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Books on the zahiri school

The Zaharism Movement in Islamic History by Omar A. Farrukh
The second/eighth century saw a dense atmosphere of esotericism in Islam, affecting fundamental concepts like the essence of God and the understanding of the Qur'an. At the same time, the Mu'tazilite school emphasized reason over revelation. In contrast, another movement emerged, known as the Literalists (Zahiriyyah), which focused on a strict verbal interpretation of the Qur'an and the Prophet's sayings. This school was founded by Dawud ibn 'Ali, who received education from prominent jurists in Baghdad. His family belonged to Kashan, but he shifted towards Shafi'i rite after studying with notable scholars. Dawud ibn 'Ali was a scholar who studied the Shafi'ite school but ultimately became dissatisfied with it, leading him to found the Zahirite school that solely relied on the Quran and Hadith for guidance. He accepted consensus among the Prophet's Companions but rejected other methods like analogy, personal opinions, and following older generations' decisions. Dawud ibn 'Ali was well-versed in logic and skilled in debates, known for his trustworthiness, knowledge, and piety. Some questioned whether he believed the Quran was created or eternal, though this might have been an accusation rather than a fact. He died in Baghdad around 884 AD, leaving behind numerous written works that included both fundamental and minor aspects of Islamic law. Although none of his original books have survived, references to them can be found in the writings of other scholars like Ibn Hazm. Dawud ibn 'Ali's views on consensus and analogy were distinct; he only accepted the Companions' consensus, citing their direct connection with the Prophet as the reason. His theological stance included the belief that God is all-hearing and all-seeing but emphasized this does not imply He perceives through human sight. Overall, Dawud ibn 'Ali revised Islamic jurisprudence based on his Zahirite approach, often differing from mainstream interpretations of the time. Traveling Muslims can shorten their prayers from four to two rak'ahs due to a Quranic verse. Jurists generally agree that this applies to long journeys, while Dawud suggests cutting short any journey's prayer. When fasting during Ramadan, Muslims who are sick or traveling should make up for missed days upon returning home, with some jurists arguing that fasting on a journey is invalid altogether. The concept of usury (riba) in Islam raises questions regarding bartering commodities; early jurists concluded that trading equivalent quantities of the same commodity on the spot is permissible, but any surplus would be considered usury. Examples of acceptable trades include gold for gold or dates for dates, but not taking advantage by exchanging unwrought gold for wrought gold as a gain. Jurists also consider other commodities like copper, coffee, and wool to fall outside these examples, suggesting they can be bartered in larger quantities without violating Islamic principles. The Zahirite school, founded by Dawud ibn 'Ali, was also considered a form of usury by analogy. Dawud believed that the Prophet Muhammad had intentionally named these commodities and that if he wanted to add more, nothing would have stopped him. Therefore, when someone bartered goods for more of the same commodity, any surplus would not be considered usury but rather gain. However, the Shafi'ites criticized Dawud's school severely and deemed it worthless. Some even accused Dawud of being ignorant or a disbeliever. Despite this, the Zahirite followers were numerous and prominent, with Dawud ibn 'Ali's son, Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Dawud, succeeding him as head of the school. Abu Bakr was more interested in poetry and literature than jurisprudence but still propagated his father's teachings, giving the Zahirite rite a high level of prestige that made it one of four prevailing rites in the East. However, Abu Bakr is more famous for his anthology of love poetry, Kitab al-Zahrah. The Zahirite school had its peak of expansion and prestige in the 4th century AH, with the poet Ibn al-Rumi praising Abu Bakr in a poem that begins with "O you who...," of Dawud! O jurist of Iraq!"39 A renowned historian, Tabari (d. 310/923), although not a Zahirite, studied Zahiri jurisprudence and learned from Dawud ibn 'Ali himself.40 The leading jurist of the Zahirite school in the fourth/tenth century was Abd Allah ibn Ahmad ibn al-Mughallis (d. 324/936), whose teachings on Fiqh by Dawud ibn 'Ali gained popularity worldwide.41 By the next century, the Zahirite school had lost ground in Eastern lands, and before the mid-tenth century, it was replaced by the Hanbalite rite under Abu Ya'la (d. 459/1066).42 The Zahirite school continued to hold some influence in Syria until 788/1386.43 In Egypt, it maintained a stronger presence and deeper roots. Notable historian Al-Maqrizi (d. 845/ 1442) had a favorable stance towards Zahirism despite not being affiliated with the school himself.44 The first prominent figure of Zahirism in Muslim Spain was Mudhir ibn Said al-Balluti, born in Cordova in 273/886.45 He studied in Egypt and the Hijaz for three years before returning to Cordova, where he served as a judge and later became Chief Justice, upholding Dawud's teachings until his death.46 Ibn Hazm is considered the founder of the Zahirite school in Muslim Spain, achieving its peak with his work and demise marking its end.47 Ibn Hazm's Life Before Ahmad ibn Said Ahmad ibn Said, the father of Ibn Hazm, became a minister to the Hajib al-Mansur ibn Abi Amir in 381/991. This position allowed for his son's upbringing in luxury and access to quality education. Key influences on Ibn Hazm included Ibn Mufliṭ (d.426/1035), who encouraged an eclectic approach to worship and jurisprudence, and Dawud ibn 'Ali. Ibn Hazm found solace in his ancestral home, Manta Lisham, where he passed away. He was a prolific writer, covering subjects such as genealogy and epistemology, producing an estimated four hundred books comprising eighty thousand pages of content. Notable works include Tauq al-Hammamah, Al-Milal wa'l-Nihal, Al-Ihkam fi Usul al-Ahkam, and Al-Muhalla bi al-Athar. This latter book delves into worship and jurisprudence in Islam. Ibn Hazm was also a poet, statesman, and man of letters. He is most renowned for his rationalist and theologian pursuits. In his book Al-Milal wa'l-Nihal, ibn Hazm's approach to rationalism is evident. He tackles the issues of time and space, which Kant addressed in his Critique of Pure Reason. Astonishingly, a Muslim theologian did so seven and a half centuries prior. Ibn Hazm proposes that knowledge arises from three primary sources: sensory perception, primary reason, and proof. He maintains that humans possess six senses, with the soul perceiving material objects through five senses. Additionally, the soul has a sixth sense, which allows it to grasp axiomatic truths without requiring evidence. The idea that the whole is greater than its parts is a fundamental concept in primary reason, which allows individuals to understand basic truths such as the fact that two people cannot occupy the same physical space. This sense of spatial awareness is evident in how children struggle to share spaces with others and can become agitated when they perceive someone occupying their desired spot. Ibn Hazm argues that these truths are beyond doubt and do not require proof, as they are inherent to the nature of reality. However, he also acknowledges that personal acquisition and intellectual training play a crucial role in determining the validity of knowledge claims. Ibn Hazm's own philosophical approach was influenced by dialectics and his exposure to various scientific and mathematical concepts through translations of Greek works. He maintained a critical stance towards certain philosophers, such as Heraclitus and the Eleatics, while affirming certain aspects of their ideas, particularly regarding the nature of space and being. Ultimately, Ibn Hazm's philosophy emphasizes the importance of reason, intellectual training, and personal experience in acquiring knowledge. Time is fleeting and all things, including time itself, are created by God. He believes that atoms can be divided because it's within God's power to do everything, including making an atom infinitely divisible. In terms of geography, he thinks the world has boundaries and the earth is a sphere with the sun being larger than our planet. However, he agrees with Anaximenes that the sky resembles a dome over the earth but differs from Pythagoras in not believing in a companion earth that helps keep our own earth in balance. The world was created but has been around for an extremely long time. When it comes to ethics, Ibn Hazm touches on Greek philosophy and shares Prodicus' view that death is painless and shouldn't be feared. He also aligns with Epicurus and his contemporaries by saying that the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of worry are key indicators of happiness. Yet, he believes that building character and improving oneself requires more than just philosophical understanding; it needs the guidance of prophets as well. In his theory of knowledge, Ibn Hazm emphasizes three fundamental means of acquiring religious knowledge in Islam: the literal meaning of the Qur'an's text, the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and actions, and consensus among Muslims. The primary source of knowledge is the literal interpretation of the Qur'an's text unless specific words are used metaphorically or according to early Arab conventions. Deviation from the Qur'an's text is only allowed if one verse modifies or abrogates another. What's more, every aspect of life and human need is covered in the Qur'an or addressed within it, thanks to God's promise: "We have neglected nothing in the Book." This idea is explicitly stated in the verse, "This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor to you and chosen for you Islam as a religion" (5:3). The second source of knowledge is the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and actions, which serve as an essential guide for Muslims. Ibn Hazm has a strict view of Islamic jurisprudence. He only accepts sayings and actions from the Prophet Muhammad if they're confirmed by reliable men in a clear chain, quoting Quran that says the Prophet doesn't speak out of desire but receives revelations. Ibn Hazm also accepts consensus among the Prophet's Companions as a source of knowledge, ensuring they were all aware and agreed on the matter. In contrast to other schools like Hanafite, ibn Hazm rejects intuition, hearsay, interpretation, deduction, personal approval, refraining from unseemly actions, legitimizing silent matters, seeking reasons outside Quranic context, or following predecessors' beliefs. He only considers the Prophet Muhammad as a model for belief and behavior. Ibn Hazm further rejected analogy and opinion without proof, emphasizing that Muslims shouldn't follow prophets before Muhammad unless their teachings are accepted by Islam. His views on God emphasize its uniqueness, incorporeality, and creation of time, space, and even the Throne. He sees God as eternal, all-powerful, and all-knowing, with power and knowledge existing eternally. God's essence is unknown and cannot be modified by attributes; His qualities are merely names and not derived from adjectives. He declares, "God's names are the fairest; invoke Him with them." Thus, only ninety-nine self-designated names of God can be used to address Him, as other titles such as "happy," "healthy," or "beloved" are valid but not explicitly mentioned by God. Similarly, names derived from verbs associated with God cannot be used without His explicit mention, as seen in the example where God says, "God shall mock at them." Despite these nuances, we cannot attribute human-like qualities to God based on His names alone; He is described as the "hearer." "the One who sees," yet we do not interpret His names to imply physical senses. The Quran also speaks of God's hands(s), eye(s), and face in varying numbers, leading Ibn Hazm to conclude that these terms are free metaphors referring only to God Himself. Although God is incorporeal, Muslims believe they will see Him on the Day of Judgment, not through human sight but possibly with a higher sense or intuition; this view is distinct from knowledge obtained through primary reason, as it cannot be disproven by others' differing reasoning. Ibn Hazm contended that humans can't know God through logic or hearsay, as most people lack dialectical reasoning skills. If we don't attain knowledge of God through these channels, some conclude He doesn't exist. We can only come to know God via revelation, not authority or word-of-mouth. Ibn Hazm held predestination views, believing Allah commands everything's course and man acts according to his inherent abilities. Therefore, all human actions are ultimately created by God. As a polemicist, he made compelling arguments but also used harsh language against other religions and sects. He believed Islam was the only valid faith, having abrogated previous religions, making them obsolete and nullified. According to Ibn Hazm, Muhammad is the Prophet for all nations, and his teachings can't be altered or added to. The best people are God's messengers, followed by prophets, then the Companions of Muhammad, who differ in prestige based on their service to Islam and personal character. Zahirism, founded by Ibn Hazm, functioned as a school of jurisprudence in Eastern regions but was persecuted in Muslim Spain. As the philosophical movement declined following Ibn Hazm's death, its acceptance remained limited to a specific region. While he established a Zahirite system and revised Muslim law, his views gained only restricted recognition in the West. In contrast, the East showed little enthusiasm for his ideology, partly due to his uncompromising stance on creed, worship, and legal transactions. Additionally, his harsh criticism of those who disagreed with him might have deterred others from embracing Zahirism. Despite this, a few individuals in North Africa were influenced by Ibn Hazm's ideas, possibly driven by political considerations. In Andalusia, some individuals supported or accepted Zahirism to varying degrees. Notable examples include Ibn Abd al-Barr, who showed a leaning towards it, and Al-Humaidi, a declared Zahirite who introduced Ibn Hazm's works into the East. However, these efforts failed to gain traction in the East, where persecution of Zahirites reached its peak. Despite this, one might expect that Zahirism would have attracted a significant following at some point, as has been the case with other movements. However, records suggest otherwise. In the Muslim West, there were reportedly numerous followers of Ibn Hazm's teachings, known as the Hazmiyyah. Asin Palacios attempted to compile a comprehensive list of these individuals. While some indeed had Zahirite leanings or affiliations, others may not have been as closely tied to Ibn Hazm's ideology. It is important to note that Al-Ghazali's opposition to Batinism and his advocacy for strict religious practices do not necessarily make him a Zahirite or follower of Ibn Hazm. Similarly, Ibn Rushd's limited references to Ibn Hazm in his Tahafut al-Tahafut does not automatically classify him as a Zahirite. Twice, the masses demonstrated indifference towards the idea that only the thinkers could rise above the literal meaning of the Law, as presented in Zahirism's two notable epistles. Meanwhile, the thinker Ibn Tufail described the situation in which a few enlightened individuals lived among a large number of common people unable to think critically for themselves. The Zahirite movement became a problem in the Muslim West, Spain, and North Africa during the 6th/12th century, as it was fought on all sides. Bibliography: * Ibn Hazm: Al-Muhalla (Vols. I and II), Cairo, 1348/1929; Ibtal al-Qiyas (extract in Goldziher, Die Zahiriten); Al-Ihkam al-Ahkam (8 Parts), Cairo, 1345-1348/1926-1929 * Ibn Hazm: Al-Milal wa'l-Nihal (Religions and Sects) (5 Vols.), Cairo, 1317-1327/1899-1909; al-Nubath fi Usul al-Fiqh al-Zahiri (Hints to the Fundamentals of Zahirī Jurisprudence), with an Introduction by Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari, Cairo, 1360/1940 * Tauq al-Hammamah, Damascus; Kitab al-Akhlaq wa'l-Siyar (Book of Ethics and Behaviour); Cairo, n.d. * Rasa'il Ibn Hazm, 1st series, Cairo & Baghdad, n.d. * Sa'id al-Aghmani: Ibn Hazm wa Risalat al-Mufadalatī bain al-Sahabah (Ibn Hazm and His "Epistle on the Classification of the Companions of the Prophet"), Damascus 1359/1940 * Roger Arlandez: Grammare et theologie chez Ibn Hazm de Cordoue, Paris, 1956 * Asin Palacios: Abenahzam de Cordoba y su historia critica de las ideas religiosas, 5 Vols., Madrid, 1927; Charles M. Bakewell Source Book in Ancient Philosophy, New York, 1907 * Ibn Bashkuwal: Kitab al-Silah, Cairo, 1374/1955 * T. J. de Boer: The History of Philosophy in Islam, London, 1933 * 'Abd Allah Muhammad al-Humaidi: Jadhwat al-Muqtabis . . . , Cairo, 1372/1952; Encyclopaedia of Islam * Ibn al-Faradi: Tarikh al-'Ulama' . . . bi al-Andalus, 2 Vols., Cairo, 1373/1954 * 'Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi: al-Farq bain al-Firaq (on Muslim Sects), Cairo, 1328/1910 * Ibn al-Nadim: Kitab al-Fihrist, Leipzig, 1871-1872 * Von Carl Broekelmann: Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur, 2 Vols., Leiden, 1898, 1902; Supplementbande, 3 Vols., Leiden, 1937, 1938, 1939-1942 * I. Goldziher: Le livre du Mohammed Ibn Toumert, Introduction par I, Algiers, 1903 This list presents a collection of works on Islamic history, philosophy, and culture written by various authors from the 12th to the 20th centuries. The texts include biographies, histories, philosophical treatises, and commentaries on Islamic jurisprudence and theology. Some specific examples of works included in this list are: * A biography of Ibn Hazm * A history of Muslim Spain * A collection of traditions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad * A commentary on Islamic jurisprudence * A history of North Africa * A philosophical treatise on the nature of reason and knowledge The authors represented here come from a range of geographical locations, including Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Morocco, and Europe. The texts themselves were written in various languages, including Arabic, Persian, and European languages such as English and French. Overall, this list provides a comprehensive overview of Islamic thought and culture across the centuries, covering topics such as philosophy, history, theology, and law. In 1883, Ignác Goldziher penned his book "Die Zahiriten", a seminal work on Islamic jurisprudence. Its English translation emerged in 1971, cementing its enduring relevance. This latest edition within the Brill Classics in Islam series serves as a testament to the timelessness of Goldziher's insights. Those adhering to the principles of madhhab al-hir are designated as hir'. Goldziher provides an exhaustive account of the hir'ite school, its doctrine, and the stature of its representatives within orthodox Islam. The core tenets of hirism are founded on rational intuitions, Qur'anic revelation, and linguistic insights. This treatise offers a unique perspective on Islamic theology, shedding light on the nuances of legal interpretations vis-à-vis other schools and probing questions such as whether all prescriptions and prohibitions in Islamic law are commanded or forbidden? As a Hungarian orientalist and scholar of Islam, Goldziher stood alongside luminaries like Theodore Nöldeke and Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje in shaping modern Islamic studies in Europe. His contributions were recognized internationally, including the prestigious gold medal at the Stockholm Oriental Congress in 1889. The depth of his scholarship was rooted in meticulous investigations into pre-Islamic and Islamic law, tradition, religion, and poetry. His works continue to be regarded as relevant today, alongside a personal journal that provides a window into his reflections, travels, and daily musings.