HADITH 'ISA IBN HISHAM BY MUHAMMAD AL MUWAILIHÎ.

A Reconsideration

Introduction—the development of the text

Al Muwailihi’s famous book Hadith 'Isa ibn Hisham first appeared in serial form under the title Fatra min az Zaman in Misbah ash Sharq—the newspaper which was owned and edited by his father Ibrahim, and published between April 1898 and August 1903—and the episodes were published in book form for the first time in 1907. Most previous analyses of the book have viewed it in isolation without bearing in mind the effect which these journalistic origins may have had on its structure and contents. In this article, we will place the book in its original context, and by studying it both as a piece of journalism and a work of literature, try to draw some conclusions about the author’s purpose in producing it in book form; only by so doing can we form a fair assessment of his success.

In 1887, Al Muwailihi returned from Istanbul at the end of five years in exile, which had begun with his expulsion from Egypt as a result of his campaigning on behalf of 'Urabi and his supporters and had taken him to Italy, Paris, Brussels, London and finally the Sultan’s court in Istanbul. Leaving his father in Istanbul, Muhammad returned to Cairo and began to write newspaper articles for Al Muqattam under a number of pseudonyms in which he discussed the fortunes of the Nationalist Party, the schemes of the Legislative Council, the question of slavery, and other topics of current interest. In the context of Hadith 'Isa ibn Hisham, what is interesting about these articles is that they were introduced by a narrator who calls himself As Sadiq al Amin; this use of a fictional dialogue to discuss

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1. Muhammad gradually took over the editorship after June 1901; see Misbah ash Sharq no. 158.
2. He was caught distributing a leaflet written by his father; see Ibrahim al Muwailihi the younger in the 6th ed. of Hadith 'Isa ibn Hisham (Dar al Ma’arif, 1943) page 327, also Cahiers d’histoire égyptienne VI (1954) page 168 ff and Ar Risala 1938 page 617 ff.
3. See Cahiers d’histoire égyptienne VI (1954) page 168 ff, and Al Muqattam from the 8th of December 1893 until the 19th of November 1894 (at irregular intervals).
issues of current affairs is noteworthy as being a prelude to the more sophisticated use of this medium in *Hadith 'Isa ibn Hisham*, and in both this early manifestation and the more famous episodes of *Fatrah min az Zaman* which appeared in *Misbah ash Sharq*, we can trace the influence of similar articles of political comment and satire which were written by James Sanua in *Abu Naddara* and 'Abdullah Nadim in *At Tankit wat Tabkit*.¹

In 1895, Ibrahim al Muwailihi returned to Cairo and in the following year published his famous book *Ma Hunalik*, a bitter exposé of the atmosphere of intrigue pervading the Sultan’s court which so incensed the Sultan that he ordered its destruction, a command which Ibrahim did all he could to carry out. Besides this damning collection of articles (which had appeared in *Al Muqattam*), Ibrahim had had experience both as a journalist and editor,² and so it is not surprising that he decided to found his own newspaper. The first number of *Misbah ash Sharq* appeared on the 14th of April 1898 and the paper soon established a high reputation for itself. It contained news from Istanbul and items of local interest as well as extracts from essays by Al Jahiz and poems from the Diwan of Ibn ar Rumi (which Muhammad had transcribed from manuscripts in the libraries of Istanbul). The leading articles dealt with issues such as the growth of the Pan-Islamic movement, the British occupation, the movement for religious reform, and the comparison of Western and Oriental customs. In addition to this, Muhammad wrote some articles of a philosophical nature which he collected later in his life; he was working on the text of this book until a few weeks before his death in 1930 and it was published posthumously as *'Ilaj an Nafs* in 1932, edited as a school text by his brother Khalil and Salim Abu Hajib whose letter in praise of *Hadith 'Isa ibn Hisham* ends the text of the second and subsequent editions of the latter book. But apart from the episodes of *Fatrah min az Zaman*, probably the most famous articles to appear in *Misbah ash Sharq* were the criticism of the Diwan of Ahmad Shauqi and the introduction with which the poet prefaced his work; these articles caused a furore in the literary world of Egypt which was split down the middle by this virulent and at times brutally sarcastic attack on the

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¹ For examples, see page 108, note 2.
² He had worked with 'Uthman Jalal on *Nuzhat al Afkar*, and with Al Afghani and 'Abduh on *Al 'Urwat al Wuthqa*; he himself had produced *Al Khilafa*, *Al Ittihad*, and *'Ain Zubaida*. 