AN UNPUBLISHED LETTER FROM 'ALĪ PASHA, OTTOMAN GOVERNOR OF IRAQ, TO THE SHARIF OF MECCA

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Leeds Arabic MS No. 192 is a small volume of Turkish origin containing a large number of short, unrelated literary pieces in Arabic, by various authors, suggesting that it was a commonplace book. Among the most interesting of these pieces is the text of a letter sent by 'Ali Pasha, Ottoman Governor of Iraq, to the Sharif of Mecca, informing him of the appointment of Ahmad 'Izzat Pasha as qa'im-maqām of Jiddah. The text of this letter is here presented for the first time, together with an English translation.

The Manuscript

The various short literary pieces of MS 192 are mainly of a poetical nature, but they also include the text of Rayḥānat al-ʿAlībbāʾ wa-Nuzhat al-Ḥayāt al-Dunyā of al-Khafājī and a collection of aphorisms.1 The MS consists of 282 folios, of which a few have been left blank, of paper of several different colours (white, pink, blue, yellow, etc.) with a Smyrna stamp. The folios measure 8 × 5 inches, and the MS is bound in tooled red Morocco leather with leather clasps. Tucked inside the front cover is a fragment of a letter written by A. G. Ellis of the British Museum in 1909. There is also a slip of paper with a brief summary of the contents, apparently in Ellis’s hand. The MS bears no date, but from internal evidence and the style of the script

it can fairly confidently be dated to the middle of the nineteenth century.

The text of the letter presented here occupies folios 166r-168r, and is written in a neat Turkish naskh. There are a few obvious copyist’s errors, which have been pointed out in the notes.

The style of the letter is very elaborate and allusive, and many passages are in rhymed prose; in this respect its style is typical of much later Islamic official correspondence. Several Traditions are quoted, metaphorical allusions are made to the rites of the hajj, and a somewhat far-fetched analogy is drawn between the Sultan ‘Abd al-Majid I and the Caliph ‘Ali ibn abi Ṭalib.

Date and Contents of the Letter

The sender of the letter is given as ‘Ali Pasha, Governor of Iraq. From internal evidence it is clear that this is an abbreviated form of the name ‘Ali Riḍā Pasha, Governor of Iraq from 1831 to 1842. The letter was actually drawn up by the hand of Mahmūd Effendi Ālūsī-zādah, Mufti of Iraq. The person who copied the letter did not bother to note its date, but it is possible to determine this with a fair degree of precision from events referred to in the letter itself.

The purpose of the letter was to inform the Sharif of Mecca (at this time Muḥammad ibn ‘Awn) of ‘Ali Pasha’s appointment, on behalf of the Sultan, of Ahmad ‘Izzat Pasha as qā’īm-maqām of Jiddah and Shaykh of the Ḥaram, and to appeal to the Sharif to

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2 For the career of ‘Ali Riḍā Pasha, see R. Coke, Baghdad, the City of Peace (London, 1927), pp. 256f.
3 Mahmūd ibn ‘Abdullāh al-Husaynī al-Ālūsī (1802-1854) was a member of an eminent Iraqi family. He was a Traditionist, Commentator on the Qur’an and Jurist, and author of many scholarly works. See ‘Umar Rida Kahhalah, Mujam vol. 12 (Damascus, 1960), pp. 175-176; C. Brockelmann, Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur, Supp. II (Leiden, 1938), pp. 785-787.
5 Ahmad ‘Izzat Pasha was later to become wāli of the Hijāz from 1852-3, and again from 1881-2.
6 The two titles seem to have been held by the same official; a short time later the title of “Shaykh al-Ḥaram” was held in conjunction with the full governorship of the Hijāz by Fariq ‘Uthmān Pasha. See Rif’at, op. cit., vol. I, p. 383.