

the *tahbīs* associating his name with a pious deed in the eyes of the community in a highly significant place. It can even be turned into a political signal and serve as the record of a public statement: the Zirid ruler, al-Mu'izz b. Bādīs, expresses his loathing of the Fātimids and his siding with Sunni orthodoxy in the *tahbīs* of a Qur'ānic manuscript given to the Great Mosque in Kairouan.⁵⁰

Although the mediaeval inventory of the Great Mosque library unfortunately remains an isolated witness, its value is immense, all the more so because a number of the manuscripts described therein have come down to us and are still preserved at Kairouan. It is therefore very significant as it allows us to trace the history of this library through the ages. But it also enables us to understand the role of the book in a mediaeval Islamic community because it provides us a picture of the collection not only as it stood in 693/1294, but already during the Zirid period, as we suggested. However, our conclusions must remain provisional in the absence of a comprehensive catalogue of the collection, which must take into account -as much as possible- the items which were dispersed from the middle of the 19th century onwards. Only then will the importance of the inventory for the history of the book in the mediaeval Maghrib will become clear.

⁵⁰ B. ROY and P. POINSSOT, *op. cit.*, p. 37-38, n° 10 and fig. 9; M. RAMMAH, *op. cit.*, p. 43 (in the French text).

QUANDOQUE BONUS DORMITAT HOMERUS

A note on Ibn Rustah in De Goeje's BGA

EMERI VAN DONZEL & ROBERT M. KERR

It is a privilege as well as an act of gratitude for us to contribute to this *Festschrift* in honour of professor J. J. Witkam. His well-known admiration for M. J. De Goeje (1836-1909) – a distant predecessor of his as *Interpres Legati Warneriani* of the Leyden University Library Oriental Collections – will not be shown to be detrimentally misplaced when our contribution to this *liber amicorum* concerns a somewhat remarkable editorial procedure employed by the latter in one of the volumes of his still unsurpassed *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum* (BGA; 1870-1894). Volume VIII (Leyden, 1892) contains the *Kitāb al-A'lāq an-Nafisā*¹ by the Persian astronomer and geographer Abu 'Ali Ahmad ibn 'Umar ibn Rustah, a native of Iṣfahān.² The only extant volume of his geographical compendium contains, besides numerous other subjects, the narrative of the journey undertaken by Sallām 'the Interpreter'³ at the behest of the Abassid Caliph al-Wāṭiq (reg. 842-847 AD/227-232 AH). In a dream, the Caliph had seen that the barrier built by Alexander the Great (الإسكندر) 'the two-horned'⁴ against 'Gog and Magog' (يا جوج وما جوج) had been breached. He sent Sallām, in all likelihood a Khazarian Jew, on a mission to investigate the veracity of the matter. He travelled via Tiflis (modern Tbilisi/თბილისი Georgia), Igu (modern Hāmi / 哈密 or Uyghur *Qumul* / قۇمۇل in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China), probably Dūnhuáng (燉煌, Gansu Province PRC) and Ispigāb (ايسپغاب; modern Sayram/Са́йрам, Southern Kazakhstan) whereupon he returned to the caliphal court at Sāmarrā'. Here he drew up a report of his travels and

¹ Translations: G. WIET, *Les atours précieux* (Cairo, 1955); A. MIQUEL, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du 11e siècle, tome 1 : Géographie et géographie humaine dans la littérature arabe des origines à 1050*, (Paris, 1973, 2001); H. GÖCKENJAN-I. ZIMONYI, *Orientalische Berichte über die Völker Osteuropas und Zentralasiens im Mittelalter. Die Gayhānī-Tradition (Ibn Rusta, Gardīzī, Hudūd al-'Ālam, al-Bakrī und al-Marwazi)* (Wiesbaden, 2001).

² Cf. S. MAQBUL in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition s.v.

³ Cf. E. VAN DONZEL, *op. cit.* sub 'Sallām al-tarḡumān'.

⁴ Cf. Qur'ān 28: 83-98 and note E. VAN DONZEL-C. OTT, *op. cit.* s.v. and R. KERR, *Latino-Punic Epigraphy* (Tübingen, 2010), p. 144 esp. 112.

read it to Ibn Ḥurradādbih, who took it up in his *كتاب المسالك والممالك*.⁵ Ibn Rustah, who may well have actually met his contemporaries Ibn Ḥurradādbih and Sallām, states that he read Sallām's account as narrated in Ibn Ḥurradādbih's work. In this version, ms. B according to de Goeje, the following passages found in ms. A are missing:

- the advice of al-Wāṭiq's Mamluk general Ašnās to entrust the mission to Sallām "because he spoke thirty languages" (probably Turkic languages are intended, cf. *infra*);
- the accoutrements for Sallām's caravan;
- the stops at Tiflis and Igu;
- the hereditary function of the commander at the barrier of *dū l-qarnayn* against *Ya'ğūğ wa Ma'ğūğ* and Sallām's conversation with him;
- the black and yellow iron dust which Sallām scratched from the crack with his knife;
- mention of Neyšābūr (Nishapur), the residence of the Ṭāhirid governor of Ḥurāsān 'Abd Allāh b. Ṭāhir although ms. B does mention his name;
- several stops on the homeward journey;
- Sallām's audience with the Caliph upon his return.

Ms. B, according to de Goeje, is the oldest one probably dating to the last years of al-Wāṭiq's reign, or the early ones of his brother and successor al-Mutawakkil (reg. 847-861). This is the version which became rather widely known, being also found e.g. in al-Faqīh al-Hamaḍānī's *كتاب البلدان*.

In his edition of Ibn Rustah's *كتاب العلاق النفيس*, de Goeje omits Sallām's travel account altogether.⁶ The most important *variae lectiones*, he mentions in a note, had already been given by him in his text

⁵ BGA, v6 p.164 l 8-p. 170 l 5, = ms. Vienna pp. 137-144 (=foll. 68v-72r). De Goeje refers to this as ms A (cf. BGA v6 pp. xvi-xviii) of which he also provided a French translation.

⁶ In the printed text – which is only supposed to render the text of the manuscript, and not the editor's beau idéal – De Goeje inserts in an Arabic footnote *الضمي إلح*, i.e. "and adds: etc." (BGA, v7 p. 149 ad l 4) and omits the text until nearly the end of fol. 172V, i.e. Sallām's entire travel account. *إلح* is a contraction of *إلى آخره*, lit. 'to the end of it' i.e. 'et cetera' (cf. W. WRIGHT, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (Cambridge, 1971), v2 p. 146, sub B.)

edition of Ibn Ḥurradādbih. For some reason he apparently considered it unnecessary to publish Sallām's record for a second time.

Two comments are in order here. Firstly, regarding De Goeje's omission and secondly his justification for this exclusion by referring to Ibn Ḥurradādbih's text. This is a clear indication that for him, Ibn Rustah's text as found in the British Library manuscript is to all intents and purposes identical to that of Ibn Ḥurradādbih. This, however, is not the case. The differences between ms. A and the BL manuscript (as well as ms. B) are quite substantial indeed, and certainly much greater than De Goeje would have us believe. He himself underlined the differences between mss. A and B, but did not notice – or at least did not note down – the differences between ms. B and the BL manuscript and in turn between these and ms. A. One is left with the impression that De Goeje did not really study the BL manuscript, in any case not Sallām's report. Yet, the differences are quite apparent, especially with regard to the various endings transmitted: in the BL manuscript, we read after the passage "We returned to Sammārā' twenty-eight months after we had left it" (fol. 172A l 5ff.), "Ibn Ḥurradādbih said: Sallām the Interpreter told me this entire story. Then he dictated it to me from the report he had written on that [story] for al-Wāṭiq" (fol. 173b). Ms. B has almost the same ending as does the BL manuscript excepting several minor *variae lectiones*. The only real point of interest is the differing *kunyā* of the Ṭāhirid governor Abu l-'Abbās 'Abd Allāh b. Ṭāhir.⁷

De Goeje's treatment of the BL text does come rather as a surprise. He had published Ibn Ḥurradādbih's *كتاب المسالك* in 1899 and Ibn Rustah's *كتاب العلاق النفيس* in 1892. Yet in neither edition did he mention what Ibn Rustah wrote at the very end of Sallām's account. After the words "Then he dictated it to me from the report he had written on that for al-Wāṭiq", Ibn Rustah has "And we [scil. Ibn Rustah] in our turn have written it [the account] down in order that information be given about the 'mêlée' (*tahlīt*) and 'confusion' (*tazyīd*) it contains. For things like these cannot be accepted as authentic. I have found it [scil. this text] in accordance [with the original]."⁸

⁷ C. BARBIER DE MEYNARD, *Le Livre des routes et des provinces par Ibn-Khordadbeh* (Paris, 1865), p. 102 (translation) p. 192 (text).

⁸ وكتبناه نحن ليقتف على ما فيه من التخليط والتزيد لان مثل هذا لا يقبل صحته فوجته موافقا 8

This is even more surprising since already in 1888, one year before his edition of Ibn Ḥurradāḏbih and four years before that of Ibn Rustah, he wrote in *De Muur van Gog en Magog*⁹ (our translation): "Even Ibn Rustah, the earliest writer to take over Ibn Ḥurradāḏbih's tale, still in the ninth century, notes that he at first had difficulties in accepting it as trustworthy (ms. of the British Museum. [=BL] fol. 173r)."¹⁰ As we have seen above, Ibn Rustah did not just take over Ibn Ḥurradāḏbih's text, certainly not the version preserved in ms. A. There is also no evidence that he only after some initial reluctance considered Sallām's account as trustworthy. On the contrary, he speaks of 'mêlée' and 'confusion' and gives the text only for the sake of completeness. It is hard to see how De Goeje, had he actually studied the BL manuscript with any thoroughness at all, could have taken Ibn Rustah's statement as he did in *De Muur*.

A further remark concerning De Goeje's unmotivated interference with the text has to do with the similarities between the BL manuscript, ms. B. and al-Idrīsī's *Opus Geographicum* (كتاب زهرة المشتق) at least with regard to Sallām's account. These similarities would suggest that all three separate accounts are dependent here on a common source. At some point, one of the former two may have been combined with al-Ġayḥānī's كتاب المسالك والممالك, which led to the al-Idrīsī version we know, since neither BL nor ms. B show any influence of al-Ġayḥānī. Our conclusion then is that De Goeje did not do justice to Ibn Rustah's text by not attempting to clarify the (inter)relationship of the various versions of Sallām's report.

May our esteemed dedicatee take some comfort in the fact that even the Greatest are on occasion not beyond repute. Now that he has achieved the well-deserved status of emeritus, we however hope that he will not slumber but continue his prodigious scholarship. Maybe though in a quiet moment, he might find the opportunity to clarify his hero's slip.

9 M. J. DE GOEJE, *De muur van Gog en Magog* [Verslagen en Mededelingen der Koninklijke. Academie, Afdeling Letteren 3^e reeks, deel V] (Amsterdam, 1888).

10 Idem, *op. cit.* p. 103.

A LETTER IN BITS AND PIECES:
THE EPISTOLA ALEXANDRI
AD ARISTOTELEM ARABICA

A first edition with translation

based on four 16th-18th century manuscripts

FAUSTINA DOUFIKAR-AERTS

The earliest descriptions of India commonly known in Europe are found in the *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*. The *Epistola* was part of a correspondence between Alexander the Great and his teacher Aristotle, transmitted in the Greek *Alexander Romance*, which was compiled no later than the third century A.D.¹ Alexander supposedly informed his mentor of his travels in India, reporting to him amazing encounters and events from this part of the world, which at that time was virtually *terra incognita*. The letter must be considered apocryphal, but, since the information illuminates the mysterious Oriental setting which played on people's imagination, it was cherished by its readers as a valuable document. The *Epistola* hence had an enormous vogue and appeal. It was also transmitted independently from the Greek *Alexander Romance*, and by the thirteenth century its dissemination, through translations in many different languages, reached as far as Iceland.

The popularity of the *Epistola* was not only connected with its readers' penchant for spine-chillers, it was for centuries taken as a serious travel account on India of (one of) the first explorative expedition(s) to the East.

Moreover, the *Epistola* and its wondrous stories spread into the narrative cycles of the Middle East, Africa and Asia, in the wake of Islam. It can be recognized — in a reasonably intact shape although not in the form of a letter — in the *Šahnameh* by the Persian poet

1 Actually, the letter even antedated the *Alexander Romance*, the compiler of which inserted it in his work in an abridged form. The letter also circulated — independently from the Romance — in its 'original' form. The *Alexander Romance* is the legendary biography of Alexander the Great, Βίος Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μακεδόνα ('Life of Alexander of Macedon'), generally known as 'Pseudo-Callisthenes'. See DOWDEN, *Pseudo-Callisthenes*. Also see, in particular, GUNDERSON, *Alexander's Letter*.