

the same themes in Qusṭā together with those from Paul of Aegina, Alexander of Tralles, Oribasius, Aetius, and others, while contrasting Qusṭā's account with Arabic sources. The sheer quantity of Bos's examples demonstrates Paul's direct influence on Qusṭā. They also serve as a case study of Paul's influence on Arabic medicine, the extent of which has not as yet been fully assessed. On the description of 'spontaneous generation' (chap. 13), Bos also suggests that Qusṭā may have derived his information directly from Aristotle's zoological works, rather than from Arabic sources.

In his historical analysis, however, there are a number of problems. Bos disturbingly lumps al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, al-Majūsī, and Ibn Sīnā repeatedly as 'Arab' or 'Arab authors' (8, 11, 12, 85, 88, 98, 111, 136). He overlooks the fact that, although their works were written in Arabic, they all came from the Persian geographical and cultural milieu with its formative significance for their intellectual development. Furthermore, the use of terms such as 'infection' (157) as distinct from 'contagion' (*ī'dā*), and 'contamination' or 'contaminated' (10, 19, 21, 59) as distinct from 'bad', 'foul', or 'fouled' water (*al-miyāh al-fāsid*) is both inappropriate—with their underlying modern assumption of a 'germ' theory of disease—and unnecessary. (For instance, Qusṭā's reference is simply to water that contains 'bad' elements or minerals which 'corrupt' its purity, affect its taste (bitter, salty, sour) or appearance (thick, turbid), and which consequently could make one sick (chap. 9, p. 39).) The application of such terms to Arabic/Islamic medicine would be highly questionable prior to the scientific understanding of the microbial cause and mechanism of disease in the nineteenth century.

Bos has made available for study and critical evaluation not only a unique medical text by Qusṭā b. Lūqā, but also, by placing it within the broader Graeco-Byzantine context, direct evidence of Paul of Aegina's influence. It is a welcome addition to the source material of the formative period of Islamic medicine.

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Al-Muqaddasī: The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions: Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm fī Ma'rifat al-Aqālīm

Translated by BASIL ANTHONY COLLINS. Reviewed by Muhammad Hamid Alta'ī. Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1994. Pp. xxviii + 460. Price HB £60.00. 1-873938-14-4.

Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm fī Ma'rifat al-Aqālīm (The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions) is a geographical treatise written in the tenth century of the Common Era by Shams al-Dīn Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. 'Aḥmad b. Abī Bakr al-Bannā' al-Shāmī al-Maqdisī, that is the man from Bayt al-Maqdis or al-Quds as it is known among native Arabs. In writing this treatise, al-Maqdisī (who is also known as al-Bashshārī) drew on first-hand experience and close observation of his subject over more than twenty years. Surveying the realm of Islam from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, he travelled throughout its

countries and regions—meeting the learned; serving the princes; studying under the jurists; frequenting the society of men of letters, the readers of the Qurʾān and writers of the Traditions; mixing with the ascetics, the Sufis, story tellers, and public preachers; engaging at the same time in trade everywhere he went and associating with all the people he encountered.

In addition, the author was aware of the fact that he was dealing with a branch of learning which the scholars had neglected or, to use his own words, 'had not dealt with it, except defectively' (1). This made him pay careful attention to the elements of his science until he was familiar with them, and to the measurements of the regions he considered so that he determined them with precision. Thus he travelled around the frontiers so that he could define them with precision, and traversed the military districts so that he knew them. He made inquiry about the religious sects so that he became familiar with them; and arrived at a knowledge of the languages and complexions of the peoples so that he could classify them. He paid close attention to the districts so as to categorize them, and he researched the taxes on land so that he could calculate their amounts; he tasted the air, and he evaluated the water. Despite suffering severe privation and spending a lot of money, he none the less did his best to avoid falsehoods and excess and strove all the time for accuracy with all his might. As for the districts and areas in the border territories which he could not reach, he relied on those men of intelligence whom he knew to be neither careless nor confused. In fact he accepted as authentic everything on which they agreed and rejected everything on which they differed. He also supplemented his work with materials from the royal archives that he came across.

Reviewing the works of his predecessors such as Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Jayhānī, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, Ibn al-Faḡīh al-Hamadhānī, al-Jāhīz, and Ibn Khurrādādhbih, al-Maqdisī writes: 'Indeed, only he can appreciate the excellence of my present work who has examined the works of these others, or who himself traversed the countries with comprehension, and is of the persons of education and intelligence' (6). Yet he knew that he was only a human being and his work could not have been perfect. Thus he adds:

I do not acquit myself of error, nor my book of defect, neither do I submit it to be free of redundancy and deficiency, nor that it is above criticism in any respect.

Moreover, my reporting on those elements which I specified in my introduction will vary in completeness from one region to another, and will be uneven in its scope; for I relate only what I know absolutely. This science is not such that proceeds by analogy, or is always uniform; rather it may be fully attained only by observation and enquiry (6).

Publishing his book only after he had reached the age of forty, al-Maqdisī divided the realm of Islam into fourteen regions, treating separately the regions of the non-Arabs as distinct from those of the Arabs. He started his book by giving his reader an account of the realm of Islam, its seas and rivers; the names of its towns, districts, and villages and their diversities; the distinctive features of its fourteen regions, and its *madhāhib* and the *dhimma*, before proceeding to talk about the climate of the world and the position of the *qibla*. Then he discussed the six regions of the Arabs, namely the Arabian peninsula,

Iraq, al-Jazīra, Syria, Egypt, and the Maghrib, as well as the eight regions of the non-Arabs, namely the Mashriq, the Daylam, the Rihāb, the Jibāl, Khūzistān, Fārs, Kirmān, and Sind. The treatise also includes twenty maps which were all coloured by the author, using red for the well-known roads, yellow for the golden sands, green for the salt seas, blue for the well-known rivers, and dust colour for the principal mountains: 'thus the descriptions may be more readily perceptible to the understanding, and accessible to the specialist and layman alike' (9).

It is no wonder, therefore, that such a unique work has earned al-Maḳḍisī the lavish praise and high acclaim of so many authorities on the history of Arab-Islamic geography from the Arab and Muslim worlds as well as from the West. Thus, when early in the second half of the nineteenth century the German orientalist Aloys Sprenger, who, by the way, considered al-Maḳḍisī the greatest geographer of all time, brought to the attention of the West a manuscript of al-Maḳḍisī's work, Michael Jan de Goeje edited the Arabic text and published it as the third volume of his *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum* in 1877 (the revised edition came out in 1906). Since then a German translation of the section on Syria and of some brief passages from other sections of the work was undertaken by J. Gildemeister and published in 1884; a well-annotated English translation by Guy Le Strange of the section on Syria and Palestine with maps and diagrams was published in London in 1896; and another, also well-annotated translation of the first 200 pages of de Goeje's *BGA* vol. III by G. S. Ranking and R. F. Azoo appeared in Calcutta between 1897 and 1910; two partial French translations by Charles Pellat and André Miquel appeared in 1950 and 1963 respectively; and finally in 1974 Basil Anthony Collins published his doctoral dissertation entitled *Al-Muḳḍasī: The Man and His Work, with Selected Passages from the Arabic*, which comprises an English translation of assorted representative geographic sections of *BGA* vol. III.

Yet, despite this continued interest in the book for the last 150 years or so, the high regard and admiration which were accorded to it, and the fame of its author as the most distinguished classical Arab geographer, there has never been a single complete translation of the book in any of the major European languages or in any other language for that matter. The present translation, which is undertaken by Basil Anthony Collins, Professor of Geography and Planning at the University of Toledo in the United States and an authority on al-Maḳḍisī, and which is also reviewed by the distinguished Iraqi geographer Muhammad Altaḥī, is, therefore, long overdue and is a particularly welcome source of information for everybody interested in the Arab-Islamic contribution to world civilization.

Besides being the first complete translation of Al-Maḳḍisī's treatise, the present edition is no mere translation of the Arabic text edited by Michael Jan de Goeje which he derived from two apographs of al-Maḳḍisī's manuscript, relying mainly on the content of one of them, namely the one that resides in the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, Berlin. Collins, quite wisely, has compared de Goeje's published text with this apograph and also with a second apograph, housed in the Süleymaniye Kutuphanesi in

Istanbul—a comparison which confirmed the great fidelity of the published text to the reading of the two apographs. And since the latter apograph contains material not found in the former, the translator adds this material to the present edition *in loco*. Furthermore, it includes twenty maps published for the first time in any language, including Arabic. Collins not only provides his reader with the maps in the original Arabic version and at their original locations in the text, but also brings them together with English keys in an appendix at the end of his translation. An index of Arabic terms is also added, but unfortunately without an English translation. As the translation is intended for inclusion in the series of 'The Great Books of Islamic Civilization', published by the Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilization in Doha, Qatar, which is meant to serve the needs of a wide readership, no textual, historical, or bibliographical addenda or the like are included to distract the general reader. None the less the translator lists in his preface fifteen works which he deemed to be relevant to al-Maḳḳisī's work (xv–xvii).

However, this excellent work is devoid of any reference to any Arabic study concerned with al-Maḳḳisī's life or work. This gives the impression that Arab scholars have been indifferent to or even neglectful of such work. Yet several Arab scholars have paid considerable attention to it. Here one could cite the works of Niḳūlā Ziyāda, 'Abd al-Rahmān Ḥamīda, Ghāzī Ṭalaymāt, and Muḥammad Makhzūm who supervised the publication of a revised Arabic edition of *Aḥsan al-Taḳāsim* which appeared in Beirut in 1987. This could be the reason for the translator's choice of al-Muḳaddasī, being, in his view, the more widely used form of the author's name. Although this might be true among Western orientalisks, almost all Arab scholars called him al-Maḳḳisī. The truth of the matter is that very few Arabs refer to Bayt al-Maḳḳis as al-Bayt al-Muḳaddas. Consequently the man who is connected with the city is rarely called al-Muḳaddasī. Of course, the translation is intended for non-Arab readers; but should not the English reader know the most widely used form of the author's name among his fellow Arabs, or must the outsider's view alone determine the form of his name?

None the less the present translation has enough merits of its own to deserve more than a warm welcome. Its accuracy and readability, together with the concise and extremely well-informed introduction, are accomplishments worthy of such a promising series. It will certainly enhance Western understanding of 'the cultural and intellectual heritage of Islam and will provide an important means towards greater understanding of today's world'. For Islam, which has previously contributed a great deal to human civilization, is no enemy of the West. The only way to appreciate the aspirations of today's Muslims—to catch up with other nations on the road to real progress in all aspects of life and then to resume their role in consolidating this progress—is to understand their glorious past, which qualifies them for a better place in the so-called new world order. For only a mutual understanding between nations is capable of paving the way 'for the development of peaceful co-existence'.

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