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AL-HAKAM II. The Cultured Caliph.



Al-Hakam II al Mustasir (*"He who seeks God's victorious help"*) (Vallvé, 1992), also known as Alhaken II, was born in Cordoba on 13 January 915. He was the second Umayyad Caliph of Cordoba, succeeding his father, Caliph Abderramán III. He died in the same city where he was born on 1 October 976.

His reign spanned almost 15 years, from 961 to 976, a period of splendour in al-Andalus, which was politically significant for being a relatively peaceful and prosperous period and, fundamentally, for its flourishing culture. In this regard, it should be noted that al-Hakam II was famous for possessing one of the largest libraries of the time, as well as for his work on the extension of the mosque in Cordoba, and for the extraordinary palatine city in which he lived - *Medinat al-Zahra* (Medina Azahara) - located just a few metres from the capital (Manzano Moreno, 2019).

Al-Hakam II was appointed successor at a very early age, at the age of four, and was groomed to rule by his father. However, he did not come to power until he was 46 years old. By the time he succeeded his father on 16 October 961, he already had a wealth of experience in governmental affairs that would help him preserve the hegemony of the Caliphate of Cordoba on the peninsula (Fernández & Tamaro, 2004). During the years of his reign, al-Hakam II was able to preserve the political stability and peace on the borders of al-Andalus, which his father had hard-won, and brought the lustre and prestige of the Umayyad Court of Cordoba to its maximum expression (Villanueva, 2023). This situation meant his personality stood out more for his love of literature and the arts than for his leadership abilities.

Thanks to his training as a crown prince, he managed to acquire a broad cultural background that combined scientific knowledge with that derived from the juridical-religious sciences, grammar, lexicography, rhetoric and poetry (Fernández & Tamaro, 2004). His figure has survived to the present day as that of a wise, highly cultured man, poet, mystic and bibliophile (Bueno García, 2009).

A sovereign who was concerned with knowledge and study, a scholar and patron of the arts, he assembled a considerable collection of books in Cordoba and actively patronised scholars he sent for from all over the world (Vallvé, 1992; Guichard, 2015).

The Pyxis of Zamora, also known as the Pyxis of Subh or Pyxis of al-Hakam II, was commissioned by the Umayyad Caliph for his favourite concubine, the mother of the future heir Abd-al-Rahman, who died prematurely (Martínez Martín, 2015). Its recipient was Subh (Aurora, in Christian sources), one of the most influential women in Umayyad Cordoba due to her participation in the political life of the Caliphate, both in the time of al-Hakam II and that of the future heir, his son Hisham II, for whom she was regent with the support of his tutor and minister, Muhammad ibn Abi Amir, the future Almanzor (Vallvé, 1992; Mosquera & Fernández, 2018).

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