PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

D. James

A LOST WORK BY IBN AL-QÛTIYYA

Abû Bakr Muhammad b. 'Umar b. 'Abd al-Azîz called Ibn al-Qûtiyya, "the son of the Gothic Woman" was born in Cordova probably in the final decade of the 3rd/9th century and died there in 367/977 [1]. He was a descendant of one of the last Visigothic princes of Spain his ancestor being the daughter of one of the sons of King Witiza (AD 702–710), penultimate monarch of the Visigothic kingdom. Despite this he was a loyal client and servant of the Umayyad amir of al-Andalus. He is most famous for his history of Islamic Spain and Portugal, the Ta'rikh fiṣṭal al-Andalus ("The History of Conquest of Andalus"), which gives an account of the arrival of Islam in the Iberian Peninsula, the flight there of the fugitive Umayyad prince 'Abd al-Rahman b. Mu'awiyah (138–172/756–788), the re-establishment of Umayyad rule and the lives of the amirs down to the reign of 'Abd Allâh b. 'Abd al-Rahmân (275–300/888–912) [2]. He is considered an alghârî rather than a mu'arrabî, that is a relater of anecdotes rather than a true historian, although the "science" of Arab history only began to develop in al-Andalus during his lifetime. His own "History" is a fascinating collection of accounts of life in Muslim al-Andalus, embracing not just the Arab-speaking hierarchy, but all classes and creeds of society.

He was a scholar and teacher at the Great Mosque of Cordova for most of his life, where he taught fiqh, hadith, and akhîrât. His classes on the latter were enjoyed by many students who were to become servants of the state in later years. It was possibly one of these who put his master's anecdotal oral accounts into written form, which survive in a unique manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France [3]. This, however, is only a summary of his oral — possibly also written — accounts for others appear in the Muqtabis ("The Spark") of Ibn Hayyân (377–867/982–1050) and elsewhere, which are not mentioned in the "History".

Among his contemporaries Ibn al-Qûtiyya was revered not so much for his expertise in any of the above disciplines — indeed his teaching of fiqh and hadith was condemned as deficient, too liberal, and not sticking to the letter — but for his immense knowledge of Arabic. When Abû 'Ali al-Qâlî (d. 356/950) visited al-Andalus in 330/952), the caliph al-Hakam II (350–366 /961–976) asked him on whose ground was the greatest scholar of Arabic and without hesitation he answered "Muhammad b. al-Qûtiyya".

Ibn al-Qûtiyya wrote several works on Arabic but only the titles of two were recorded. The first was the Kûthb taṣârîf al-qâlî ("The Conjugation of Verbs") which was edited many years ago by the Italian scholar, Ighazu Gaino (1813–1882) in the library of Sidi El Ferkous in Constantine, Algeria in the mid-19th century, though this was not examined by Gaino, and in fact seems to have disappeared [5].

His second work had also disappeared and was long thought to have been lost. This is the Kûthb al-maqâsîr wa al-mamlûdîl ("Book of the Shortened and Lengthened Alif") dealing with words ending in alif maqâsîr and alif mukkadd which is mentioned by Ibn al-Farâbî [6]. However in the autumn of 2009 a solitary copy emerged from the mists of history and came into the possession of the London dealers Bernard Quaritch. This was correctly identified by Dr. Meis al-Kaisi of Quaritch as the lost work of Ibn al-Qûtîyya [7].

The manuscript is in excellent condition and consists of 105 folios measuring 25.5 × 18 cm. According to the colophon on fol. 105 verso, it was copied in al-Qhirah in 650/1252 and is therefore late Ayyûbid. The text, seventeen lines to the page, is written on thick cream-coated paper. The script is an excellent scribal naskhî hand, fully vocalized, in black with headings in red. The text is accompanied by glosses on almost every page with each note giving, in red, the name of the author from whose work it has been copied. Importantly on fol. 105 verso there is a note to say that the text has been collated with the original, which may possibly have been in the hand of the author: balaghat al-mutâbadah kashâb... (?)...bi-murâjîn al-ślîf... (?The binding is later, brown morocco covers, of 19th century date.

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The work is in two parts Kātib al-maṣāṣir and Kātib al-manāfīd. As is only to be expected there is no biographical information in the text, though there are some verses of poetry. At the beginning, on the title page, fol. 1r, is the account of the author by Ibn al-Faraj (d. 403/1013) taken from his Taʿrīkh ʿulamāʾ al-Andalus ("History of the Scholars of al-Andalus") [8]. It is written in naskhi and was probably added in the 7th/13th century. Although the text of the passage is damaged on the left-hand side, it appears to be identical to the published version.

Notes

3. MS arab 1867, W. Baron MacGuckin de Slane, Catalogue des manuscrits arabes, Bibliothèque Nationale (1883—1895), ii.
5. Ibid., iv. For Cherbonneau’s work on the Paris manuscript of Ibn al-Qāṭīyya and the manuscript in Constanzine see: James, op. cit., pp. 19, 21, 41, note 6.
7. Catalogue No. 1388, Bernard Quaritch (2009), item No. 80. My thanks to Dr. al-Kaisi for allowing me to examine the manuscript.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Ibn al-Qāṭīyya, Kātib al-maṣāṣir wa al-manāfīd ("Book of the Shortened and Lengthened [Alāj]"). 25.5 × 18 cm, thick cream-coloured Arab paper, 105 folios. Al-Qāṭīyya, 650/1252. Courtesy of Bernard Quaritch Ltd., London.
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IN MEMORIAM


AUTHORS

Dr. Igor A. Alimov — Head of the Department of East and Southwest Asia of the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences (St. Petersburg), specialist in Far Eastern ethno-cultural texts. Author of the series of monographs in the field.

Mr. Mustafa Dehqan, MA — specialist in Kurdish Studies with an interest in the literature and religions of Kurdistan. He earned a bachelor's degree in Historical Studies and a master's in Historical Linguistics from the University of Tehran. Author of the numerous articles in the field.

Dr. Alessandro Gori — Department of Linguistics, University of Florence (Italy). Specialist in Arabic Islamic literature of the Horn of Africa. Author of a series of articles and monographs in this field.

Dr. David James — the author of several works on the arts of the Islamic book, especially calligraphy and illumination. He was lecturer in Arabic at University College, Dublin, Islamic Curator of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin and Curator of the Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, London. Now he lives and works in Spain.

Dr. Mikhail Kizlov — Kreitman fellow at the Department of Jewish Thought at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev (Be'er Sheva, Israel).

Dr. Khanna Omarkhaili — Lecturer of Yazdisism, Kurdish language and Culture at the Institute of Iranian Studies, George August University of Göttingen, Germany. Specialization: Yazdisism and Pre-Islamic Kurdish Religions. Author of a number of articles and three monographs in the field.

Mrs. Olga V. Vasileva — Head of the Oriental sector in the Manuscript Department of the National Library of Russia. Fields of interest — the arts of the book in the Middle East, history of the Oriental manuscripts' collections, old Turkish literary prose.

Dr. Igor N. Wojewodzki — Chief Librarian in the library of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, specialist in Semitic studies, author of several articles dealing with the history of Islamic and Judeo culture.

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