



EBN AL-FAQĪH, ABŪ BAKR AḤMAD

EBN AL-FAQĪH, ABŪ BAKR (or Abū ‘Abd-Allāh) AḤMAD b. Moḥammad b. Eshāq b. Ebrāhīm **HAMADĀNĪ** Akbārī (fl. second half of the 3rd/9th century), man of letters, who wrote in Arabic *Ketāb akbār al-boldān*, a geographic work, in which primarily the Islamic world with its centers in Arabia, Persia, and Iraq are described. His only other works are *Ketāb al-‘ajā‘eb*, which he mentioned himself (Mašhad ms, hereafter M., fol. 129b), and *Ketāb dekr al-šo‘arā’ al moḥdatīn wa’l-bolaḡā’ menhom ...*, mentioned by Ebn al-Nadīm (ed. Flügel, p. 154). Data on Ebn al-Faqīh are scanty. His full name suggests that his ancestors and possibly he himself came from Hamadān and that his father was a jurist (*faqīh*). Ebn al-Faqīh certainly lived in Baghdad. He devoted many pages to both Hamadān and Baghdad (pp. 217-58; M., fols. 29-73a) and was acquainted with the works of his contemporaries: He quoted an account by Ya‘qūbī (d. 284/897) on Arminia and Bāb-al-Abwāb (pp. 290-92), referred more than once to Balāḏorī (q.v.; d. 279-892), and called the scholar and *moḥtaseb* of Baghdad Aḥmad b. Ṭayyeb Saraḡsī (d. 286/899) “my friend” (M., fol. 49b). Šērōya/Širawayh (d. 509/1115), an historian of Hamadān cited by Yāqūt (Odabā’ II, p. 63), reported that Ebn al-Faqīh and his father were traditionists.

Alois Sprenger, Charles Rieu, and Michaël de Goeje (Ebn al-Faqīh, p. x) deduced from comparative analysis of the reports on historical events and persons mentioned in Ebn al-Faqīh’s work that *Ketāb akbār al-boldān* had been written about 290/903. The complete text, which originally consisted of



five volumes (Moqaddasī, p. 5, n. a) and numbered 1.000 folios (Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Flügel, p. 154), has not survived; rather, it is extant in two abridgements, one by Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ja'far b. Aḥmad Šayzarī (ca. 413/1022), the other in an anonymous collection of geographical works. Šayzarī's version, *Moḵtaṣar*, was published by de Goeje (BGA 5, Leiden, 1885, repr. Leiden, 1967) from three manuscripts (Staatsbibliothek, no. 6035, 62 fols., copied ca. 800/1397, reproducing the original colophon, Ahlwardt, no. 6035; British Library, London, no. Add. 7496, 91 fols., Rieu, p. 772, no. 380; India Office, London, no. 617, fols. 1-109a, dated 725/1325, Loth 208-09, no. 722). Another manuscript was later discovered in Tashkent (Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, Institute of Oriental Studies, no. 3097/I, 164 fols., title page and last pages missing, second half of the 10th/16th century; *Sobranie*, 1952, p. 301 no. 690; Tskitishvili, 1980). The anonymous version, containing only the second half of the work, is represented by a unique manuscript in the library of Āstān-e Qods-e Rażawī in Mašhad (fols. 1-175a with lacunae, probably copied in Persia at the beginning of the 7th/13th century; Validov).

Moḵtaṣar consists of a brief introduction (pp. 1-3); reports on the creation of the earth, the surrounding sea, and wonders of the sea (pp. 3-16); descriptions of Mecca, Ṭā'ef, Medina, Tehāma, Najd, Yamāma, Bahrain, and Yemen (pp. 16-41); “turning the serious into satire and satire into serious” (*taṣrīf al-jedd ela'l-hazl wa'l-hazl ela'l-jedd*; pp. 41-46); praise of foreign lands and travel (pp. 47-56); descriptions of Nile, Nubia, Ethiopia, Maḡreb, and Syria (pp. 56-127); descriptions of Jazīra and Rūm (pp. 128-51); praise and criticism of buildings (pp. 151-66); descriptions of Iraq, Kūfa, and Bašra (pp. 161-92); an introduction to the second part (pp. 192-95); descriptions of Fārs, Kermān, and Qarmāsīn (i.e., Kermānšāh; pp. 195-217); of Hamadān (pp. 217-58); of Nehāvand, Isfahan, Qom, Ray, and Damāvand (pp. 258-79); of Qazvīn, Zanjān, and Abhar (pp. 279-84); of Azarbaijan and Armenia (pp. 284-301); of Ṭabarestān (pp. 301-14); and of Khorasan (pp. 314-30).

In the Mašhad manuscript the text begins in the middle of the section on Kūfa (corresponding to p. 184) and contains the rest of the chapters in the *Moḵtaṣar*, with the exception of the introduction to the second part and the sections on Azarbaijan and Armenia. It includes, however, additional chapters on Wāseṭ, Nabaṭīya, Baghdad, Sāmarrā, Sawād, Ahvāz (fols. 20b-89a), *karāj* of Khorasan, the Turks, towns of the Turks, titles of kings of Khorasan, Mašreq, and the Turks and their neighbors (fols. 166b-75a). The text on Kūfa and Bašra and on the building of towns (fols. 99a-103b) is more extensive than that of the



Moқтаşar, but otherwise the two versions are similar and complementary (variants in the Mašhad manuscript are given in footnotes to Ebn al-Faqīh, tr. Massé, pp. 181-96, 223-384).

The first publication on the Mašhad manuscript (Validov) led to a series of articles and reports (for bibliography see Ebn Fażlān, pp. 172-74). Fragments of the text have been published and interpreted (Kahle; Volin; Minorsky; Tskitishvili, 1968; idem, 1970, pp. 272-355; idem, 1977; and Ebn al-Faqīh, 1979), but there is an urgent need for a full, critical edition including collation of both extant versions with borrowings in later works, as well as relevant studies of the sources. It has been argued that the spirit and internal proportion of Ebn al-Faqīh's work were preserved in its abridgment (Miquel, pp. 157-60), and that what has survived is not much shorter than the original. The very structure of the work makes it possible to omit words, phrases, and paragraphs, or even whole chapters (as is obvious from attempts to collate the two versions of the chapter on Başra), but no later addition seems to have been inserted in the text.

Ebn al-Faqīh's book has been more readily recognized as a monument of literature or a depository of cultural information than that of geography, but its title and formal organization are geographic. Most of its chapters are named after provinces, the sequence of which coincides with the "Islamic atlas."

Ebn al-Faqīh was not a traveler; he drew on his predecessors' works and materials collected by contemporary informants, citing them with or without reference. All kind of geographical data accumulated in Arabic are available in his work: mathematical, administrative, economic, political, and ethnographic. Ebn al-Nadīm criticized it, however: "He took it from people and plagiarized Jayhānī's book" (ed. Flügel, p. 154; cf. Moqaddasī, p. 4). But Ebn al-Faqīh himself outlined his scheme clearly: "This book of mine contains various accounts on countries and wonders of districts and buildings... I included into this book all that I managed to memorize and receive of legends, poetry, evidence, and parables" (pp. 2-3). As for Jayhānī, whose identification is unclear (Pellat, p. 265), the opposite may have been true: that he incorporated Ebn al-Faqīh's text into his seven-volume geographical collection, and the Mašhad manuscript is a copy of one of them.

Ebn al-Faqīh did not reveal the full scope of his oral and written sources. It is clear, however, that two authors influenced him decisively, Ebn Ḳordāḍbeh



(q.v.) and Jāhez. The general plan of the work he took directly from the former, although he altered the order of the parts, discarding details and rarely referring to his enumeration of localities and distances (pp. 25-26, 30-33, 79, 133, 198-204, 285-88, 302-05, 318-19), or the amounts of taxes (pp. 76, 103, 363, 328, especially M., fols. 81a-86a, 166b-168a). There are noted instances where Ebn al-Faqīh augmented figures given by Ebn Ḳordāḍbeh (Miquel, p. 176). His detailed description of quarters, canals, and bridges of Baghdad is original (M., fols. 29a-46b), but his attempt to define the size of the population by counting bath-houses and mosques leads to fantastic figures (96 million inhabitants). The influence of Jāhez, as well as of Ebn al-Moqaffa' and Madā'enī, is reflected in his choice and presentation of materials; he often focused on entertaining aspects of things and on unusual, striking, sometimes supernatural phenomena, as well as on peculiar features of peoples and tribes and historical and quasi-historical facts. Mention of the marvelous can be found in the works of Ebn Ḳordāḍbeh and others, but with Ebn al-Faqīh it is systematic.

Ebn al-Faqīh's favorite themes were conquests, taxation, and the founding of towns. The figures given greatest prominence in his text are the prophet Moḥammad, the caliphs 'Omar and 'Alī, Ḥajjāj b. Yūsof, and, the 'Abbasid caliphs al-Manṣūr, Hārūn al-Rašīd, and al-Ma'mūn. He also recounted traditions related to such ancient rulers as Solomon and Alexander the Great, biblical prophets like Abraham and Moses, and Sasanian kings like Kavād, Anōšīrvān, Ḳosrow II Parvēz, and Bahrām Gōr.

Ebn al-Faqīh's work combines, somewhat paradoxically, sound information with legends. The author dealt with vast amount of material drawn from literature and folklore: biblical, Hellenic, Arabic, and Islamic, as well as Persian and Turkish. He added historical reports from the most recent periods. The use of such a method in geography is often judged unfavorably. Nevertheless, Ebn al-Faqīh's work has great value beyond the usual listing of topographical and statistical data; he explained maps and integrated various cultural traditions, the most influential being those of Persia, thereby developing an important link in the development of Islamic geography toward the classical works of the *masālek wa mamālek* type.



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