

## A MANUSCRIPT OF AN ANTHOLOGY BY AL-ĀBĪ

Abū Saʿīd (or Abū Saʿd) Maṣṣūr b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ābī is known as a literary and political figure of the late tenth — early eleventh century. In describing al-Ābī's native city in his "Geographical Dictionary", Yāqūt provides in passing some valuable information about him; it is virtually all that has come down to us [1]. "The town of Āba is located across from Sāwa [2] and is known among the populace by the name of Āwa; this is undoubtedly [correct]. Its residents are Shi'ites, and the residents of Sāwa are Sunnis; unceasing war is waged between these two cities because of religious differences... In my opinion, this is the place of origin of Abū Saʿd Maṣṣūr b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ābī, who was [repeatedly] appointed the ruler of glorious regions and was friends with al-Šāhib b. ʿAbbād [3]. He later became a *wazīr* under Majd al-Dawla Rustam b. Fakhr al-Dawla b. Rukn al-Dawla b. Buwayh. He was an *adīb*, poet and compiler of books. He is the author of *Kitāb nathr al-durar*, "History of al-Ray", and other works. His brother, Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad [4], was one of the great *kātib*s and glorious *wazīr*s who served the ruler of Tabaristan".

The numerous sources on the history of the Buwayhids are silent on the political activities of al-Ābī. Ḥājjī Khalīfa [5] terms him a *wazīr* and gives the date of his death as 421/1030.

Al-Ābī's "History of al-Ray" is known only because it is mentioned by Yāqūt and al-Šafādī [6]. In his poetic anthology *Dumyat al-qaṣr wa ʿuṣrat ahl al-ʿaṣr* [7], al-Bākhārī provides some satirical verses by al-Ābī and speaks of his letters (*rasāʾil*) and poems (*qaṣāʾid*) as being of high artistic merit. Several verses by al-Ābī are apparently also cited in *Tatimmat al-yatīma* by al-Thaʿālibī [8]. Al-Ābī's most significant contribution to Arabic literature is his seven-volume prose anthology, scattered sections of which are now held in various manuscript collections. The St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies possesses a two-volume manuscript containing the second and sixth volumes of the work [9]. Before describing the manuscript, we touch on several questions about the work as a whole.

Several variants of the work's title exist. The most extended is *Kitāb nathr al-durar wa nafāʾis al-jawhar fī-l-muḥādārāt* ("Book of Scattered Pearls and Precious Stones in Conversation"). Our copy is entitled *Kitāb nathr al-durr* ("Book of Scattered Pearls"), and this brief title was preferred by W. Ahlwardt [10] and I. Krachkovsky [11]. We also note that, according to Ḥājjī Khalīfa [12], *Kitāb nathr al-durr* is an abridgement of a more voluminous work

by the same author — *Nuzhat al-qulūb* ("Delight of the Heart") — which has not come down to us. This is difficult to verify, as this is not clear from the anthology and is not confirmed by other sources.

Information about the plan and volume of the work is contradictory, as not one repository possesses a complete copy. Among Arab authors, only Ḥājjī Khalīfa provides a description [13]. According to him, the anthology is made up of seven volumes (*mujallad*), each of which features its own eloquent introduction (*khuṭba*) and consists of four sections (*faṣl*) subdivided into chapters (*bāb*). His description leaves the ratio of volumes to sections unclear. He then gives a summary of the contents of five chapters from the first section and indicates the main themes of the remaining three sections and the number of chapters in them. The Cairo [14] and Leiden [15] catalogues indicate that al-Ābī's anthology consists of five sections. The Berlin [16] catalogue gives seven sections or parts (*juzʿ*), with both terms considered identical in meaning. The Paris [17] catalogue speaks of a seven-volume anthology with an abridged redaction consisting of seven parts. Scholars who worked with the St. Petersburg manuscript considered it the second and sixth volumes of a seven-volume anthology [18]. Finally, in a dissertation on al-Ābī's anthology, the American Arabist C. Owen [19] holds that the four volumes of the Cairo collection contain the full work; he provides an overview of the contents, which coincides exactly with the information given by Ḥājjī Khalīfa about the four sections of the work.

As for the St. Petersburg manuscript, we find that one volume bears on its title page the heading *al-Juzʿ al-thānī min kitāb Nathr al-durr* ("Second part of the book *Nathr al-durr*") and contains the end of the second section and third section in its entirety. The end of the manuscript:

آخر الجزء الثانى ويتلوه فى الجزء الثالث كلام  
النساء الشرائف و الحمد لله حمد الشاكرين وصلاته  
على نبيه محمد و على آله اجمعين وسلامه

These concluding words indicate a discrepancy between parts and sections. But the other volume of our manuscript is entitled both the sixth part and sixth section of the anthology. Like the third section, it begins with an introduction (*basmala* and *khuṭba*) and table of contents. Consequently, either the parts and sections should correspond to each other, or the discrepancy was fixed by the sixth section.