A FISCAL SURVEY OF THE MEDIEVAL YEMEN

NOTES PREPARATORY TO A CRITICAL EDITION OF THE
MULAHHAS AL-FITAN OF AL-HASAN B. ‘ALI AL-SARIF AL-HUSAYNI

BY

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I.

ONE of the MSS. from the uncatalogued portion of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana of Milan singled out by Griffini for special attention was the Mulahhas al-Fitan wa-l-albāb wa-miṣbāḥ al-hudā li-l-kuttāb of a certain al-Hasan b. ‘Ali al-Šarif al-Ḥusayni (H. 130). Griffini even printed part of the preface to this very interesting work in his article Die jüngste ambrosianische Sammlung arabischer Halschriften (ZDMG, LXIX, 1915, pp. 78-79). Brockelmann (GAL, S. II, 253) provides no further details concerning this author and his work, but we know from al-Ḥasan that he completed it in Ǧumādā II 815 h. (Sept.-Oct. 1412), though from the internal evidence of the text itself his treatise covers existing practice for some considerable time anterior to the author’s composition of the Mulahhas. He describes the contents of the book as Fi Qawā’id amwāl dawawin al-ḥarāq al-sultānī al-mālikī al-malāhi al-nāṣirī al-ṣalāḥī bi-l-Gihāt al-yamanīyya (al-Mālik al-Nāṣir Ahmad, 803/1400-1401 to 827/1424). Griffini considered this MS. to be the author’s autograph, and draft corrections in the margin or between lines seem to support this view.

The binding of the MS. is quite interesting, but damaged, and the back is older than the front. The MS. of the Mulahhas itself is incomplete (4r°-27v°) [f° 28r° beginning abruptly with the middle of a chapter from the Iḥyā’ ʿulūm al-dīn of al-Ǧazzālī — C.C.]. But it would not seem that in fact a great deal of the Mulahhas is missing, and the exact portions lost can be determined by comparing the list of contents with the actual text. The ḥatima seems
to be on the virtues of the Pen, and probably resembles similar portions in the preface and in such authors as Qalqašandi. [The Mulahhaš begins on f° 5, but already f° 4 is surely part of it, only not bound in the proper place; f° 25 is another isolated folio, something lacking between it and folios 24 on the one part, 26 on the other.—C.C.]. The title page contains various indications of ownership, and the MS. was at one time a family waqf; might one suppose it was a waqf in a family of treasury officials? On a normal page of prose there are 15 lines to the page, but few pages can be described as normal, for the MS. is taken up with lists of articles of merchandise, tables, etc.

Most of the text is written in a good našh type hand, and for a Yemenite MS. it is well supplied with diacritical points, and even with vowels. [However the lists of taxes beginning with f° 17v° are in a smaller and hasty writing, which provides more difficulty in reading—C.C.], as the notation is not in Arabic numerals, but in a form of the Qirmeh script; and it is significant that, when I showed this to a Yemeni Sayyid whose father had been a prominent official of the Yemenite government, he was unable to make head or tail of the notation; so that one may suppose that this script is not now in use; perhaps it never was used by the Zaydis.

STYLE.

A late MS. of this type contains of course many so-called grammatical errors of a type common also to Mamluke MSS. roughly contemporary, e.g. the plural in in for classical ān, dual in ayn for ān. Shortened imperfect forms of the colloquial or jussive are employed. Special perhaps to South Arabia is the omission of fā after ammā. Spellings are often according to medieval and modern Yemenite orthography. Part of the text is in sağ, especially in the preface, when the author discusses the superiority of the Pen to the Sword.

CONTENTS.

The Mulahhaš, says the author, has four sections, like the temperaments (ṭabāʾiʿiʿ) of Man:

Section  I (5v°), Fi  faḍl al-qalam wa-ahlihi.

II (7v°), Fi maʿrifat qawā'id diwān al-ḥarāq al-sulṭāni.

III (13r°), Fi maʿrifat qawā'id amwāl al-Ḡīḥat al-ya- maniyya.