



ADAB AL-KĀTEB

ADAB AL-KĀTEB (“Manual for secretaries”), a work composed by the celebrated Baghdad scholar probably of Khorasanian *mawlā* origin, Ebn Qotayba (213-76/828-89). It was written during the caliphate of Motawakkel (r. 232-47/847-61) and dedicated to his vizier, Fath b. Kāqān. Although its title makes one think of the great line of Arabic treatises on the multi-faceted art of the secretary, the culmination of which was to be the great *Šobḥ al-aʿšā* of the Mamluk author Qalqašandī, Ebn Qotayba’s work essentially is on Arabic grammar. Its four sections are: *Ketāb al-maʿrefa* on names and terms; *Ketāb taqwīm al-yad* on orthography; *Ketāb taqwīm al-lesān* on the correct reading and pronunciation of words; and *Ketāb al-abnīa* on the formation and derivation of verbs and nouns.

In his important introduction (*moqaddema*), the author sets forth the reasons impelling him to write. He bewails the low state of genuine learning among the secretarial classes of his time and denounces their inordinate concentration on the non-Arabic sciences and their looking towards the Persian and Hellenistic cultural worlds for intellectual stimulus. This is concordant with Ebn Qotayba’s hostility to the new disciplines and methods of *kalām* (scholastic theology) and *falsafa* (philosophy)—as adopted by e.g., Šāfeʿī and the Muʿtazilite school—and to the Šoʿūbīya in general. For Ebn Qotayba, true *adab* had to be based on the Arabic, religious sciences, above all on Hadith (Tradition). Although quite well aware that the perfect secretary had to have an intimate knowledge of such practical sciences as mathematics and mensuration, he asserted the primacy of language as the basis of all human



communication; hence he devoted his book wholly to questions of language. Since Ebn Qotayba was suspicious of the use of *qīās* (analogy) in theology and law, he was, in regard to grammatical method, more sympathetic to the anomalist grammarians of the Kufan school; and he frequently quotes al-Farrā' (q.v.), the Kufan scholar. But it is difficult to discern in the *Adab al-kāteb* any coherent philosophy of grammar.

The text was published in a critical edition by Max Grünert (Leiden, 1900) and has appeared in numerous editions in Cairo. After Ebn Qotayba's time, various commentaries were written on it; most important are Jawālīqī's *Šarḥ adab al-kāteb* (ed. M. Šādeq al-Rāfe'ī, Cairo, 1350/1931) and Baṭalyūsī's *Ketāb al-eqteżāb* (ed. 'A. Bostānī, Beirut, 1901).

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