



## ADAB AL-KABĪR

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**ADAB AL-KABĪR, AL-**, an Arabic work by Ebn al-Moqaffa' dealing largely with Persian manners and court etiquette. Although published many times under this name (in the singular), it is, more accurately, *al-Ādāb al-kabīr* (in the plural), as it is called by Ebn al-Nadīm (*Fehrest*, p. 118) and those who cite it, such as Ebn Qotayba (*Oyūn al-aḳbār*, Cairo, 1925-30, I, pp. 20-22, 31). Ebn Meskawayh, the well-known historian and philosopher, cited it under this name; and he incorporated the whole work, except for the introduction, in *al-Ḥekmat al-kāleda* (Cairo, 1952, pp. 293-327). Strangely Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Āmerī (381/992), who cites Ebn al-Moqaffa' many times in his *al-Sa'āda wa'l-es'ād* (ed. M. Mīnovī, Tehran, 1334 Š./1955), does not mention the name of the book, even when the quotations are directly taken from it (pp. 146, 148, 160). Ebn al-Nadīm adds that it was also known as *Maqraḥāses* (for an interpretation, see M. Moḥammadī, *Farhang-e Īrān va ta'tīr-e ān dar tamaddon-e eslām va 'arab*, Tehran, 1333 Š./1954, p. 265; and *al-Fehrest*, tr., p. 260, n. 28). To call it *al-Dorrat al-yatīma* or *al-Yatīma* ("The rare gem"), would be to confuse it with another work of Ebn al-Moqaffa's, the citations from which (*Oyūn* I, p. 3) are different in nature and not part of the extant *Ādāb*.

Although al-Āmerī in his *E'lām* (Cairo, 1967, pp. 159-60) states that *al-Ādāb al-kabīr* is based on the Avesta's moral precepts, many of the sayings included in that book occur in Greek gnomonology. Thus the saying: "Let the ruler be suspicious of the hungry noble man and the sated wicked man" (*Rasā'el al-bolaḡā'*, Cairo, 1946, p. 52) is ascribed also to Plato (al-Mobaššer b. Fātek, *Moḳtār al-ḥekam*, Madrid, 1958, p. 130); the saying: "Let it be known that the



wicked are physically more solid and the noble spiritually so,” is said to be Aristotle’s (ibid., p. 215). Other sayings go back to Asclepius, Socrates, and other Greek philosophers. This does not necessarily mean that the author resorted to Greek sources. It is more convincing to say that Greek wise sayings were taken over into Persian literature at a very early date. Ebn al-Moqaffa’ did not rely on a defined Persian text; he was not a mere translator and compiler but a real author with a clear plan. The introduction shows a desire to make a personal, if modest contribution. Although he exalts the tradition of the ancients and their comprehensive outlook in every field, he holds that there remain certain small, albeit shrewd, points for later generations to add.

Two main topics occupy the book; one is the ruler and the man who associates himself with the ruler; and the other comprises rules of behavior in society. The first part is, to an extent, a “mirror for princes” but with little of the idealism of most later Islamic works in this field. The companion of the ruler is advised to take care of the ruler and stick by him, even if he does not approve of his behavior. “Do not take insult or harshness from the ruler to heart,” he is told, “because the air of power may endow the tongue with words that do not carry their real meanings” (*Rasā’el*, p. 56). The material relating to the second topic is more fragmentary; but the theme of the friend (and hence, the enemy) occupies a large space. By combining these two topics, the author tried to cover the whole field of statecraft (*sīāsa*), in which counsel (*tadbīr*) is a very essential part.

See also: [Ebn al-Moqaffa’](#), [al-Adab al-saḡīr](#).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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See also G. Richter, *Studien zur Geschichte der älteren arabischen Fürstenspiegel*, Leipzig, 1932, pp. 4-22.

F. Gabrieli, “L’Opere di Ibn al Moqaffa’,” *RSO* 13, 1931-32, pp. 197-247.

A. Amīn, *Žoḡā al-eslām*, Cairo, 1946, I, pp. 211-14.



E. I. J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, Cambridge, 1962, pp. 69-71.

The Persian tr. (D. Behrūz, *Āyīn-e bozorgī*, Tehran, 1311 Š./1932) must have been based on one of the Arabic printed texts.

Of all the Arabic editions of this book and *al-Adab al-ṣaġīr* (e.g., Beirut, 1380/1960), none can be considered a standard edition.