

BOOK REVIEWS

Mikael Persenius. *The Manuscripts of Parts 1 and 2 of Shams al-'ulūm by Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī. A Study of Their Relationship*. Uppsala: 1997, 278 pp. — Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Semitica Upsaliensia, XIII.

The work under review is Mikael Persenius's dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Semitic Languages at the Department of Asian and African Languages of Uppsala University in 1997. The main objective of the author consisted in establishing the relationship between the extant manuscripts of the Arabic lexicon *Shams al-'ulūm wa-dawā'*¹ *kalām al-'Arab min al-kulūm* ("The Sun of the Sciences and the Wounds' Remedy for the Words of the Arabs"), compiled by the famous scholar of medieval Yemen, Nashwān b. Sa'īd al-Ḥimyarī (d. 573/1178), to prepare a preliminary research for its critical edition.

It seems that a kind of fate hangs over the publication of this masterpiece of Yemenite tradition. Though a selection of texts from the *Shams al-'ulūm*, dealing with South Arabia and compiled by 'Azīmuddīn Aḥmad on the basis of some reliable manuscripts, appeared as early as 1916², the edition of the whole body of the lexicon has not been accomplished yet. The first part of the work covering the letters *hamza* to *shīn* was published in 1951 under the supervision of 'Abdallāh al-Jarāfī who used mostly manuscripts from the library of the Imām of Yemen³. But the decision to interrupt the publication was made by the Imām on his learning about the European edition of the same work undertaken by Karl Vilhelm Zetterstéen (1866—1953). As for Professor Zetterstéen, he succeeded in editing only two fascicles (down to the end of *jīm*)⁴, as his death prevented

from finishing the project. In 1983, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Sultanate of Oman undertook the edition of five volumes of the *Shams al-'ulūm*. The publication embraces the text of the lexicon from the beginning to the end of *shīn* and, in all probability, represents a faithful transcription of only one manuscript kept now at Muscat (pp. 29, 70)⁵. Thus the intention of Mikael Persenius to prepare a critical edition of Nashwān's work, following in the footsteps of K. V. Zetterstéen, professor of Semitic languages at Uppsala University in 1904 to 1931, is praiseworthy, being an example of the scholarly continuity in classical Arabic studies, which occurs now rather seldom. M. Persenius's work is the first step in right direction.

The structure of the dissertation fits well the aims of the codicological research carried out by the author. It consists of six chapters, including the Introduction considered as Chapter I, and the critical edition of six texts selected from Parts 1 and 2 of the *Shams al-'ulūm* (Chapter 6). Chapter 2 provides a survey of some important facts of Nashwān's biography, which are extracted mainly from several researches on the life of the lexicon's author (pp. 18—20). However, M. Persenius's list of primary sources dealing with Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī appears to be exhaustive (p. 17).

It should be noted that in the framework of a codicological research M. Persenius's attempt to reveal the real meaning of the proper name Nashwān (p. 19) seems a bit strange. Besides, the etymology he proposes — "he who inquires after the news as soon as it comes" — is not convincing. Possible is the derivation of this name from *nashwān* ("dizzy (with love)"), attested in the 'Absite poetry⁶, or its affinity to the *nisba* form *nashwānī*, which in post-classical Yemeni Arabic means "diligent", "industrious"⁷.

¹ As M. Persenius correctly remarks (p. 23), the reading *diwā'* ("cure", "treatment") attested in some manuscripts fits well this context, and it is difficult to decide which of two variants was original.

² *Die auf Südarabien bezüglichen Angaben Našwān's im Šams al-'ulūm*. Gesammelt, alphabetisch geordnet und hrsg. von 'Azīmuddīn Aḥmad (Leyden—London, 1916). — E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, vol. XXIV. The selection was reprinted in Yemen under the title *Muntakhabāt fī akhbār al-Yaman min Kitāb shams al-'ulūm wa-dawā' kalām al-'Arab min al-kulūm*. Ṭab'a thāniya muṣawwara (Ṣan'ā', 1981). — Mashrū' al-kitāb, 8/3. Unfortunately, in his detailed survey of all the previous publications of the *Shams al-'ulūm*, M. Persenius took no notice of this publication, although he gives in his bibliography the names of reprint editions (pp. 26—30, 269).

³ Nashwān b. Sa'īd al-Ḥimyarī, *Shams al-'ulūm wa-dawā' kalām al-'Arab min al-kulūm*. Taḥqīq 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jarāfī (Cairo, 1951), i—ii (reprint: Beirut, 1982).

⁴ Nashwān b. Sa'īd al-Ḥimyarī, *Shams al-'ulūm wa-dawā' kalām al-'Arab min al-kulūm*, ed. K. V. Zetterstéen (Leiden, 1951—1953), i, fasc. 1—2.

⁵ Nashwān b. Sa'īd al-Ḥimyarī, *Shams al-'ulūm wa-dawā' kalām al-'Arab min al-kulūm* (Muscat, 1983), i—v.

⁶ V. I. Polosin, *Slovar' poetov plemeni 'abs (VI—VIII vv.)* (A Vocabulary of the 'Absite Poets of the Sixth—Eighth Centuries) (Moscow, 1995), p. 472.

⁷ M. Pimenta, *Dictionary of Post-Classical Yemeni Arabic*. Pt. 2 (Leiden—New York—København—Köln, 1991), p. 486.