

Ibn Quzmān

Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn ʿĪsā ibn ʿAbd al-Malik ibn ʿĪsā
ibn Quzmān al-Zuhrī al-Zajjāl al-Aṣghar

DATE OF BIRTH Before 1086
PLACE OF BIRTH Cordova
DATE OF DEATH 2 October 1160
PLACE OF DEATH Cordova

BIOGRAPHY

Ibn Quzmān was born in Cordova into a well-known family, whose name Quzmān (= Guzmán) suggests non-Muslim, maybe Gothic, origins. From the little that is known about him, mainly through hints in his poems, he was well versed in classical Arabic poetry, but he attained fame through popular stanzaic poems known as *zajal*, written in the vernacular language of al-Andalus, mostly as panegyrics for various members of the Almoravid dynasty. He travelled to a number of Andalusian towns, including Seville, Granada and Jaén, in search of patrons.

One of the characteristics of Ibn Quzmān's poetry is satire, verging on the licentious, aimed at religious experts. On several occasions he was accused of impiety, but towards the end of his life, giving up his former ways, he became a mosque imam. He died during the siege of Cordova by the emir Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn Saʿd in 1160.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

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DATE 12th century. Before 1160

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

The *Dīwān* of Ibn Quzmān, which has come down in a single copy, consists of 149 stanzas of poetry (*zajals*) written in the Andalusī Arabic dialect. Many of them are dedicated to rulers of the Almoravid dynasty. The collection, a masterpiece of popular poetry, depicts a vivid panorama of the social life of 12th-century Islamic Cordova, including details about local customs, criticism of the religious authorities, and descriptions of sexual exploits. It also deals with the relationship between Muslims, Christians and Jews.

It is very interesting to note that, while Jews are usually treated in a friendly and respectful manner, Christians are always seen as dangerous and a potential enemy. They are usually called *Naṣrānī*, and once *Rūm* and ‘*ulūj*’ (‘infidels’), and they are never considered citizens of any kind. This must be because at this time the southern progress of the Christian *reconquista* was threatening al-Andalus, and

hence provoking a natural reaction against Christians, their language and culture.

SIGNIFICANCE

One of the most important features in the *Dīwān* is its language and style, which is popular and vivid, and reflects Cordovan society during the Almoravid period, in contrast to the elitist tendencies of contemporary poetry. It is also important as a witness to the Andalusī Arabic dialect spoken by Muslims and Christians.

Regarding Christian-Muslim relations, Ibn Quzmān's *Dīwān* is consistently pejorative about Christians under Almoravid rule (see poems 9, 14, 38, 40, 86, 102 and 137). This is intriguing, because by this time Christian communities had almost disappeared from al-Andalus as a consequence of the political and military actions of Christians from the north against the Almoravids.

MANUSCRIPTS

MS St Petersburg – Asiatic Museum 136 (1243)

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