
PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

M. Al-Kaisi

KITĀB SIMṬ AL-LA'ĀLI' AL-DURRIYYA WA-USLŪB AL-JAWĀHIR AL-BAḤRIYYA (“A BOOK OF THE STRING OF THE GLITTERING PEARLS AND SEA GEMS”), AN UNKNOWN TEXT ON THE SCIENCE OF JAFR

The name of the author as noted on the title page of the MS is Shams al-Dīn Abī ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Qurashī al-Bakrī al-Murjānī. I shall refer to him as al-Bakrī from this point onwards.

Attempting to identify this Bakrī has proved to be a task far from easy or straightforward. The surnames “al-Qurashī” and “al-Bakrī”, which refer to lineage, may suggest either the paternal lineage in association with a particular household and the supra tribe or they may possibly be referring to both the paternal and maternal lineage. “Al-Qurashī” suggests an association with the Quraysh tribe of Makka and “al-Bakrī” with Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq of Quraysh and, in this case, the figure concerned would still be a descendant of Quraysh from the household of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq. However, “al-Bakrī” may also be used in reference to the *banū* Bakr b. Wā’il tribe of the Rabī‘a branch of ‘Adnān tribes of Arabia. In this case, the application of the two surnames is, most likely, to confirm both paternal and maternal lineage. Moreover, “al-Murjānī” may be referring to al-Bakrī’s association with, possibly, Khān Murjān in Baghdād or the town Murjān in western Persia or, if read “al-Marjānī” then, to a profession in the coral trade. “Al-Mālikī” is in reference to his *madhhab* [1].

Interestingly, this manuscript includes a colophon indicating the date of completion signed by the scribe who’s name is noted as follows: Abū al-Ghayth b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Abā ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Murjānī al-Qurashī al-Bakrī al-Mālikī. The resemblance between the author’s and the scribe’s name is worthy of note. They may be, most likely, referring to the same person making this manuscript an autograph copy.

Looking at the primary sources little can be found about al-Bakrī. The names associated with this appellation are more than one as is the case with the two varieties included in the concerned manuscript alone. The closest options I could find to the Bakrī concerned are discussed below. It should be noted that the dates given are various placing him thus in three different centuries.

Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī [2] mentions ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Malik Abū Muḥammad b. Abī ‘Abd Allāh b. Abī Muḥammad al-Qurashī al-Bakrī al-Murjānī. Al-Sakhāwī makes also reference to Madina by applying the cognomen “al-Madanī” referring to this figure’s association with the city of Madina. However, he continues by stating that the person concerned is of Tunisian origin, born in al-Iskanariyya and lived in Makka. Al-Sakhāwī notes that this Bakrī wrote, amongst other works, a history of Madina entitled *Bahjat al-nufūs wa al-asrār fī tārikh dār hijrat al-mukhtār* (“The delight of Souls and Secrets of the History of Madina”) in Shawwāl 751 / December 1350. He also notes that this Bakrī arrived in Maghrib after year 760 or 770 / 1358–9 or 1368–9 and that nothing further was heard of him since then.

Khayr al-Dīn al-Zirikī [3] mentions ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Malik Abū Muḥammad al-Murjānī (633—699 / 1235—1300), a *ṣūfi*, of Tunisian origin, born in al-Iskanariyya and died in Tunisia. He wrote a treatise on *tafsīr*, which he entitled *Al-Futūḥāt al-rabbāniyya fī al-mawā’id al-marjāniyya* (“The Divine Conquests in the Coral Dates”). He also wrote *Bahjat al-shumūs wa al-asrār fī tārikh hijrat al-mukhtār* (“The delight of suns and secrets of the history of Madina”) which is, most likely, the same as the work mentioned above by al-Sakhāwī. Both texts are extant with reference to a manuscript in the Khizāna al-Taymūriyya (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, the Egyptian National Library) of the former and a microfilm copy in the University of