A NOTE ON THE AWLĀD AL-HILĪ: A SCRIBAL DYNASTY OF FĀS (FEZ)

D. James

In the recently published catalogue to the Shaker Collection of Islamic manuscripts, the author describes a group of Moroccan manuscripts whose illumination, he says, is "in the style of the Awlād al-Hilī", though he does not tell us any more about the Awlād al-Hilī, or al-Hilī family [1].

Since first coming across the name of this group of scripts in the 1960s I have always been interested in finding out more about them. It was not an easy task. None of the books on Moroccan decorative arts which I examined said anything; even works dealing specifically with illuminated manuscripts from the Maghribi made no mention of them [2]. Whilst researching other matters in the British Library, I occasionally glanced through the many Arabic manuscript catalogues available in the reading room looking for the name al-Hilī; but, by the time I began to be more seriously interested in Maghribi manuscripts, I had— as they say— "drawn a blank". I was convinced there was nothing to know— in print at least— about the elusive Awlād al-Hilī [3].

It was not until the publication in 1991, of late Muhammad al-Mariānī’s book, in Arabic, on the history of writing, scribes and manuscript production in Morocco, that comprehensive information became available [4]. It contains the researches of a lifetime, undertaken by the indefatigable Moroccan scholar among the manuscript collections of his homeland, and includes several references to various members of the al-Hilī family. However, the information is scattered throughout the text, names are not always given in the indices and occasionally appear confusing. For the sake of convenience I shall try to systematize the information here, and add a few comments and additional information, based on other sources.

Like scribes elsewhere in the Islamic World, those of Morocco were part of an honourable profession, due in a large measure to their copying out the Qur’ān. In Morocco, the script in which the text was written was almost as hallowed as the text itself, "Just as the composition of the Qur’ān is a miracle, its script is a miracle as well", said a leading 18th century stilist of Fās [5]. But scribal practice was not as well organized in Morocco as it was in the Central Islamic lands. Ibn Khaldūn remarks that calligraphy was not taught as "scientifically" in the West as it was in Cairo. Only in the 16th century did this begin to be done in Morocco. There were four categories of scribes: members of the royal family and high officials; members of noble and well-to-do families of the main centres, less privileged members of society; and those engaged in teaching [6]. The latter activity was done mostly by imitation. Ahmad al-Rūfī (d. 1846), a scribe from a well-off family who became governor of Fās for a time in 1817, left an autobiography in which he describes in some detail, how writing was taught in 19th century Morocco [7].

The al-Hilī family were scribes, illuminators and binders who worked in the city of Fās from the mid 18th century down to the 20th, though they were probably active before 1700. There were two "branches": one working in the area of manuscript production and the other consisting of distinguished scholars.

Both were descended from Muhammad al-Hilī al-Wajāṣī al-Mariānī, brother of the wazir Yahyā b. Yahyā b. ’Umar b. Zayyān al-Wajāṣī, killed by the Marinid sultan Abū ʿAbd al-Haqq (1429–65) in 1458, along with most of his family. Only Muhammad al-Hilī and another brother Muhammad al-Shawkī escaped by fleeing to the desert, from where they were later able to seize power in Fās [8].

The earliest recorded member of the al-Hilī family engaged in manuscript production lived during the reign of sultan Muhammad II (1757–90), in the Second Alawi Period — which consisted of those years of the sultan’s reign. He was Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Mahfī b. Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Hilī al-Mariānī al-Fāsī — whom we can designate as Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Mahfī b. Ahmad b. Hilī i. Several of the family members included the words al-Mariānī and
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The supplicant signed himself: Muhammad b.ʿAl-Hāj Muhammad b. ʿAbd Bakhir b. ʿAlīhā [33].

So it is known that a book decorated with gilt, illumination, and a gilded binding, then, we are ready to serve His Highness..."

The activities of the Ālīhā family did not end with the establishment of the French Protectorate in 1912. Muhammad b.ʿAl-Hāj (ʿAlīhā) (xiiii) belonged to the Ālīhā family, though he lived in Saṣ̱rī (Sevres) in western Morocco, where he had been exiled by the French authorities for nationalist activities. He produced fifty copies of the Qurʾān as a well-illustrated, mainly religious works and died in 1954 [38].

The final member of the Ālīhā family recorded by Maṭṭūth was Muhammad b.ʿAl-Hāj (ʿAlīhā) (xiiii). He was a rewritten in maghribī script for the library of sūlān ʿAlīhā (1837–94) [29]. The same manuscript sent to Cairo, 1835, by his grandfather and uncle, the Tunisian scholar Muhammad b.ʿAṣḥāb (1900–70),

"the fame of this excellent, perfect scribe was widespread in Tārīkh at the beginning of the 13th/19th century, where people vied to obtain copies of works in his hand... In the Zayānīyya Library is a copy of the Sūratā in a single volume in the version (rūʿiyya) of Ibn Sinānā from al-Ṣadātī, very accurately and beautifully written, with superb illumination in colours and gold. It was copied by Muḥammad b.ʿAṣḥāb (1837–1912). There is another one in the Aḥbābīyya Library, copied (by the same scribe) in 1211/1896–67. Both are expatiately bound with the titles embossed on their for-edge flaps (gīyāy) [21]."

His brother Abū ʿAlīhā was a binder and illuminator, praised by Ibn ʿAlīhā as one of the best of the time [22]. He was a binder and illuminator, and his work is praised for its high quality. The book is praised for its fine binding and illumination. The scribe died in 1269/1853 and enjoyed his work is praised for its high quality. The book is praised for its fine binding and illumination. The scribe died in 1269/1853 and his work is praised for its high quality. The book is praised for its fine binding and illumination. The scribe died in 1269/1853 and his work is praised for its high quality. The book is praised for its fine binding and illumination.
The Awlūd al-Ḫāliṣ

Muḥammad ʿIṣḥāq ibn ʿAlāʾ (1757—1822)

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Grandfather</th>
<th>Father of Father</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad ʿIṣḥāq ibn ʿAlāʾ</td>
<td>ʿAlāʾ ibn ʿAlāʾ</td>
<td>ʿAlāʾ</td>
<td>ʿAlāʾ</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes
1. N. Saifawi, Golden Pages, Qu’āns and Other Manuscripts from the Khüsusī Collection (Oxford, 2000), pp. 278—81.
3. A thorough search of the Arabic manuscript collections of European collections available in the British Library in the summer of 2006, revealed no mention of manuscripts copied by any of the ʿAlī family outside of North Africa. At least, I didn’t find any.
6. ibid., p. 25.
7. Ḥiyāt al-khūṣūʾ, unpublished (Rabāṭ Public Library D 254); Abdurazak, op. cit., pp. 16—8.
11. ibid., No. 250. (ii) Maṣḥuṭ al-Maqṣūrī al-Darʾi, p. 1751—72; Royal Library (M 1781); (iv) Another copy dated 1188/1772, Royal Library (M 2661), was made for the Tāʾlīb Muḥammad al-Muṭṭābil ibn ʿAbd al-Qādir b. Salīm al-Zauqāt; (v) The Kāḥib al-ḫāliṣ of Qāḍī ʿIṣḥāq dated 1189/1775, Royal Library (M 574). The māḥrūb hands were māḥrūb, used for the Quʾān and religious works; maḥrūb used for...
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