



## DAMIRI, MOḤAMMAD

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**DAMIRI, MOḤAMMAD** b. Musā b. 'Isā Kamāl al-Din Ebn Elyās b. 'Abd-Allāh al-Damiri (b. Cairo, A.H. 745/A.D. 1342, d. Cairo, A.H. 808/ A.D. 1405), a tailor turned Shāfi'i theologian, is best known for his *Ḥayātal-ḥayawān* (Animal Life). It is a comprehensive work on all that pertains to animals, which became widely disseminated in the Islamic world in three recensions—long (*kobrā*), intermediate (*wostā*), and short (*ṣoḡrā*). The sources that were available to Damiri include the rich Persian literary tradition in animal tales (such as the *Sindbād-nāma* and *Manteq al-ṭayr* in addition to *Kalila wa Demna*). In contrast, the Graeco-Roman or the Aristotelian legacy seems to have been indirect. For example, Aristotle's *Historia animalium* had been translated into Arabic by Yaḥyā ebn al-Betṛiq in the eighth century. It remained, however, embodied in veterinary and medical texts as well as in cosmological works, such as al-Qazvini's *'Ajā'eb al-Maḵluqāt* (Wonders of Creation), or incorporated into large compilations, which bordered on philosophy, biology, psychology, and natural history, such as the *Epistles* of the *Eḵwān al-Ṣafā'*, or the seven-volume *Ketāb al-ḥayawān* of Jāḥeẓ (A.H. 163-255/A.D. 780/868) (Pellat-Thoumine, 1979). Jāḥeẓ's work had already prepared the way for Damiri in a haphazard and unsystematic way (Pellat, 1969). To what extent and in which way Damiri utilized these works among his hundreds of sources has yet to be adequately investigated in light of modern scholarship.

The nature and scope of Damiri's work can be gleaned from the organization of its content, which contains more than a thousand articles, quoting from 807 authors (Somognyi, 1928). Arranged alphabetically according to names of



animals, each article loosely extends, at least in the longer version, into seven sections: (1) a philological consideration of the animal's name; (2) a description of its physical characteristics and habits; (3) the traditions (*aḥādīṭ*) where it is mentioned; (4) its juridical status (*ḥokm*) within the *Shari'a* as to whether eating its flesh is permissible (*ḥalāl*) or not (*ḥarām* and *makruh*) according to the different legal schools (*maḍāheḥ*); (5) the relevant proverbs, largely attributed to Maydāni's *Majm' al-amṭāl*; (6) medicinal and other properties (*kawāṣṣ*) of the various parts of the animal; (7) the interpretation of its appearance in dreams. These categories are expanded, in a highly anecdotal style, with numerous quotations and material, such as the metaphorical use of animals in the art or "science of rhetoric" (*elm al-noṭq*). Damiri even digresses into a survey of other subjects, such as the history of the Caliphate (Somogyi, 1935).

Having witnessed a discussion at an assembly, where the ignorant and the learned were equally confused on the subject of the natural qualities of certain animals, Damiri became acutely aware of the need to correct erroneous notions and widespread misconceptions about animals (*Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān*, Preface, p. 2). The autobiographical aspect of the Preface acquires greater significance when considered in the context of Damiri's own times when the importance placed by the Mamluks on the horse and the equestrian arts (*funun al-furusiyya*) was accompanied by a resurgence of interest in texts on animals (Ayalon, pp. 954-55). In addition to contemporary treatises of a quasi-zoological nature, such interest is reflected in the production of illustrated versions of earlier works. These included not only Jāḥeẓ's *Book of Animals* (*Ketāb al-Ḥayawān*), and Durayhim al-Mawṣili's *Book on the Usefulness of Animals* (*Ketāb Manāfe' al-Ḥayawān*), but also literary texts of Indo-Persian origin, such as the *Kalila wa Demna*. The stylistic characteristics of these illustrations indicate continuity with the older Persian iconographical traditions that combine an acute eye for the defining qualities unique to each animal with an almost cartoon-like economy of presentation (Ettinghausen, p. 136, 153-58).

The *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān* is a complex work that is not easy to classify. It falls neither within zoology, nor the medieval bestiary where animals are used for the purpose of moral instruction. In the comprehensive scope, Damiri's work exemplifies the Islamic classical tradition of an encyclopaedic approach to knowledge (*elm*). Unlike earlier specialized encyclopaedias, however, such as



Ebn Sinā's *Qānun*, a systematically organized, lucidly presented synthesis of medical knowledge, Damiri's work represents an heroic attempt to impose a rational grouping to a vast store-house of animal lore, which fails in practice. It remains an uncritical compilation, indiscriminately lumping together the important and the trivial, the real and the imaginary, the factual and the fictional (deriving, for example, from *One Thousand and One Nights*). Nonetheless, the result is an indispensable source of cultural reference on animals for both Arabic and Persian.

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A contemporary translation, possibly of the *şogrā* version, was made into Ottoman Turkish by MeĤemmed b. Süleymān, (Topkapi Sarayi, Revan MS. No. 1664, F.E. Karatay, *Topkapi Sarayi Müzesi Kütüphanesi Türkçe Yazmalar Katalogu*, Vol. I, Istanbul, 1961, p. 567); one, possibly of the 'wostā' version, by IbrāĤim b. al-Hajj 'Abdullāh al-Adanavi (the Mofti of Sivas), which includes an index; another by 'Abd-al-RaĤmān b. IbrāĤim was printed in Constantiniyya in A.H. 1272 / A.D. 1855 and 1900 (A. Adivar, *Osmanli Türklerinde İřlim*, Istanbul, 1943, pp. 15, 76, 91).

In the sixteenth century a Persian translation was prepared for Sultan Selim I by Ĥakim řah Qazvini and another, entitled " " *Kawařř al-Ĥayawān* by Edris b. Ĥusām- al-Din Bedlisi (d. A.H. 926 / A.D. 1560) (Karatay, *Farsca Yazmalar*, MS No. 277, p. 106).

An illustrated lithograph edition was printed in A.H. 1285 / A.D. 1869 (Teheran?) (F.E. Karatay, *Topkapi Sarayi Müzesi Kütüphanesi Farsca Yazmalar*



*Katalogu*. MS No. 277, Istanbul, 1961, p. 106).

Damiri's work was also known in a Latin translation, probably from an abridged version. It was, for example, incorporated into the sources of the *Hierozoïcon sive bipartitum Opus de Animalibus Sacrae Scripturae*, London, Thomas Rycroft, 1663. It was composed by Samuel Bochart (1599-1667), A Biblical scholar, as a demonstration of the divine wisdom through the observance of God's creation. Demiri became known among eighteenth-century orientalisists through Bochart. An unpublished French translation of the "*histoire des animaux*" of Demiri by Petit de la Croix, le fils, is mentioned in Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale, ou Dictionnaire universel* (continuée par C. Visdelou et A. Galland), Tome IV (1779); H. A. Schulten's "Additions" (1782), p. 731. There is also a partial English translation (up to Abu Ferās )by Col. A.S.G. Jayakar, entitled *Ad-Damiri's Ḥayāt al-Ḥayawān (A Zoological Lexicon)*, London / Bombay, 1906-8, Vol.I & II, Part I. It includes a lengthy introduction. For a detailed bibliography of manuscripts and translations in addition to those mentioned within the text, see D. Ayalon, "Furusiyya," and F. Viré, "faras" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed. Vol. II, 1965, pp. 784-88, and 952-55.

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