner circle of the Umayyad rulers. He was appointed as a vizier by at least two Umayyad Caliphs of Cordova: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mustazhir (Abd al-Rahman V, d. 1024) and Hisham al-Thālith (Hisham III, d. 1036).

Ibn Ḥazm received his education from the educated women and men in his father’s palace, and during his travels throughout al-Andalus. He was a polymath, i.e. not only a poet, but a jurist, theologian, philosopher, historian and leading scholar in the field of comparative religion. Ibn Ḥazm spent almost all of his life in al-Andalus. He left Cordova for Almeria in 1013 before being deported to Aznalcaza in 1016, after being accused of giving support to the Umayyads’ right to the caliphate. In 1017, he visited Valencia and its neighboring town of Xàtiva before traveling to Granada and fighting for the Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Murtaḍā (Abd al-Rahman IV, d. 1018). He returned to Cordova in 1019 and

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<sup>1</sup> Qurṭuba, or Cordova, is a city in southern Spain. It was captured by the Muslim army in 711 and then became the capital of al-Andalus until the collapse of the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordova in 1031.

<sup>2</sup> The Umayyad family, or Umayyads, ruled the Islamic world from Damascus in Levant during the period of 660 to 750 and ruled al-Andalus from 756 to 1031. Their control over al-Andalus passed in two stages: first, as a province of the Umayyad Caliphate, in which al-Andalus was under their control before the collapse of their dynasty and, second, as the Umayyad Emirate and Caliphate of Cordova, which started after the fall of their dynasty in Damascus. This last stage passed through four phases: (1) the Emirate *al-amāra* (756–929), during which the emigrant Umayyad leader ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dākhil (Abd al-Rahman I, d. 788) declared himself Emir of Cordova and rebelled against the Abbasid Caliph, (2) the Caliphate *al-khilāfa* (929–978), during which ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir (Abd al-Rahman III, d. 961) proclaimed himself Caliph of Cordova and broke the tradition of having only one Caliph in the Islamic world, (3) the Gatekeeping *al-hijāba* (978–1009), during which the Umayyad vizier al-Manṣūr (Almanzor, d. 1002) established a state within the Umayyad state that ruled al-Andalus under the name of the Umayyad caliphate, and (4) the civil war *al-fitna* (1009–1031), during which the civil war between Umayyads and anti-Umayyads ended with the fall of the Umayyad rule in al-Andalus.



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left it to spend a long period in Xàtiva. He also visited Mallorca and Seville. In the final stage of his life, he returned to Huelva, to Awnaba, in Labla (Niebla), a neighboring town of Seville, where he died.

Ibn Ḥazm was known for his polemical style of writing and debates with his opponents, such as his debate with a group of religious Muslim scholars in Seville, who became angry with him and incited the king of the *ṭā'ifa* of Seville,<sup>3</sup> al-Mu'taḍid (d. 1069), to burn Ibn Ḥazm's books, which he did in public. Ibn Ḥazm was also imprisoned at least two times for the suspicion of his allegiance to the Umayyads.

## ***Fitna*, the Collapse of the Caliphate of Cordova, and the Destruction of Cordova**

*Fitna* (unrest) refers to the state of infighting and the struggle for power that al-Andalus experienced in the period between 1009 and 1031, which ended with the collapse of the Umayyad dynasty in al-Andalus and the emergence of independent mini-states. The roots of *fitna* are in the death of the second Umayyad Caliph of Cordova al-Ḥakam al-Mustaṣir bi-llāh (al-Hakam II, d. 976) who, right before his death, appointed his only twelve-year-old son Hisham al-Mu'ayyad bi-llāh (Hisham II, d. 1013) to be his successor in the Caliphate. Ṣubḥ al-Bashkuniyya (Subh of Cordova, d. 999), his mother, began controlling rulership after al-Hakam II's death, but the actual control was in the hands of the head of the army and vizier Almanzor, who ruled the country in the name of Caliph Hisham II. Later, Almanzor seized power from Caliph Hisham II and announced that the Caliph had authorized him to run the affairs of the country. After the death of Almanzor in 1002, his son Muzaffar took power to continue ruling under the name of Caliph Hisham II until he died in 1008 and was succeeded by 'Abd al-Raḥmān Shanjūl (Abd al-Rahman Sanchuelo, d. 1009). Sanchuelo forced the powerless Caliph Hisham II to appoint him as the official crown prince, which aroused the anger of the Umayyad royal family, who saw in this appointment the official end of their Caliphate of Cordova. So, one of the Umayyads, Muḥammad ibn Hisham (Muhammad II of Cordova, d. 1010), took advantage of Sanchuelo's absence from Cordova to fight Sancho García of Castile (d. 1017), leading a successful military coup that ended when he overthrew Caliph Hisham II and declared himself Caliph Muḥammad II al-Mahdī. He also displaced and mistreated the Berbers and the *ṣaqāliba*<sup>4</sup>, who were supporters of Sanchuelo and his half-brother Muzaffar, and father Almanzor before him. In response to these events, Sanchuelo's army abandoned him, and he was captured and killed by al-Mahdī's fighters in 1009. After that, al-Mahdī mistreated the pro-ʿĀmirī<sup>5</sup> Berbers and some Arab leaders, including their claimant to the caliphate, Hisham ibn Sulaymān ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir (known as a Caliph under the name of al-Rashīd, d. 1009). The Mahdī's soldiers fought against al-Rashīd. Al-Rashīd's army was defeated and he was killed, the Berbers were displaced from Cordova and their homes were destroyed. As a result, al-Rashīd's nephew, Sulaymān ibn al-Ḥakam b. Sulaymān ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir (later, as Umayyad Caliph, al-Musta'īn bi-llāh, d. 1016) prepared an army to fight back with the Berbers against the Caliph al-Mahdī. The state of *fitna* continued for years after that, with the involvement of Sancho García of Castile (d. 1017) fighting with the Berbers and their leader Sulayman, and Ramon Borrell III, Count of Barcelona (d. 1017) and his brother Armengol I, Count of Urgell (d. 1010) fighting with the Umayyad Caliph al-Mahdī and his allies. At a later stage of *fitna* and after the involvement of different groups in the conflict, the people of Cordova

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<sup>3</sup> Taifa, (*ṭā'ifa*) is an independent Muslim-ruled principedom; lit. "sect".

<sup>4</sup> The term *ṣaqāliba* was used to refer to Slavs and other people from Central and Eastern Europe.

<sup>5</sup> The 'Āmirī state, or 'Āmirīs, refers to the third phase of the Umayyad Emirate and Caliphate of Cordova, which is the state of the Gatekeeping *al-hijāba* (978–1009), during which the Umayyad vizier al-Ḥājib al-Manṣūr al-'Āmir, and after him his two sons al-Muzaffar and Sanchuelo, were controlling the state under the name of the Umayyad Caliph Hisham II.

revolted against the Umayyads in 1031. This marked the beginning of a different stage in the history of al-Andalus known as the Taifa Kings or *mulūk al-ṭawā'if* (“the kings of the territorial divisions”).

### ***Risāla fī rithā' Qurṭuba:***

*Rithā'* is an elegy that usually laments a lost family member, friend or a beloved person. However, the multiple civil wars between Muslims, as well as the ceaseless wars against the Christian armies, led the poets of al-Andalus to develop a type of elegy in Arabic that laments a lost city known as a *rithā' al-mudun* (elegy to the cities). In this context, the following treatise composed by Ibn Ḥazm can be regarded as an elegy to the city of Cordova. This text is written in a poetic language to lament the ruins of the deserted abode, which is a theme that was used in classical Arabic literature. There was a tradition of initiating a panegyric ode by halting at the ruins of the lost home of the beloved before making a journey to the patron. However, Ibn Ḥazm in the following text uses this tradition and the image of the ruins of the abode to lament a real loss and an actual destruction of his home and the city of Cordova, in which he was raised by the slave girls (*jawārī*) of his father's palace. The palace was located next to the palace of Almanzor in the district of Balāṭ Mughīth. The decline of Ibn Ḥazm's family started in 1010 when one of the governors dismissed Ibn Ḥazm's pro-Umayyad grandfather Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd (d. 1012) from the ministry, imprisoned him and confiscated his money. Ibn Ḥazm also passed through harsh conditions after the death of his older brother from plague in 1010, followed by the death of his father and his beloved wife in the next year.

Ibn Ḥazm visited Cordova after his first emigration during the *fitna* period to see the ruins of his palace. He wrote the following treatise during or after that visit:<sup>6</sup>

### **A Treatise on Lamenting the City of Cordova:**

وقفت على أطلال منازلنا بحومة بلاط مغيث من الأرض الغربية، منازل البرابر المستباحة عند معاودة قرطبة، فرأيتها قد  
محيت رسومها، وطمت أعلامها، وخفيت معاهدها، وغيرها البلاء فصارت صحارى مُجدبة بعد العمران، وفيافي موحشة بعد  
الأنس، وأكاماً مشوهة بعد الحُسن، وخراباً مفرغة بعد الأمن، مأوى للذئاب، وملاعب للجنان، ومغاني للغيلان، ومكامن  
للوحوش، ومخابئ للصوص بعد طول غنائها برجال كالسيوف، وفرسان كالليوث، تفيض لديهم النعم الفاشية، وتغص منهم  
بكثره القطين الجليسة، وتكنس في مقاصيرهم طباء الأندلس الفاتنة تحت زبرج من نصارة الدنيا تُذكر نعيم الآخرة.

مال الدهر عليهم بعد طول النضرة فبدد شملهم حتى ساروا في البلاد أيادي سباً، تنطق عنهم الموعظة.

فكان تلك المحاريب المنمقة، والمقاصير المرفئة التي كانت في تلك الديار كبروق السماء إشراقاً وبهجة يغير حسننها  
الأبصار ويجلي منظرها الهموم كأن لم تغن بالأمس، ولا حلتها سادة الإنس، قد عبث بها الخراب وعمها الهدم، فأصبحت  
أوحش من أفواه السباع فاغرة تؤذن بفناء الدنيا وتريك عواقب أهلها، وتخبرك عما يصير إليه كل ذا نفس ماثلاً فيها، وتزهدك  
فيها.

وكررت النظر ورددت البصر، فكدت أستطار حزناً عليها، وتذكرت أيام راحتي فيها، وصبابة لذاتي بها مع كواعب  
غيد إلى مثلها يصبو الحليم.

ومثلت لنفسي انطوائين بالفناء وكونهن تحت الثرى إثر تقطع جمعنا بالتفريق والجلاء في الأفاق النائية والنواحي  
البعيدة، وتصدقت نفسي عن فناء تلك البغية، وانصداع تلك البيضة، بعدما عهدته من حسننها، ونضارتها وزبرجها وغضارتها  
ونضوبه بفراقها من الحال الحسنة والمرتبة الرفيعة التي رفلت في حلها ناشئاً فيها.

<sup>6</sup> I have followed the Arabic version of the treatise found in Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Lisān al-Dīn/Sayyid Kasrawī*, Ḥasan (ed.). *A'māl al-a'lām*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Dār al-kutub al-Ilmiyya: Beirut, 2003, 2:100–102.

وراعيت سمعي صوت الصدا، واليوم زاعقاً فيها بعد حركات تلك الجماعة المنصدعة بعرضاتها التي كان ليلها تبعاً  
 لنهارها في انتشارها بسكانها، والتقاء عمارها، فعاد نهارها تبعاً لليلها في الهدوء والاستيحاش والخفوت والإجهاش، فأبكى ذلك  
 عيني على جمودها وفرع كبدي على خرابها، وهاج قلبي على نكارتها وحركني للقول على نبوء طبعي فقلت:

سلامٌ على دارٍ رحلنا وغودرت	خلاءً من الأهلين موحشَةً قفرا
تراها كأن لم تغن بالأمس بلقياً	ولا عمرت من أهلها قبلنا دهرا
فيا دار لم يُفكر منا اختيارُنا	ولو أننا نستطيع كنت لنا قراً
ولكنَّ أقداراً من الله أنفذت	تُدمرنا طوعاً لما حل أو قهرا
ويا خير دار قد تُركت حميدة	سفتك الغوادي ما أحلّ وما أسرا
ويا مُجتلي تلك البساتين حقها	رياض قوارير غدت بعدنا عُبرا
ويا دهر بُلغ ساكنيها تحيتي	ولو سكنوا المروين أو جاوزوا النهر
فصبراً لسطو الدهر فيهم وحكمه	وإن كان طعم الصبر مستثقلاً مُراً
لئن أظماناً فقد طال ما سقى	وإن ساءنا فيها فقد طال ما سرا
وأيتها الدار الحبيبة لا يرم	رُبوعك جون المزن لميمي بها القطرا
كأنك لم يسكنك غيد أو إنس	وصيد رجال أشبهوا الأنجم الزهرا
تقانونا وبادوا واستمرت نواهم	لمثلهم أسكبت مقلتي العبرا
سنصبر بعد العسر لليسر طاعة	لعل جميل الصبر يُعقبنا يُسرا
وإني وإن عادت وعدنا لعهدا	فكيف بمن من أهلها سكن القبرا
ويا دهرنا فيها متى أنت عائد	فنحمد منك العود إن عدت والكرا
فيا رُب يوم في دارها وليلة	وصلنا هناك الشمس باللهو والبدرا
فوا جسمي المضى وواقلي المعزى	ووانفسي التكلى وواكبدي الحرا
ويا هم ما أعدى ويا شجو ما أبدى	ويا وجد ما أشجى ويا بنس ما أفرا
ويا دهر لا تبعد ويا عهد لا تحل	ويا دمع لا تجمد ويا سقم لا تبرا
سأندب ذاك العهد ما قامت الخضراء	على الناس سقفاً واستقلت بنا الغبرا

## English Translation

### A Treatise on Lamenting the City of Cordova:

I stopped by the ruins of our abodes<sup>7</sup> in the area of Balāt Mughīth<sup>8</sup> in the western land-dwelling [of the river of Cordova]<sup>9</sup>, and by the desecrated abodes of the Berbers<sup>10</sup> when I returned to Cordova. I found the area's traces obliterated, its signs erased, its places vanished, and other misery occurred. They had become desolate deserts that were once built up, abandoned wilderness that was once intimate, distorted hills that were once beautiful, an emptied ruin that was once full of life; shelters for wolves, playgrounds for demons, habitations for ghouls, hideouts for monsters, and hiding places for thieves, after a long time of being rich in men prepared for fighting<sup>11</sup> and knights like lions who overflowed with great prosperity. The social gatherings were full of skillful men, and the charming gazelles of al-Andalus hid in their palaces under ornaments of a bloom of this world reminiscent of the amenity of the Hereafter.

Fate turned against them after a long blooming time, and dispersed them until they marched [everywhere] like people of Saba<sup>12</sup>, and the exhortative sermons talk about them.

It seems as if those ornate niches and palaces that were near the shore [of the river] in those dwellings, which were like the sky's lightning in brilliance and joy, the beauty of which changes the sight and eliminates worries, had not flourished before, and the masters of people had not dwelt there. The devastation spoiled it and destruction prevails over it. It has become wilder than the gaping mouths of the beasts of prey, showing signs of the imminent end of this life and the results of [the life of] its people. It tells you of the fate of everyone, and makes you renounce pleasure in it [i.e. this life].

I looked at it again and took another look, and I was about to go out of my mind with sorrow over it. I remembered my comfortable days there, and my fervent longing for pleasure with buxom and delicate girls, the like of whom render a man's mind youthful again.

It came to my mind how they are covered by nothingness and buried under the ground, immediately after the dispersion of our gathering and departure to distant lands and remote regions. My soul believed in the vanishing of that desire and the breakdown of that essence [of the country], after what I have known of its beauty, bloom, ornament, affluence and its barrenness, and after [my] separation from it in a good condition with high status, where I had once swaggered in its stations and budded in them.

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<sup>7</sup> According to contemporary historical research, Ibn Ḥazm's palace was in the same location where San Lorenzo's church in Cordova is currently.

<sup>8</sup> The area was named Balāt Mughīth after the commander Mughīth al-Rūmī (d. 718), who was one of the earliest Muslim leaders to enter Spain with the Berber commander Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād (d. 719), who led the Umayyad conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in 711. Mughīth led the Muslim army to conquer Cordova.

<sup>9</sup> The Algerian historian al-Maqqarī (1577-1632) describes the areas of Cordova after its expansion. It included twenty-one areas around the river. According to al-Maqqarī there were nine areas in the west, such as the Rihān shops and the Cave Mosque, three areas in the north, such as the Jews' Gate and Ruṣāfa, seven areas in the east, such as the ancient city and the tower, and two areas in the south and center. He also mentions that after the period of *fitna* cordovans made a trench that encircled these areas and a wall surrounding them.

<sup>10</sup> The Berbers were an ethnic Muslim group of Maghreb and North Africa.

<sup>11</sup> The literal meaning of *al-suyūf* is swords.

<sup>12</sup> The poet likens his separated community to the people of Saba' mentioned in the Qur'ān, who had two beautiful Gardens and lived in close, blessed cities. But when they turned away from God, they were dispersed in scattered fragments and their Gardens were destroyed (Q. 34:19).

I focused on listening to the echoing sound of the owl hooting there after the departure of that brittle gathering in the courtyards, the night of which was as crowded with people as the previous day was with inhabitants' meetings. But the day changed to imitate the night with its silence, alienation, quietness and outburst of tears. This made my eye weep over its dryness, my liver worry about its corruption, and my heart get stirred up in denial. Although it is not my nature, this inspired me to say,

Greetings to an abode we departed from and left  
empty of its folks, desolate, and devastated.  
It seems to you as if it was never inhabited, a wasteland,  
and it wasn't populated for a long time before us!  
O abode, it was not our choice to desert you,  
and, if we could, we would choose you to be our abode,  
but the decrees of God have come into force  
to destroy us with what happened to us, willingly or by force.  
O best abode, you have been left laudable  
May the morning cloud water you with rain whenever they stay or travel at night.  
O voyager, in those gardens was surrounded  
by serene meadows that turned, after us, to dust!  
O time, deliver my greetings to its dwellers,  
even if they are living in al-Marwayn or past the river.<sup>13</sup>  
Have patience with the assault of time on them and its judgment,  
although the taste of patience is difficult and bitter.  
If it makes us thirsty, it was watering [us] for a long time  
and if it did wrong to us, it pleased [us] for a long time.  
O dear abode, may  
the dark rain cloud not swallow your territory because the rain waters it.  
If the delicate young ladies never dwell in you  
with confident men that resemble the bright stars,  
They are lost and perished, but remain [in memory]  
To people like them, my eyes pour tears.  
We will obediently remain patient with difficulty, [waiting] for relief.  
Perhaps our good patience will bring relief to us.  
Indeed, even if it returned and we returned to it,

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<sup>13</sup> al-Marwayn (two Marws) are two cities in Khorasan, and the river is the river of Āmū Daryā in Central Asia. The poet presents them as an example of faraway places.



What of those of its folks who dwell in the grave?!  
O our time there, when will you return?!  
We would praise your coming back, if you did, and your turning around.  
How many pleasing days have we spent in its shelter, and nights  
in which we combined the sun with fun and the full moon?  
O my weak body, O my heart that patiently abides!  
O my bereaved soul, and O my distressed liver,  
O worry, you did not infect [me], O grief, you did not appear [in me],  
O passion, you did not fill me with anxiety, O separation, you did not trigger [me].  
O fate, do not go away, O abode, do not stay  
O eye, do not stop shedding tears, and O illness, do not be recovered.  
I will keep lamenting that time as long as the sky remains above  
as a heavenly firmament for people, and [as long as] we are carried on the earth.

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