

Ibn Zafar

Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn Abī Muḥammad ibn
Muḥammad ibn Zafar Ḥujjat al-Dīn al-Ṣiqillī al-Makkī

DATE OF BIRTH May 1104
PLACE OF BIRTH Sicily
DATE OF DEATH 1172 or soon after, but not later than 1202
PLACE OF DEATH Hama

BIOGRAPHY

According to the majority of biographers, Ibn Zafar was born in Sicily under Norman rule but grew up in Mecca, though some authors identify Mecca as his birthplace (al-Fāsī, *Al-‘iqd*, p. 345; Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-mīzān*, p. 372; al-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat*, p. 142; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 167). He travelled to Egypt, Mahdiyya (present day Tunisia), Sicily, back to Egypt and then Aleppo, before finally settling down in Hama, where he died. This is an approximate account of his life journey, as it is difficult to determine the exact chronological order and the precise time he spent in each of his destinations.

The great majority of biographical sources propose 1170 as the year of Ibn Zafar’s death, though according to some others he died in 1172 (al-Isfahānī, *Kharīdat al-qaṣr*, p. 49; Ibn al-Qiftī, *Inbāh*, p.74; al-Fāsī, *Al-‘iqd*, p. 344; Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-mīzān*, p. 372), 1173 (al-Isfahānī, *Kharīdat al-qaṣr*, p. 49; Ibn al-Qiftī, *Inbāh*, p.74; Ḥajjī Khalīfa, *Kashf al-zunūn*, ii, pp. 998, 2052), 1180 (al-Daljī, *Al-falāka*, p. 136), in the decade of 1175 (al-Fāsī, *Al-‘iqd*, p. 346), or in 1202 (Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-mīzān*, p. 372). The opening page of the Escorial MS (f. 1v) includes a *samā’* note, which suggests that he was still alive in Rajab 566 (March 1171), so one is inclined to conclude that he may have died sometime in 1172 or soon after, but not later than 1202 (see Ibn Zafar, *Khayr al-bishar*, pp. 36, 57, 69-70).

Ibn Zafar was a man of letters, a poet, grammarian and philologist. He was a prolific author who composed works in various disciplines including law, theology, history, political philosophy and qur’anic and biblical exegesis. More than 30 books are attributed to him, among which 23 are listed in a catalogue written by Ibn Zafar himself

and annexed to one of his works (for a full list, see Amari, *Solwan*, pp. 43-51). The sources record that during his stay in Aleppo, while based at the Madrasa of Ibn Abī 'Aṣrūn, his books were destroyed in a conflict between the Shī'īs and the Sunnis. Today only a few of his works are known to have survived.

In addition to his work on the prophethood of Muḥammad, *Khayr al-bishar bi-khayr al-bashar*, 'The best of tidings concerning the best of mankind', he penned his most famous work, the *Sulwān*, 'Waters of comfort', which contains maxims for a ruler, written in the literary genre of *Fürstenspiegel*, 'Mirror for princes'. Ibn Zafar compiled this work twice, and dedicated the two editions to two different patrons: the first to an unknown ruler in Syria who was facing a political crisis, and the second, completed in 1159, to Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn Abī l-Qāsim ibn 'Alī 'Alawī al-Qurashī, a *qā'id al-Muslimīn*, 'leader of Muslims', living in Norman Sicily (see Kechichian and Dekmejian, *The just prince*, p. 68). The work has been translated into Turkish, Persian, English and Italian.

Among his other important works are a commentary on the Qur'an entitled *Yanbū' al-ḥayāt*, 'The spring of life', a commentary on al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*, 'Sessions', and a biographical work called *Anbā' nujabā' al-abnā'*, 'Information regarding the noble descendents'.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

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- Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-udabā'*, *aw: Irshād al-arīb ilā ma'rifat al-adīb*, 6 vols, Beirut, 1991-94, v, pp. 442-43
- Al-Qiftī, *Inbāh al-ruwāh 'alā anbāh al-nuḥāh*, ed. M.A.-F. Ibrāhīm, 4 vols, Cairo, 1955, iii, pp. 74-76
- Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān*, iv, pp. 395-97
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- Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, ed. S. al-Arna'ūṭ, 23 vols, Beirut, 1985, xx, pp. 522-23
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- Ibn Qunfudh, *Al-wafayāt*, ed. 'Ā. Nuwayhid, Beirut, 1971, p. 285
- Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāsī, *Al-'iqd al-thamīn fī tārīkh al-balad al-amīn*, ed. F. Sayyid, 8 vols, Cairo, 1958-69, ii, pp. 344-48

- Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Daljī, *Al-falāka wa-l-maflūkūn*, Baghdad, 1385 AH [1965], p. 136
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- Shuhba ibn Qādī, *Ṭabaqāt al-nuḥāh wa-l-lughawīyyīn*, ed. M. Ghayāḍ, Najaf, 1974, p. 245
- Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Lisān al-mīzān*, 6 vols, Hyderabad, 1331 AH [1913], v, pp. 371-72
- Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Nuzhat al-albāb fī l-alqāb*, ed. 'A.-'A. al-Ṣudayrī, 2 vols, Riyadh, 1989, i, p. 197
- Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-wu'āt fī ṭabaqāt al-lughawīyyīn wa-l-nuḥāh*, ed. M.A.-F. Ibrāhīm, 2 vols, [Cairo]: Maṭba'at 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964, i, pp. 142-43
- Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufasssīrīn*, ed. 'A.-M. 'Umar, 2 vols, [Cairo]: Maktabat Wahba, 1972, ii, pp. 167-68 and 245-47
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Secondary

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- I.B. al-Bābānī l-Baghdādī, *Hadīyyat al-'arīfīn asmā' al-mu'allifīn wa-āthār al-muşannifīn*, ed. K.R. Bilge and I.M.K. İnal, 2 vols, Istanbul, 1951, ii, p. 96
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WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Khayr al-bishar bi-khayr al-bashar,
 'The best of tidings concerning the best of
 mankind'

DATE 1163

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

The work, written in Syria under Zangid rule in 1163 (ed. Choukri and Abouri, p. 96), is dedicated to Ibn Zafar's patron, Şafī l-Dīn, 'a generous *ra'īs* (chief)', who might have been a notable figure in the court of Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Zangī (r. 1146-74). In the latest edition, it is approximately 190 pages long (ed. Choukri and Abouri, pp. 69-261).

As the title suggests, its main intention is to present historical proofs that present the evidence for the coming of the Prophet Muḥammad and his message. It is structured in four parts comprising four different types of material that verify the prophetic ministry of Muḥammad. These are: information provided in earlier scriptures; information given by non-Muslim religious authorities (*aḥbār*); information handed down by soothsayers (*kuhhān*); and information derived from the *jinn*, as communicated to earlier Muslim generations.

The biblical passages that Ibn Zafar quotes in the first section (ed. Choukri and Abouri, pp. 77-109) are from Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Psalms and the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John. According to Ibn Zafar, not only were Hagar and Abraham given the glad tidings about Muḥammad, but Moses and Jesus also prophesied his coming. The biblical texts he refers to are very similar to those quoted by earlier authors such as Ibn al-Layth

(fl. late 8th century) (q.v.), 'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. c. 860) (q.v.), and Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) (q.v.). The mention of Sinai, Seir and Paran (Deuteronomy 33:2) is nothing but a triadic symbol of the divine revelation conveyed by Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad (ed. Choukri and Abouri, pp. 82-84). Similarly, Jesus' Paraclete is actually a foretelling of Muḥammad's prophethood (ed. Choukri and Abouri, pp. 91-96).

The second section includes various accounts related from Wahb ibn Munabbih, Ka'b al-Aḥbār and other early Muslims who reveal a hidden text or piece of information regarding the Prophet Muḥammad that had been known to the *ahl al-kitāb* (ed. Choukri and Abouri, pp. 113-51). The relevant part of the third section is found in the last few pages, in which King Nebuchadnezzar's dream is described and interpreted as in Daniel 2:1-48 (ed. Choukri and Abouri, pp. 191-92).

The work also focuses on the question of *taḥrīf*, the alteration of earlier scriptures. According to Ibn Zafar, the Jews as well as the Christians have altered the authentic scriptures that were given to them by God. In fact, the Torah and the Gospel they possess are nothing more than the products of *taḥrīf* and *tabdīl* (ed. Choukri and Abouri, pp. 85-87). The external evidence he presents for the occurrence of *taḥrīf* is an historical account concerning the loss of the true Torah during the time of Nebuchadnezzar and its recovery by Ezra. The internal evidence is the fact that the Torah does not provide any information about heaven and hell, and that punishment and reward appear to be only in this world. Moreover, its anthropomorphic description of God and the sinful acts attributed to the prophets (e.g. the story of Lot and his daughters, Judah and his daughter-in-law, acts of the sons of Jacob, shortcomings of Moses and Aaron) are indications of *taḥrīf* in the biblical text (ed. Choukri and Abouri, pp. 87-91). Similarly, the use and interpretation of the title 'son', by Christians as well as Jews, is an example of *tabdīl* and *taḥrīf* (ed. Choukri and Abouri, p. 94). What happened to the Torah likewise happened to the Gospels, i.e. the original of both was lost. It is only the Qur'an that, through God's protection, has remained intact (ed. Choukri and Abouri, p. 97).

SIGNIFICANCE

The work is an example of the genre called *dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, 'proofs of prophethood', *bashā'ir al-nubuwwa*, 'good tidings of prophethood', or *a'lām al-nubuwwa*, 'signs of prophethood', the primary goal of which is to establish the authenticity of Muḥammad's prophetic

mission. As such, it includes many elements that are familiar from other extant examples.

A significant characteristic of the work is the variety of Arabic versions of the biblical texts quoted in it. The author justifies this by saying: 'We have quoted from them [the *ahl al-kitāb*] in accordance with the translations they accept and prefer to relate in their books. Therefore, they cannot accuse us of altering (*tahrīf*) them [their scriptures]' (ed. Choukri and Abouri, p. 109). The diversity of the translations cited provides useful data for students of the Arabic Bible.

MANUSCRIPTS

- MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Karaçelebizade 351, fols 39r-72r (1476)
 MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Esad Efendi 1058, fols 103v-176v (early 18th century)
 MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Hafid Efendi 157, fols 64r-97v
 MS Princeton, University Library – 556, fols 184r-186r
 For other MSS see below.

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

- Ibn Zafar, *Khayr al-bishar bi-khayr al-bashar*, ed. A. Āl Nāṣir, Beirut, 2009
 Ibn Zafar al-Ṣiqillī, *Khayr al-bishar bi-khayr al-bashar*, ed. L. Choukri and K. Abouri, Rabat: Markaz al-Dirāsāt wa-l-Abḥāth wa-Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 2008

This edition is based on five MSS:

- MS Riyadh, Islamic University of al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Su'ūd – 7935, 58 fols (1218; the oldest surviving dated MS)
 MS Paris, BNF – 1959, 92 fols (1324)
 MS Madrid, El Escorial – 3/116-117 [1516 (1) /1521], 45 fols (1361)
 MS Medina, King 'Abd al-'Azīz Library – 'Ārif Ḥikmat 242/35, 51 fols (1464)
 MS Dublin, Chester Beatty – 5082, 37 fols (1620)
 Other manuscripts mentioned in this edition (p.55) are:
 MS Tunis, National Library – 4833, 49 fols (1631-32)
 MS Tunis, National Library – 4399, 97 fols
 MS Cairo, Dār al-Kutub – 5/174 (15 majāmi' m.)

Ibn Zafar al-Ṣiqillī, *Khayr al-bishar bi-khayr al-bashar*, Cairo, 1863

STUDIES

- H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined worlds. Medieval Islam and Bible criticism*, Princeton NJ, 1992, pp. 82n, 85-86, 88, 90, 92n, 94n, 95, 96, 97n, 103n, 104n, 107n, 117n, 119n, 121n, 138

Al-mukhtaṣar fī khabar sayyid al-bashar,
 ‘An abridgment of the news regarding the
 master of mankind’

DATE Unknown; probably after 1163

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

As the title suggests, this must have been a summary of *Khayr al-bishar*. No sources mention it apart from Brockelmann, *GAL S i*, pp. 595-96.

SIGNIFICANCE —

MANUSCRIPTS

MS Mosul – 106, 90, 6 (see Brockelmann, *GAL S i*, pp. 595-96)

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS —

STUDIES —

Alām al-nubuwwa, ‘Signs of prophethood’

DATE Unknown; probably 1163 (see Ibn Zafar, *Khayr al-bishar*, p. 96)

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

As implied by the title, this is most probably identical to Ibn Zafar’s *Khayr al-bishar* and is perhaps an alternative title. The fact that no reference to this work exists in any of the biographical sources supports this possibility. The only references to it are in *Kashf al-ẓunūn* (i, p. 126) and *Hadiyyat al-‘arīfīn* (ii, p. 96).

SIGNIFICANCE

If it was a separate work, it would have been another contribution to the same genre as *Khayr al-bishar*.

MANUSCRIPTS —

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS —

STUDIES —