Ibn Ḥazm and the territory of Huelva: 
personal and family relationships

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Introduction

The monumental study Abenházam de Córdoba y su historia crítica de las ideas religiosas, by M. Asín Palacios, opens with an extensive biography in which the key features of the great Cordoban ʿālim's life and work are presented.¹ In this brief article I aim at vindicating the figure of this Spanish Arabist, an unavoidable reference in the study of Ibn Ḥazm. The topics on which the paper centres—the work of Ibn Ḥazm² and the configuration of the region surrounding Huelva³—are familiar to me, as I have worked on them in the past, and on the latter in particular. In contrast with previous publications, the approach adopted in this work focuses mainly on historical characters rather than on territorial analysis.

Although Ibn Ḥazm was born and lived in Cordoba until he was eighteen years old, the territory of Huelva was of paramount importance in his life.⁴ His family originated from there, and there he was also to spend his final years, die and be buried. Although some of his works mention the region of Huelva, his family and personal relationship with it, it does not appear to have been extensively referred to. In his genealogical treatise

⁴ The dominant role that the city of Huelva currently plays in its homonymous province dates only from the early 19th century; the province includes Niebla, approximately 18 miles to the NW, nowadays a small rural settlement. In the Middle Ages, however, it was the other way around: Labla (Niebla) was an urban centre with first class administrative rank (kūra), upon which the smaller and less important Huelva (Ūnba/Wilba) depended. This explains the fact that Niebla still possesses the most impressive Islamic architectural heritage in the province, in particular its city wall, while no monumental remains are preserved in Huelva.
Jamharat ansāb al-ʿarab, for example, he mentions the settlement of Niebla (Labla) and at least five Arabic lineages\(^5\) without actually alluding to his own family, perhaps because—as we shall see below—they were attributed a Persian origin. Ṭawq al-ḥamāma, a largely autobiographical work, and Kitāb al-Akhlāq wal-siyar, written at the end of his life, most likely during his retirement at the family manor in Huelva, similarly lack any mention of his relationship with the region. Thus the sources for the relationship between Ibn Ḥazm and Huelva do not reside in his own work, but in chronicles and geographical, literary and encyclopaedic sources which are sometimes contemporary with the Cordoban scholar and were sometimes written by later Andalusi, Maghribi and Middle Eastern authors.

The Historical Sources

There are three main sources for the study of Ibn Ḥazm’s relationship with his ancestral region. Two of them are Andalusi authors, contemporary with the great Cordoban ʿālim: Ibn Ḥayyān and Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī. The third author, Yāqūṭ al-Ḥamawī, lived in the Middle East and at a later date but, as we shall see, the information provided is nevertheless as significant. We must remember that the information given by Ṣāʿid and Yāqūṭ can, preliminarily, be considered as coming from Ibn Ḥazm himself through a process of transmission that we shall be analysing.

The first of our sources is Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-umam, written by Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī around 460/1067–68, as explicitly mentioned in the text;\(^6\) that is, two years before the author’s death in 462/1069–70. The importance of Ṣāʿid’s work regarding Ibn Ḥazm’s biography is twofold: it is due both to the sources his information comes from and to the influence exerted on later sources. Ibn Bashkuwāl, the main biographer of Ṣāʿid, claims that
