A jurist, a genealogist, and perhaps a theologian, Ibn Ḥazm probably never considered himself a historian, and was never considered as such by his fellow scholars. However, history plays a decisive part in his work in a sense that the current paper is precisely about. What is “history” in Ibn Ḥazm’s thought?

Concerning one of the main figures of Andalusí culture, and the author of a considerable number of works, the approach must be plain. My first question is: how does Ibn Ḥazm himself describe his own first encounter with History? By good fortune, many narratives of Ibn Ḥazm’s youth are extant in one of the most famous masterpieces of Andalusí literature, the Ṭawq al-hamāma that Ibn Ḥazm wrote, probably when he was between 30 and 35, after the legitimist party to which he belonged failed to restore the Umayyad Caliphate in Cordoba. Putting aside what autobiography means in pre-modern Arabic literature, and whether it can be allowed any kind of reality or not, I shall focus on the first khabar—anecdote or piece of history—in which hijrī dating appears in the book.

It comes strikingly late, in the 27th chapter (out of 30), al-sulūʿ (consolation). The subject of the book is love, as is well known. The subject of this particular chapter is how love dies, while leaving the lovers alive. Ibn Ḥazm, at the end of the chapter, tells us how much in love he was with a young maidservant of the Banū Ḥazm’s wealthy household. It was just before the outbreak of the civil war in 1009, the fitna which put an end to the Umayyad Caliphate. Ibn Ḥazm was very young, under fifteen, since he was born in 994. The girl was sixteen when the main episode of the plot took place. The women of Ibn Ḥazm’s family organized a party for their female clients. Ibn Ḥazm, growing in age but still considered a child, was allowed to attend that otherwise strictly female moment of entertainment. He tries to take advantage of the crowd which overwhems the house to

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1 The title of Ibn Ḥazm’s main treatise on religions, the Fīṣal, has been translated by Miguel Asín Palacios as Historia crítica de las ideas religiosas—‘A critical History of the religious ideas’—a translation which is not groundless if the contents and developments of the work are considered.
corner the girl and touch her, without any success. As the day ends, the whole company goes down to the garden, where the girl is invited by the ladies to sing—and she sings a poem of al-ʿAbbās Ibn al-Aḥnaf. “Until my death, I shall never forget that moment,” writes Ibn Ḥazm. Not a single date in all that.

But months later, the civil war begins with a coup that overthrows the Amirid dynasty. The houses of the privileged are looted, their lives threatened by the mob. Two days after the successful coup, or in other words two days after the outbreak of the civil war which was to put an end to four centuries of Umayyad rule, Ibn Ḥazm’s family moved to the western part of the city. This was in Jumādā II 399, the first hijrī date in the book. The following events—Ibn Ḥazm’s father’s death in 402/1012, his own departure from Cordoba in Muḥarram 404/1013, and his return in 409/1019 are also precisely dated in the Hijra Era, giving the whole narrative a distinctive smell of autobiographical truth. Ibn Ḥazm’s family, first at odds with the new political power, also shares the hardships of the city dwellers besieged by the Berbers. Ibn Ḥazm leaves Cordoba in 1013 after the disaster of the Berber onslaught on the city, which brings about ruin and death, and definitively ends Cordovan hegemony in the Western Muslim world. In the Eastern part of the peninsula, he joins the forces of the legitimist, pro-Umayyad party, which are unfortunately routed by the Berbers in Granada in 1018. Later, back in Cordoba, he meets with the girl he had not seen for nearly ten years, from that very first moment of the civil war, in Jumādā II 399/1009, when he had to flee from his house. But she looks so different that he does not even recognize her. Love is dead, both are adults, the genders are separated, and he has become a Muslim through war and political commitment.

There is much to say about this narrative. The most immediately noticeable aspect is that the Hijra—that is “flight” in Arabic—dating emerges with the author’s own flight from Cordoba, and to a broader extent, from childhood. Accordingly, the Cordovan fitna may be understood as a remake of the first fitna which first split the Arabs: Mecca against Medina, and then Muʿāwiya against ‘Ali, in the first generation of Islam. The Umayyads were involved in both civil wars, just as they stood at the centre of the

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2 The last Umayyad caliph abdicated in 1031. Since 1016, the wars of the ‘parties’—tawāʿif—originated in the different ethnic groups serving the Umayyad dynasty in the palace and in the armies, Berbers, Slavs, Arabs—paved the way to the mulūk al-ṭawāʿif, the rulers of petty kingdoms centred on the main cities of the peninsula.