
PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

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‘ADJĀ’IB AL-MAKHLŪQĀT BY ZAKARIYĀ’ AL-QAZWĪNĪ (d. 682/1283): 16th-CENTURY ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT FROM THE ST. PETERSBURG ACADEMIC COLLECTION

Brief Presentation

Among the masterpieces of the Muslim manuscript art preserved in the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, there is a splendidly illuminated 16th-century Arabic copy of the famous cosmography ‘*Adjā’ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā’ib al-mawjūdāt*’ (“The Marvels of Creation and the Rarities of Existence”) by Abū Yahya Zakariyā’ b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Qazwīnī (600/1203 — 682/1283) [1].

Al-Qazwīnī is one of the most famous authors of the ‘*adjā’ib*’ genre of Muslim literature. He is often compared with such celebrated authors as Herodotus and Plinius. His works, and particularly his ‘*Adjā’ib al-makhlūqāt*’, translated later into Persian and Turkish, greatly influenced the world’s outlook of the Muslim Orient [2].

Geographical frames of the ‘*Adjā’ib al-makhlūqāt*’ cover the Near and the Middle East, Central and South-East Asia, China, India, Ceylon, the Caucasus and countries of the Mediterranean, North Africa, Andalusia, etc. Al-Qazwīnī visited many countries travelling with trade caravans. He also recorded many stories told by pilgrims, merchants and dervishes. Some of these stories and descriptions are based on some fantastic oral tradition; one of the author’s aims was to amuse his readers. The work presents the whole picture of the universe, planets and constellations, angels and monsters, spheres of the air, water and earth, “strange” people, as well as the vegetable and animal kingdoms...

The manuscript (inventory number D-370) was purchased in 1914 in Athens through the intermediary of Georges Gues. It is dated by 988/1580 and contains 231 folios (some folios are missing). The size of its pages is 34.5 × 24.0 cm. The text is framed with blue, red and two golden lines, the latter are traced with thin black lines; the surface occupied by the text measures 24.5 × 18.1 cm. There are 22 lines per page, written in calligraphic classical black naskhi characteristic of the Persian scribes’ style of the period. Red ink and enlarged letters were used to mark

all the key words. The titles of the chapters are written in dark blue and gold.

The colophon, written in black ink on the last page is in the same handwriting as the main text; it contains the date of copying and the name of the copyist — al-‘Ibād al-dīn b. Madjd al-dīn al-Isfahānī.

The binding with a flap, which is as old as the manuscript itself, is made of paper sheets closely pasted together and covered with dark-brown leather. A stamped golden frame is decorating the binding on both sides. An applique device is skilfully set in the centre of the binding. It has a quasi-ellipsoid form with a stamped plant pattern against the gilded background.

There are six imprints of the three owners’ seals and few dated marginalia on the first page of the manuscript. Two imprints of the biggest seal belong to al-Sayyid Muḥammad ‘Arif al-Rushdī, three others — to some person named ‘Afīfa. The last seal belongs to one ‘Ibād Allāh. Many people are mentioned in marginalia as the owners of the book (*ṣāhib hazā ‘l-kitāb*). Among them the above-mentioned ‘Afīfa (1147/1733—4), ‘Ibād Allāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Djahrumī (1269/1851—2), Hādjī Muṣṭafa b. Hādjī Yahyā’ Katkhodayī (1289/1872—3). —

The manuscript is richly illuminated. It contains decorative ‘*unwān*’, 11 astronomic tables and 4 drafts of the spheres of heaven, 25 star charts and 426 miniatures. Their size vary between 80.0 × 22.0 cm (fol. 76b) and 30.0 × 18.7 cm. (fol. 230b). As a rule, they are not framed. The palette looks vivid and rich. The drawings reveal a bold and firm hand. The repertoire of the miniatures is typical of the other known ‘*Adjā’ib al-makhlūqāt*’ [3] manuscripts.

Even a superficial examination of the handwriting and miniatures leaves little doubt that the manuscript was copied and illuminated somewhere in the region of Baghdad — Tabriz. The manuscript is waiting for a thorough and detailed analysis which will establish its place within the iconographic tradition of illustrating ‘*Adjā’ib al-makhlūqāt*’.