

PREFACE

In addition to its intellectual aim, my purpose in this thesis is to demonstrate the importance of studying the medieval Islamic world to the modern reader. By considering the past it hopefully becomes clear that the image of the past and the contemporary period are connected to each other in complex ways. However, in studying the Middle East and the Islamic world, the impact of the past is nowadays often forgotten or presented in an over-simplified manner. Hopefully, in its modesty this study will show, in relation to al-Andalus and the *shu'ūbiyya* letter written by Ibn García, that the image of the past and the analysis of historical sources pose complex questions that are open to many answers.

Although I am entirely responsible for the results of and errors in this book, I could not have written it without the help, support and inspiration of a large number of friends, colleagues and loved ones. First of all I would like to express my gratitude to, and respect for, my supervisor, Dr Gudmar Aneer, who has steered me through the history of Islam with great patience, security and inspiration. My second supervisor, Dr Roland Anrup, has also been a source of inspiration, guidance and good advice. Without their guidance this work would never have assumed its final form.

Professor Maribel Fierro at the *Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas* in Madrid has also been a great source of inspiration and help. During my three visits to Madrid she has always welcomed me. She kindly read and discussed a final draft version of my text during her stay in Jerusalem, and without a doubt her comments improved my arguments in several respects.

I also had the pleasure to meet and discuss some of my ideas with Dr Jareer Abu-Haidar and Dr Michael Brett, both of SOAS, University of London. Their comments on my initial work helped me greatly in establishing a clear focus for my thesis. Dr Brett, who was my external examiner, also gave me constructive criticism of the whole thesis. I have tried to include their criticisms as much as possible without doing violence to my own ideas and readings of Ibn García.

I would especially like to express my gratitude to Professor Jan Retsö, who read a draft of my last chapter on the reading of Ibn

García, and Professor Göran Aijmer, who read a draft version of Chapter One, both of the University of Göteborg. Without question, their comments and remarks improved the final text. I would also like to thank my colleague and friend Professor Bertil Nilsson, who read and commented on many parts of my thesis. Professor Staffan Olofsson, who commented on my use of the Old Testament in relation to source materials on the Near East, should also be mentioned. Thanks are also due to Dr Håkan Gunnarsson and Dr Daniel Andersson for their contributions to my thesis.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the following departments and seminars in which I have participated and presented my results: the Upper Seminar in the Department of Religious Studies, the Iberio-American Institute, the Department of History, the Symbolism Seminar and finally the Department of Peace and Development. All seminars took place at the University of Göteborg over an approximately five-year period.

Besides colleagues and staff at the University of Göteborg, especially the Department of Religious Studies, I would also like to thank Dr Jonas Svensson at the University of Lund and Dr Ola Sigurdsson for their help and encouragement with my work. I also thank Robert Parkin of Oxford for revising the English language of the thesis and Nino van Reisen for revising the Arabic.

Finally my beloved wife and friend Cecilia deserves every recognition and all my gratitude. For at least the last seven years she has put up with my comments and constant babbling about Ibn García, strange theories, heresy and orthodoxy without any complaints. For the past three years our life has also been enriched by the relieving and inspiring noises and comments of our son Elis. Even though, Elis, I know that you do not need any more inspiration or creativity at the moment, it is my hope that this work will inspire you and give you a glimpse of my life as a researcher. Cecilia and Elis, you are the sunshine of my life.

Göran Larsson
Göteborg, September 2002