

Tipe Koleksi: eBook - Religion

The Courier: Averroes and Maimonides

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Abstrak

TWELFTH-century Córdoba was the setting for a glorious chapter in the history of human culture. It saw the flowering of four centuries of the civilization of al-Andalus, Muslim Spain, which covered an area essentially that of Andalusia today. It also saw the apogee of the even older classical Arab Muslim civilization of which al-Andalus was but a part, although a distinctive part, and which extended from India to north Africa and the Iberian peninsula.

Until the beginning of the thirteenth century, Córdoba, capital of al-Andalus, was the most populous, the wealthiest and the most cultured city in Europe. Its Great Mosque, a legacy which has come down to us largely intact, provides magnificent testimony to its splendour. But the crowning glory of Córdoba and al-Andalus undoubtedly lay in the sphere of intellectual creativity. In this region of southern Europe flourished a galaxy of great minds which would influence the development of modern thought and literature: poets such as Ibn Hazm, al-Mu'tamid and Ben Quzman; mystics such as Ibn 'Arabī; thinkers such as Ibn Tufayl; geographers such as al-Idrīsī; physicians such as Avenzoar; philosophers such as Ibn Gabirol (Avicebron), Ibn Masarra, Ibn Bājja (Avempace) and, above all, Maimonides and Averroës.

Moses ben Maymūn (Maimonides in Latinized form) and Ibn Rushd (the Averroës of the Europeans) were both born in Córdoba within a few years of one another. The former Jewish, the latter Muslim, both writers in Arabic, they took the great tradition of Classical Antiquity and transmitted it, enriched and modified, to medieval Christendom. These two great Cordobán philosophers symbolize the cultural universalism of al-Andalus, a tradition which made for the fruitful co-existence of cultural traditions that sprang from the three great monotheistic religions, Islam, Judaism and Christianity, in a spirit of tolerance which, despite religious persecution as the period drew to an end, still stands as an example and was almost unique in its time.

This issue of the Unesco Courier, devoted to these two great

figures of universal learning, is an attempt to throw light on a great age of intellectual achievement, the age of classical Arab Muslim thought, which deserves to be more widely known and understood. Already last December, Unesco organized an international round table to mark the 850th anniversary of Maimonides' birth. Part of the November 1986 issue of the magazine will be devoted to another major figure in this tradition: al-Ghazäll, the Algacel of the Latins. In conclusion, it should be recalled that the authors, of all shades of opinion, to whom we have given space in this issue, express their own point of view which is not necessarily that of Unesco or of the editorial staff.