

PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

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AL-QAZWĪNĪ'S 'AJĀ'IB AL-MAKHLŪQĀT WA GHARĀ'IB AL-MAWJŪDĀT: MANUSCRIPT D 370*

The collection of illuminated manuscripts at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies has in its holdings a lavishly illustrated copy (D 370) of a cosmographic work '*Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt*' ("The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existence") by Zakarīyā' b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Qazwīnī (ca. 1203—1282). The manuscript is dated by 988/1580. Al-Qazwīnī's cosmographic composition is an example of what happens when scientific knowledge is combined with a sense of adventure and of a creative imagination. Indeed, the book lives up to its title. Anyone with an interest in nature, dreamers with fantasies about far-away places and the rare creatures who live there, anyone interested in astronomy, the planets and the sky above, or even in angels — all will find much to enjoy in al-Qazwīnī's work. It is, therefore, no wonder that such a composition of great variety has been copied over the centuries, beginning in the mid-thirteenth century. Furthermore, as one would expect of a treatise that deals with vivid literary images, its rich and varied illustrations bring to life wonderful creatures and odd beings. The main purpose of this paper is to introduce in full the manuscript and its illustrations to the reader [1].

The famous Arabic cosmographer Zakarīyā' b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Qazwīnī [2], often compared with such celebrated authors as Herodotus and Plinius, was born in Qazwīn around 1203. Although Arabic may not have been his mother tongue, his family was of Arab origin. During his life he visited various places, such as Baghdād, Persia and Damascus. He encountered many famous figures such as Ibn al-Athīr and Ibn Sa'īd al-Gharnāḥī, an Arab philologist and geographer. In Wāsiṭ and Ḥilla, al-Qazwīnī was a *qāḍī* under the reign of the last 'Abbāssid caliph, al-Must'āsim. After the capture of Baghdād by the Mongols in 1258, al-Qazwīnī had turned to science, research and composition.

Qazwīnī's works, particularly '*Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt*', often mentioned simply as the "Cosmography", greatly influenced the world's outlook of the Muslim Orient. Until recently, this work, known in its

abridged and expanded versions, was one of the most popular books on science in the Islamic world. It belongs to the *mirabilis* genre which includes literary works containing tales about rarities and odd nature phenomena [3]. One finds in them a description of the planetary system, as it was known in the medieval East. Usually, such works included tales of astonishing phenomena and facts that were conceived as the "miracles" of the world to serve as a key to understanding the world's wholeness, as well as its place, role, and predestination of man in the universal hierarchy. The entire multifaceted world, from heavenly luminaries to minerals, plants, animals and man — the crown of creation — was presented in these works as a "miracle". The study and understanding of "miracles" was the basic task of man on his path to intellectual and spiritual perfection. At the same time, the discovery of various "miracles" ('*ajā'ib*') and "signs" (*āyāt*) was aided by codices and books containing "miraculous" information. The work by al-Qazwīnī represents the fullest and the best literary embodiment of the theory of signs that rests on a philosophical interpretation of the Qur'ānic text (41:53). It is a complete and seamless description of the universe.

The meaning of the word '*ajība*' (Pl. '*ajā'ib*') is 'wonder' or 'miracle'. The term '*ajā'ib*', as is found in the title of al-Qazwīnī's work, suggests information about extraordinary monuments, realms of nature, and meteorological phenomena. This information is based on both Greek and Islamic scientific tradition. The word '*ajā'ib*' in the Qur'ān refers to the marvels of God's creation, and, indeed, in an introduction to his work al-Qazwīnī defines the terms *makhlūq* (Pl. *makhlūqāt*) and *mawjūd* (Pl. *mawjūdāt*) as God's creations: everything that exists (*mawjūd*), except for God, is created (*makhlūq*).

Al-Qazwīnī gives exposition of his views and his "statement of purpose" in an introduction to his work. According to him, man, endowed with reason and a desire for knowledge and spiritual fulfilment, has thus been singled out from animals. He can find in each phenomenon and in

* The current article is mostly the result of Bilha Moor's meticulous work on the raw material I supplied her with in May 2001. That is why I would like to stress here that she is more than a mere co-author of the paper. Her MA thesis, based on the study of the miniatures of manuscript D 370, was prepared in the University of Haifa under the supervision of Professors Rachel Milstein, Anat Tcherikover, and George Kanazi, to whom I express my sincere gratitude. The facsimile of the manuscript is currently being prepared for publication in Spain by Freedonia Publishers. It will contain an enlarged version of the work (E. R.).