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BOOK REVIEW / KİTAP DEĞERLENDİRMESİ

Book Review: Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-‘Imād al-Kātib al-Asfahānī. *Nusrat al-fatrah wa ‘usrat al-fitrah*. ed. Issam Mustafa Okleh. 2 vols. London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, Centre for the Study of Islamic Manuscripts, 2019. pp. 443, 598. ISBN: 978-1-78814-533-6

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‘Imād al-Dīn al-Isfahānī belonged to a distinguished family of the 6th/12th centuries, members of which held high positions in the Seljuk government such as clerks and viziers. After his primary education in al-Ray and al-Kāshān, ‘Imād al-Dīn went to Baghdād and studied under several scholars at al-Nizāmiyah (534/1139). After his education at al-Nizāmiyah, he came back to al-Isfahān in 543 (1119) and then six years later returned to Baghdād. After his second arrival in the ‘Abbāsīd capital, ‘Imād al-Dīn was appointed as a *nāib* by Vizier Ibn al-Hubayra in Wāsīt. After the suspicious death of Ibn al-Hubayra (559/1164), he remained in custody for a time, and later went to Damascus and served as a *kātib* and *mushrif* of *Dīvān al-Inshā* in the Zangī and Ayyūbīd administrations. But after the death of Salah al-Dīn, ‘Imād al-Dīn fell out of favor with the authorities and went to live in Egypt for approximately a year. Finally, he returned to Damascus and died there on 1 Ramadan 597 hijrī (5 June 1201).

‘Imād al-Dīn’s works secured his place as one of the prominent historians and literary figures of his era. His writings are essential for scholars desiring further knowledge on the 6th/12th century of ‘Abbāsīd, Seljuk and Ayyūbīd history. These include *Khāridat al-kasr wa jarīdat ahl al-‘asr*, *Nusrat al-fatrah wa ‘usrat al-fitrah*, and *Fath al-qussī fi al-fath al-qudsī*.

Issam Mustafā Okleh is a specialist known for his editions of Islamic historical texts such as *Dīvān al-Rasāil* by Amīn al-Dawla Ibn al-Mūsālāyā (d. 497/1104) and *Ansāb al-*

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ashraf by Balādhurī (d. 279/892) (with Abd al-Azīz al-Dūrī). He recently published *Nusrat al-fatrah wa 'usrat al-fītrah* (Help in Weariness and Refuge of Creation), the only extant manuscript of which is located in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Some points of interest presented in Okleh's lengthy introduction are the life and works of 'Imād al-Dīn, the sources of *Nusrat al-fatrah*, the time of and reason for its writing, and the methodology that was adopted by of 'Imād al-Dīn in producing *Nusrat al-fatrah*.

Okleh's edition of *Nusrat al-fatrah* provides scholars with new information about both the biography and family of 'Imād al-Dīn and his works. Examples include 'Imād al-Dīn's grandfather's taking a low ranking position in the Seljuk administration, the comportment of his father Saḥy al-Dīn and of his uncle 'Azīz al-Dīn in various political struggles, and their being taken into custody for a period (p. 17-19). Also, some lesser known parts of his works are brought to light with this edition. For instance, 'Imād al-Dīn had published a book of poems entitled *Dīvān al-Shi'r*, which is no longer extant. And although Nāzem Rashid published a compilation of some of 'Imād al-Dīn's poems from his various books,¹ *Nusrat al-fatrah* presents many poems not included in Rashid's compilation (p. 26). Also, *Nusrat al-fatrah* is an important source because it contains unique data about the struggles between Seljuk statesmen, the vizirate of 'Imād al-Dīn al-Dargazīnī, Sultan Sanjar's relations with the Nizārī-Ismā'īlīs and their role in the death of the Caliph al-Mustarshid (r. 511-529/1118-1135) (p. 81-84).

According to Okleh's findings, *Nusrat al-fatrah* consists of three parts. The first part covers the period that began with the emergence of the Seljuks and continues until the middle of the vizirate of Nizām al-Mulk. 'Imād al-Dīn, when writing this part, especially benefited from the oral narratives inherited from his family, and from the information given by three sources: Gars al-Ni'ma Muhammad b. Hilāl (or Hillāl) al-Sābī, Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Malik al-Hamadānī known for the book *Takmila*, which he wrote to supplement the history of al-Tabarī, and 'Abd al-Karīm Muhammad ibn al-Sam'ānī, known for the book he wrote as supplement to the history of Baghdād by Khatīb al-Baghdādī (p. 31-34).

The second part of *Nusrat al-fatrah* is the translation of Anūshirwān ibn Khālīd's book written in Persian, which contains his memoirs and the events that took place from the accession to the throne of Sultan Malik-Shāh (r. 465-485/1072-1092) until the death of Sultan Tughril I (r. 526-529/1132-1134). This book has come down to us only in the Arabic revision of 'Imād al-Dīn, and is the main source of

1 'Imād al-Dīn al-Isfahānī, *Dīvān 'Imād al-Dīn al-Isfahānī*, ed. Nāzem Rashid (Mosul: Matābi' al-Jāmi'at al-Mosul, 1983).

Nusrat al-fatrah. For this reason, Okleh provides fairly detailed information about Anūshirwān's life and work. Despite the fact that the name of Anūshirwān's book is mentioned by 'Imād al-Dīn and by modern scholars² as *Futūr zamān al-sudūr wa sudūr zamān al-futūr* (Decline of the Times of Ministers and Ministers of the Times of Decline), Okleh adds the phrase *Nafsat al-mastūr* at the beginning of the title of *Futūr zamān* (p. 49, fn. 7). Because 'Imād al-Dīn himself did not make this addition, it requires Okleh to give a detailed explanation on this topic. Okleh also addresses Lambton's view regarding the book's title, which is based on Hindushāh al-Sāhibī (d. 730/1329-30). His contention is that Lambton uncritically accepts the idea that this work was actually two different books, *Futūr zamān* and *Nafsat al-mastūr*, whereas Hindushāh merely had misgivings about the question of whether it was one work or two works. But Lambton does not actually say that *Nafsat al-mastūr* is the second and different book; moreover she indicates that Hadjdjī Khalīfā³ mentions another work by 'Imād al-Dīn, entitled *Nafsat al-mastūr*, and this is probably the same as the *Futūr zamān*.⁴ Hindushāh, however, without discussing the issue of 'Imād al-Dīn having written two separate works, simply records the name of the text in question as *Nafsat al-mastūr fī Futūr zamān al-sudūr wa sudūr zamān al-futūr*.⁵

The other main issues addressed by Okleh in this section are Anūshirwān's relations with Seljuk sultans and viziers, his administrative positions, and the troubles he experienced with other statesmen. Some of the points that Okleh presents regarding 'Imād al-Dīn's point of view about Anūshirwān are quite remarkable. Namely, according to Anūshirwān, who was the *ā'rid al-djays* (army inspector) in the time of Mahmūd ibn Muhammad I Tabar (511-525/1118-1131), the main reason he was discharged from this duty was Imād al-Dīn's own uncle Azīz al-Dīn's opposition towards him. Azīz al-Dīn was *mustawfī* (an official in mediaeval Islamic administration who oversaw official accounts and thus acted as an accountant-general) in that period. Therefore, a negative atmosphere prevails in Anūshirwān's descriptions of Azīz al-Dīn. 'Imād al-Dīn himself was wary of Anūshirwān and accused him of being envious of his uncle Azīz al-Dīn (p. 48-49). This attitude is also reflected in his translation of Anūshirwān's work. It is necessary to underline

2 For some exceptions see. 'Abbās Ikbāl, *Vizārat dar 'ahdi salātīn buzurḡī Selcūkī* (Tahrān: Danishgāh- 1 Tahrān, 1338), 184; Sa'īd Nafīsī, *Tārīh-i nazm u nasr der Īrān u der zabān-i Fārisī*, 2 vols. (Tahrān: Intishārāt Furūḡī, 1363), 1/119.

3 Hadjdjī Khalīfā, *Kashf al-zunūn* ed. M. Şereftin Yaltkaya & Kilisli Rifat Bilge, 2 vols. (İstanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1941-1943), 2/1966

4 A.K.S. Lambton, "Anūshirwān b. Khālid" *The Encyclopedia of Islam New Edition (EF)*, 2/522-523.

5 Hindushāh al-Sāhibī, *Tajārib al-Salaḡ*, ed. 'Abbās Ikbāl (Tahrān: Kitābkhāne-i Tahūrī, 1357), 301- 302.

that there is so much overlap between ‘Imād al-Dīn’s self-written texts and his translations from Anūshirwān’s book, that the reader cannot distinguish one from another. Curiously, however, ‘Imād al-Dīn does not even include the narratives that are critical of his uncle Azīz al-Dīn in *Futūr zamān* (p. 65-66). Another issue that arises is the reason for Anūshirwān writing his book. It is clear that ‘Imād al-Dīn takes a cynical view, namely that Anūshirwān compiled such a book in order to expose the faults of the Seljuk statesmen competing with him and to take revenge on them (p. 53). But Houtsma disagrees with this view. He thinks that Anūshirwān’s work is only an expression of the author’s personality and that his attitude is part and parcel of this type of literature, and even gives it its charm.⁶ Okleh also notes that *Futūr zamān* is primarily aimed at carefully composing records of events of Anūshirwān’s time, but Anūshirwān cannot avoid sometimes being enslaved by his feelings. Okleh says that Anūshirwān’s style reflects a penetrating understanding of the problems of the period when he lived. Moreover, this style would not have been regarded as strange in its time, and similar books were written against many viziers (p. 53-54).

The third and last part of *Nusrat al-fatrah* begins in the year 528 hijrī (1134) and finishes with compendious details about Arslān ibn Tughril (r. 555-572/1160-1177) and his son Tughril III (r. 572-590/1177-1194) (p. 66-68). For this period ‘Imād al-Dīn has two main sources: narratives quoted by Seljuk statesmen and official documents of the period (p. 69-70).

Finally, the important question remains as to when and why ‘Imād al-Dīn wrote his book. According to Okleh, ‘Imād al-Dīn translated *Futūr zamān* before 579 hijrī (1183).⁷ The details of events occurring after this date (along with the foreword and conclusion) were later added by ‘Imād al-Dīn. He completed his book with the death of Sultan Tughril III in 590 hijrī (1194). (p. 72). Okleh mentions six possible causes that led ‘Imād al-Dīn to write *Futūr zamān*: 1. To complement his book *Khāridat al-kasr* by writing on the lives of the Seljuk viziers. 2. To fulfill the request of an Ayyūbīd statesman 3. To provide a comprehensive overview of the Seljuk administration. 4. To shed light on the position of his family, which took on important tasks in the Seljuk administration. 5. To defend his uncle Azīz al-Dīn against the accusations of Vizier ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Dargazīnī. 6. To build affinity with the Ayyūbīd family (p. 74-75).

Each of these reasons, of course, serves to form a picture in the reader’s mind about why ‘Imād al-Dīn wrote his book. But another question remains as to why

6 Wilhelm Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion* (London: Luzac, 1928), 27.

7 The date is wrongly written as 479 hijrī (1086) instead of 579 hijrī (1183).

‘Imād al- Dīn, even though he was averse to Anūshirwān, translated his book *Futūr zamān* and accepted it as the primary source for his work. The possible response to this may be that ‘Imād al-Dīn, in desiring to write a comprehensive book about the Seljuk history and administration, may have determined that Anūshirwān’s book was the most proficient source for this topic. In other words, the fact that a notable book could not be written without the aid of *Futūr zamān* may have been the main factor in ‘Imād al-Dīn’s making such a decision.

The explanatory footnotes, the definition of Arabic words that might be misunderstood, and the detailed index enable the reader to benefit all the more from this work. Additionally, references to other historical sources for the same historical events are footnoted, enabling the reader to easily cross reference different texts. In conclusion, with this edition the most substantial source about the Seljuks, Abbāsīds, Ayyūbīds and other dynasties in Iraq and Syria has come to light. The available data in *Nusrat al-fatrah* will equip scholars to make new assessments in future works.

