

A LITTLE - KNOWN WORK ON POLITICS BY LISĀN AL-DĪN
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THE celebrated Granadine historian, Lisān al-Dīn b. al-Khaṭīb was also, as is well-known, a prominent man of affairs who, as *wazīr*, exercised considerable power at the Naṣrī court in the 8th/14th century. In the circumstances it is not surprising that a prolific and versatile author, as Lisān al-Dīn is known to have been, should have written on specifically political subjects. The fact that he did so was drawn attention to by Simonet, who remarks in one place that Lisān al-Dīn wrote learned treatises on the difficult art of government with which he sought to arrest the decadence of the state ¹. Yet, in spite of the interest which such works might be supposed to have, as coming from a distinguished literary man with long experience of practical affairs, none of them seems hitherto to have been brought to light and made the object of special study.

In the second part of Maqqarī's *Nafḥ al-Tib* one of these political works is cited *in extenso* ². This second part of Maqqarī, less familiar to Western readers than the first part dealing with the general history of Muslim Spain, which alone was printed by the Leiden editors of Maqqarī a century ago, contains, as is gene-

1. Francisco Javier Simonet, *Descripción del Reino de Granada*. Granada,

2. Vol. IX (Cairo, 1369/1949), pp. 134-149.

rally known, the personal history of Lisān al-Dīn, at great length and with the citation of many contemporary documents —poems, letters, etc.— referring to him or actually written by him, among which is the work in question. It is written in the rhymed prose (*sajʿ*) which Lisān al-Dīn made frequent use of in his literary works. The work exists also in Arabic manuscript No. 554 of the Escorial, signalized by Mr. Mohamed Abdullah Enan ³, where but for Mr Enan's observation it might have continued indefinitely to lurk in obscurity, since, remarkably enough, there is no mention of it in H. Derenbourg's description of this manuscript ⁴. In what follows the text as found in the manuscript (fols. 34b to 47b) is referred to as E, while M signifies the printed text in Maqqari.

In M the work is introduced with the words 'And of the prose (*nathr*) of Lisā al-Dīn-may God Most High have mercy on him', followed by a short preamble (EM): 'And of what (that what E) proceeded from me on politics (*siyāsah*), and its dictation was in one night (this clause in E only), the tradition (*hadīth*) of him who was distinguished for careful consideration of narratives (E he who was distinguished etc. related, *haddatha*), and possessed a degree of celebrity for transmitting the events of night and day, and penetrated between the calyxes and the flowers, and spared (?) (*talattafa li- M, talattafa min E*) the bashfulness of the rose at the smile of the day'. These somewhat obscure expressions appear to refer to Lisān al-Dīn himself. The statement that the work was dictated in a single night accords with what we know of the *wazīr's* insomnia ⁵.

His own condition may have suggested the mise-en-scène with which the work begins (see also below). It is night at the court of the Abbasid Caliph, Hārūn al Rashīd, who suffers from sleeplessness, and can find no remedy for his complaint. In search of entertainment and occupation for his mind, he orders his courtiers to go out into the city and bring back any chance comer. This they

3. *Al-Iḥatah fi Akhbār Gharnaḥ* (The History of Granada entitled al-Iḥata fi Akhbār Charnata by Lisān-ud-Dīn Ibn-ul-Khatīb, edited with an Introduction and Notes by Mohamed Abdullā Enan), Vol. I (*Dhkhūir al-ʿArab*, No. 17), Cairo, no date, p. 75.

4. *Catalogue des Manuscrits d'El Escorial*, p. 9.

5. E. g. Mohamed Abdullah Enan, op. cit., introduction, p. 45.

do, returning with a tall old man in patched garments, who in the sequel turns out to be a sage, capable of instructing the Caliph in the conduct of his empire. The *shaikh* is a man of mystery. When asked by the Caliph who he is, he replies, «A Persian by origin, an *ajamī* (i. e. foreigner) by race, but an Arab by separation (sc. from his people)». He is from «the city of the *Īwān*», i. e. presumably the former Sasanid capital, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, called by the Arabs *Madā'in*, where was the celebrated *Īwān Kisrā* (Arch of Khusrau), which survived to Islamic times. Asked what his profession is and why he has left his native place, he replies that he travels for experience, and that his business is *hikmah* (wisdom, philosophy) and to command great men, quoting the Qur'ān (Sūr. o, o): «And he who is given wisdom hath been given a great good» to emphasize his words.

The Caliph is delighted with all this, and proposes to question the *shaikh* as to how the burden of government may best be borne. The sage assents, and in some preliminary remarks emphasizes in general the importance of the rule of law (*shar'*) and the danger of misplaced leniency (*hilm*), adding the realistic observation «He who is not a ravening beast, wild beasts conspire to devour him» (*man lam yakun sab'an ākilan tadā'at sibā' ila aklīhi*). The Caliph thereupon urges him to treat the subject of politics systematically (*wa'asim al-siāsah funūnan wa'jal li-kull laqab* philosophy) and to command great men, quoting the Qur'ān (Sūr. o, o): «And he who is given wisdom hath been given a great good» (*ganūnan*) and to begin with the subjects of the empire. The main part of work follows.

A summary account of the various sections may be given.

1. The subjects (*ra'ūyah*) are a trust from God, and God's help is needed in dealing with them. Each class should be treated differently, so that the leading men of the upper class may learn to recognise your anger. The interests of each class are to be safeguarded, but at the same time none should be allowed to transgress its sphere. Insolence and idleness among the rich are to be safeguarded but at the same time none should be allowed to transgress its sphere. Insolence and idleness among the rich are to be checked, and so also religious speculation. The plain sense of the *Shari'ah* (religious law) is to be followed in all matters. Seditious assemblies are to be put down. No group should have the power

to redress their grievances. At most, they may refer these to someone of your trusted servants, whom you have deputed over their affairs (*man waqaltahu bi-maʿālihihim min thiqātika*). Care must be taken to advance the right kind of man. In general, show kindness as far as you can, but in case of open sedition and rebellion never hesitate to adopt strong measures.

2. The *wazīr*. Since he is your right-hand man, choice of him is very important. While many qualities are desirable (though not always to be found) in a *wazīr*, such that he should be perfectly loyal, honest, abstemious, high-minded, etc., more important than anything else is that he should fear God. Have nothing to do with the over-ambitious and disloyal.

3. The army (*jund*). Promotion must be given to those who fulfil their conditions of service. Stipulated pay must be forthcoming in full. The men should be properly trained by officers selected for their competence from those of good family, but care must be taken to avoid tribal and family interests becoming too powerful. The best training is in actual fighting, wherever you conduct the war against unbelievers (*jihād*). The standard of their arms and equipment must be a first care of the fighting men. They must not engage in business and trade, since they are to live by their profession and are expected to gain booty from the enemy. The ideal commander, for whom they will be willing to lay down their lives, is one who combines fairness and consideration for the men and their dependants with military qualities which inspire confidence, etc.

4. The governors (*ʿumrā*)

5. Children (*walad*).

6. Servants (*khadam*). Your servants are like the members of your own body, and must be treated accordingly. They are to be accustomed to accept your wishes as right, and to think that it is wrong to question them. When you make large demands on any of them, he must be suitably recompensed but it is important in dispensing rewards not to render chief men among them insolent or discourage the others. Even the deserving should not be helped with the full extent of your bounty and praise, but means of rewarding those who do better still should always be left. Various characteristics which render men suitable for particular posts are briefly indicated. In general, all must be convinced that they cannot dispense with your favour.

7. Women (*hurrm*). They are at once the mothers of the new generation and the solace of men. They should be present to the thought rather than to the sight, and in their retirement should be looked after by old and reliable female servants. You should be sparing of time spent with them, and they are to be rigorously excluded from all business. When they appear in public, their attendants should not be conspicuous for finery.

Here comes a short break in the exposition. The *shaiikh* relapses into silence before commencing the second part of his lecture, which is now concerned with personal advice to the ruler. He is warned against anger and partiality, and is urged to act at all times with justice, following rational proof (*hujjah*) and truth (*haqq*) even when they appear to conflict with his interest. He is to listen to advice but not to accept it blindly, and he must seek on every occasion the opportunity for acting virtuously and thus gaining advantage for the future life.

A variety of recommendations on the use of money follows. Different qualities, he tells Hārūn, are needed for your public representatives and private advisers (cf. above). Patronage is to be extended to the learned, who will add lustre to your reign and commemorate your good deeds. Maintain the *Shari'ah* against heretics and trust in God, whose worship affords strength to meet your necessities. Seek peace with all who will be at peace with you, and strive to overcome your adversary in well-doing. In time of peace look to the future, and do not occupy your time with pleasure. Restrain vain prophesyings and rumours, and beware of the undue influence of professors and teachers, theologians, and the 'ulamā' in general. Bestow alms, and make mention of the Almighty at the beginning and close of every day. Remember that you are by virtue of your situation exposed to every eye, and so act that what you do will not cause you shame. Guard against treachery, and take firm measures with the beginnings of disaffection.

Avoid placing a former rebel in authority where he revolted. Attend to communications and trade, but do not interfere with the prices. Keep your hands off the money of the people, except in certain specified cases. Proceed against no man on mere suspicion. Look after your sons properly, lest they aspire to rise and crush you.

Having reached the end of his discourse, the *shaiikh* sees that

the night is half gone. Calling for a lute, he strikes its lowest string (*bamm*) and sings moving verses on man's quest for the divine and sense of loss when it eludes him in this life. Then, changing the key, he casts his hearers including the Caliph into a deep sleep,⁶ and so leaves them. When Hārūn awakes no trace of the *shaikh* can be found. Consoling himself as best he can for his loss, the Caliph gives orders that the words which he has spoken should be written down. They are still read and transmitted to the present day, and hearts are gladdened and enlightened by them.

This account of the duties of a ruler, short but fairly systematic, composed, as there is no reason to doubt in the circumstances already mentioned, should afford some light on 14th century Granada under the Naṣrids and in particular on the political ideas of Lisān al-Dīn. At first sight we may be struck by the somewhat conventional character of the work. This type of moralizing appeared in Islam long before the 14th century, and to judge by the present work Lisān al-Dīn was much more old fashioned in his views than his contemporary Ibn Khaldūn, whose new and incisive views on society are matched by nothing here. The fact is, however, that the work has nothing whatever to tell about Granada or the political views of Lisān al-Dīn, except perhaps indirectly, for it was not originally composed by him.

A work by the Egyptian Ahmad b. Yūsuf b. al-Dāyah, called Kātib Āl Tūlūn (4th/10th century) entitled *Kitāb al-Siyāsah li-Aflātūn* or alternatively *Kitāb al-Uhūd al-Yunanīyah al-Mustakhrajah min Rumūz Kitāb al-Siyāsah li-Aflātūn* (Book of the Greek Testaments extracted from the indications of the Politics of Plato) has been printed more than once in recent times⁷, and contains an apologue in the Oriental manner about a certain king of the ancient Greeks (al-Yūnāniyūn) called Adhriyānus (Hadrianus) li-

6. The musical proclivities of the *shaikh* recall al-Fārāhī, who as well as being a philosopher was also a skilled musician. A story is given in the *Tatimmatih Siwan al-Hikmah* of his causing an audience at the court of one of the Buwaihids to fall into a deep sleep. But the *shaikh* in the story is not to be identified with al-Fārābī, who lived a century later than Harun al-Rashīd and was of Turkish, not Persian origin.

7. By Jamil Bek al-ʿAzīm (Beirut, no date) (not Jamil Bek al-ʿAzīz, as in Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, Supplement-Band, I, p. 229) and *stet* by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī, in *al-Uṣūl al-Yunanīyah al-Siyāsīyah fi'l-Islam* I, (Cairo, 1954), pp. 3-64.

ving earlier than the time of Mūsā (Moses), whose testament to his son, together with the parallel testaments of other fathers, a *wazīr* and a commoner, forms the main subject of the work. The testament of Adhriyānūs successively deals, like the discourse of the sage to Hārūn al-Rashīd in Lisān al-Dīn's work, with the duties of a king in relation to 1) subjects (*ra'iyah*), 2) the *wazīr*, 3) the army (*jund*), 4) the *hājib* or chamberlain, 5) the governors (*ʿummāl*), 6) children (*walad*), 7) servants (*khadam*), 8) women (*hururū*) and then proceeds to deal with the personal obligations of the ruler. Further inspection shows that Lisā al-Dīn's treatise often follows the other practically word, especially throughout the first part, i. e. down to the end of the section on women, thus:

(Lisān al-Dīn) *ra'iyatuka wadā'ic Allāh taʿalā qablaka, wa-marā ʿal-ʿadli lladhī ʿalaihi jabalaka, wa-lā taṣil ilā ʿabtihim ilā bi-ʿānati'llah taʿalā llatī wahaba laka, wa-afḍalu ma 'stadʿaita bihi ʿaunahu fihim, wa-kifāyatuhu 'llatī takfihim, taqwim nafsika ʿinda qaṣd taqwimihim, wa-riḍāka bi'l-sahar li-tanwimihim, wa-ḥirāsah kahlihim wa-raḍīʿihim, w'l-taraffuʿ ʿan taḍyīʿihim, etc.*

(Ibn al-Dāyah) *aʿlam anna'a-ra'iyah wadā'ic Allāh qablaka, wa-imānatuhu ʿindaka, wa-innaka (annaka) lā taṣil ilā ʿabtihim ilā bi-maʿūnatihi jalla wa-taʿalā, wa-afḍal mā'staʿaita bihi ʿaunahu laka taqwim nafsika lahum, wa-ḥasan al-nīyan finim, wa-hirāsatum, wa'l-manʿ ʿanhur. wa'l-tarrafuʿ ʿan taḍyīʿihim, etc.*

or:

(Lisān al-Dīn) *wa'l-wazīr al-ṣāliḥ afḍal ʿudadika, wa-ausal mada-dika, fa-nuwa'lladhī yaṣūnuka ʿan al-ibtidhāl, wa-mubāsharat al-andhāl, wa-yathubu laka ʿalā 'l-furṣah, wa-yanūbu di tajarruʿ al-giūṣṣah, wa'stijlā' al-qīṣṣah, wa-yastahḍir mā nasitahu min umūrika, etc.*

(Ibn al-Dāyah) *aʿlam anna'l-wazīr al-ṣāliḥ afḍal ʿudad al-mamlakah, li'annahu yaṣūnuka ʿan al-badhlah, wa-yasūfu bika ilā'l-furṣah wa yaḥṣur (leg *yūḥḍir*) mā ghadartahu min umūrika, etc.*

and in the second part of the work:

(Lisān al-Dīn) *waʿlam annaka maʿa kathrah ḥujjābika, wa-kathāfat ḥijābika, bi-manzilat al-zāhir li'l-ʿuyūn, al-muṭālab bi'l-duyūn, li-shiddat al-baḥth ʿan umūrika, wa-taʿarruf al-sirr al-khafī bain amrika wa-ma'mūrika, faʿmal fi sirrika mā lā tastaqbiḥ an yakūna zāhīran, etc.*

(Ibn al-Dāyah) *waʿlam annaka maʿa kathrah ḥujjābika, wa-*

bu'ḍ al-wuṣūl ilaiḳa, ḥi-manziilat al-zāḥir li-a'yun al-nās, wa-inrahu (annahu) lā yastatir 'anhum shai' amlatika, li-shiddah baḥṭhihim 'an umūriḳa, wa-kathrah man yaḥḍi ilā khāṣṣatihi mā jarā fi majlisika, fa'mal fi sirr amriḳa mā lā yustaqbal an yakūn zāḥiran lahum, etc.

In short. Lisān al-Dīn's treatise is not an original work, but based on the other. The extent of Lisān al-Dīn's contribution is to expand, or conversely to abbreviate, to reproduce Ibn al-Dāyah's text in a more consistently rhymed prose form, and to provide a new setting. While the work bears no direct relation to Granada and was not conceived originally by Lisān al-Dīn, we may perhaps tentatively draw conclusions from his refurbishing of it. The section on the chamberlain (*ḥājib*) in Ibn al-Dāyah was omitted by Lisān al-Dīn. This may correspond to the fact that at Granada in his time the separate office of *ḥājib* no longer existed or was unimportant. Perhaps also when he assigns specifically female servants only to the women, this implies that eunuchs were not now employed for the purpose, as they evidently were in Ibn al-Dāyah's time and milieu. These, however, remain speculative points. It is at least clear that Lisān al-Dīn thought it worth while to take a work several centuries old and recast it in a new form, which he gave out distinctly as his own. The motives which led him to so can only be guessed at. Presumably they included more than the simple desire to while away a few sleepless hours, and it may be suggested that the new work was intended to be placed in the hands of the young king of Granada⁸, the setting in Baghdad being considered by Lisān al-Dīn more attractive and perhaps more decorous than the pagan court of a more than half mythical Hadrian. However this may be, and however the work came to be written, examination of it appears to make the contrast between Lisān al-Dīn and his great contemporary Ibn Khaldūn, in the matter of originality, stand out with sufficient clearness.

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8. Muḥammād al-Ghanī bi'llāh.