PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

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YŪSUF AL-MAGHRIBĪ'S EGYPTIAN-ARABIC WORD LIST. A UNIQUE MANUSCRIPT IN THE ST. PETERSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Introduction

The library of the Oriental Faculty of the St. Petersburg State University contains among its collection a unique manuscript (call number Ms O. 778) entitled *Daf' al-iṣr 'an kalām ahl Miṣr* ("Removing the Burden from the Speech of the People of Egypt"; hereafter referred to as *Daf' al-iṣr*). This manuscript dates to the beginning of the eleventh century A.H. (the beginning of the seventeenth century A.D.). The author of the work, Yūsuf b. Zakariyā b. Ḥarb al-Maghribī, died in 1019/1611. The importance of the manuscript lies in the fact that, to the best of my knowledge, it is the first dictionary of the Egyptian Arabic dialect. Moreover, the manuscript is the autograph. As far as I know, there are no other copies of the work [1]. This unique manuscript is the subject of the Ph. D. research by the author of the present article. The research will consist of an edition of the text and a study of its contents.

This paper is an attempt to summarize the issues I intend to discuss in my Ph. D. research. I am going to highlight the following topics: (i) the life of the author of the work, Yūsuf al-Maghribī; (ii) the St. Petersburg copy of the work: its history and present form; (iii) the contents of the manuscript. It includes not only a dictionary but also poetry, anecdotes, and remarks on the culture and customs of the seventeenth-century Egypt.

Yūsuf al-Maghribī

Unfortunately, not much is known about Yūsuf al-Maghribī, except what we read about him in *Daf' al-iṣr*, and in the chapter in the *Rayḥānat al-'albā' wa zahrat al-ḥayāt al-dunyā* dedicated to him by his friend al-Khafājī [2]. However, al-Khafājī does not provide many facts about al-Maghribī [3]. Yūsuf al-Maghribī was born in Egypt. His exact birth date remains unknown, but from what we know about his teachers, who are mentioned in different sources, we can deduce that he must have been born at the end of the sixties or beginning of the seventies of the tenth century A.H., which corresponds to the sixties of the sixteenth century A.D.

In his *Daf' al-iṣr*, al-Maghribī relates a very personal anecdote about his childhood, which gives us an insight into the background of his family (fols. 70a—71a). When al-Maghribī was about seven years old, he went with his father to al-Ḥijāz, where his father died and was buried in al-Baqī' (the cemetery of al-Madīna). Upon returning to Egypt, Yūsuf al-Maghribī stayed with his maternal uncles who were famous manufacturers of embroidered sword belts (*ḥamā'il al-suyūf*). Al-Maghribī had learnt this craft from them and worked for them. Every year they sold a huge amount of these belts to the caravans that came from the Sudan. In the evening, Yūsuf al-Maghribī would go to the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn to learn the Qur'ān. The language of the Qur'ān awoke his interest in grammar, and in the evening, after his uncles were asleep, he studied by heart the *'Alfīya*, the famous grammar of Ibn Mālik. He had to do this discreetly because one of his uncles was against his studies, stating that there were no scholars in the family, so why should he become one? Once, when a regular caravan from the Sudan did not arrive, al-Maghribī's uncles gathered their wares and set off to the Sudan. They left Yūsuf at home and entrusted their shop to him so that he could provide a living for himself and the family, but soon after they left, Yūsuf sold the shop, bought books for the proceeds, and joined al-Azhar University. His uncles never returned, and some reports reached al-Maghribī that they fathered so many children there that, according to the account, they had to drive them into the house with sticks in the evening .

Unfortunately, little is known about al-Maghribī's further career, although he mentions that he held a *waẓīfa*, but he does not mention what kind of service it was (fol. 51a). He was also an intellectual who joined *majālis*, social gatherings where Muslim intellectuals discussed various topics. According to al-Maghribī himself, he was the author of approximately ten works, among which we find a translation from Persian of Sa'dī's famous *Gulistān*. None of those has come down to us except *Bughyat al-arīb wa ghunyat al-adīb* ("The Desire of the Skillful and the Wealth of the Cultured") [4].

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