Published: December 15, 1998
Last Updated: April 24, 2013

ʿEMĀD-AL-DĪN KĀTEB, ABŪ ʿABD-ALLĀH MOḤAMMAD

ʿEMĀD-AL-DĪN KĀTEB, ABŪ ʿABD-ALLĀH MOḤAMMAD b. Moḥammad b. Ḥāmed EṢFAHĀNĪ, an eminent 12th-century government servant and man of letters, born in Isfahan in 519/1125, either on 2 Jomādā II/6 July or in Šaʿbān/October. After a period in ʿAbbasid service in Iraq, he moved at the age of 41 to a career of greater fame in Syria, although he acknowledged himself to be a product of the central ʿAbbasid milieu (Bondārī, 1971, p. 104). He died in Damascus on 1 Ramażān 597/5 June 1201 (for basic biographical notices, Ebn Kallekān, ed., ʿAbbās, V, pp. 147-53; Yāqʹut, *Odaāʾ* VII, pp. 81-90; Ṣafadī, pp. 132 ff.)

The family of Persian origin into which ʿEmād-al-Dīn Kāteb was born had a tradition of administrative service for the Saljuq dynasty and the caliphate. Most notable was his uncle ʿAzīz (executed by Sultan Maḥmʹud in 525/1131; Ebn Kallekān, ed. ʿAbbās, I, p. 189) of whose reputation ʿEmād-al-Dīn was particularly proud and protective (*Ḵarīda*, ed. Aṯarī, I, pp. 7-8). In 534/1139 at the age of fifteen, he moved with his father to Baghdad, and the following year he began his studies at the Neẓāmīya *madrasa* (*Ḵarīda*, ed. Aṯarī, I, p. 53, ed. Fayṣal, II, pp. 93, 330). After a while he went on to spend three years studying Islamic jurisprudence at the newly opened Shafiʿite *madrasa* in Baghdad, the Ṯeqatīya (*Ḵarīda*, ed. Aṯarī, I, pp. 144-45). From about 550/1155 he held posts in Lower Iraq, Wāseṭ and Baṣra, eventually as deputy for the caliphal vizier, Ebn Hobayra (Bondārī, 1971, pp. 58, 95), until the latter's death in 560/1165. ʿEmād-

al-Dīn was then imprisoned, as were other protégés of the vizier. Within the year he was released, and then lived quietly in the capital, before moving to Syria in 562/1167 (Bondārī, 1971, p. 55; *Ḵarīda*, ed. Fayṣal, II, pp. 156, 324.)

There ʿEmād-al-Dīn was helped by Nūr-al-Dīn's vizier, Kemāl-al-Dīn Šahrazūrī, with whose son he had studied in the Neẓāmīya, and perhaps by Nūr-al-Dīn's earlier contacts and sympathy with his late patron, Ebn Hobayra (Ebn Rajab, I, pp. 258, 279-90). Thus he was soon given employment, first as head of the chancery (*kāteb dīvān al-ens¡ā'*) and later, in 568/1172, as comptroller (*mos¡ref al-dīvān*) with wider financial and administrative responsibilities (Bondārī, 1971, pp. 121, 131). When the Ayyubid Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn came to power, ʿEmād-al-Dīn sought preferment in his service, relying on the former friendship of Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn's father and uncle, Ayyūb and Šīrkūh, with his own uncle, ʿAzīz (Bondārī, 1971, p. 59) and through Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn's chief minister, al-Qāżī al-Fāżel, whose influential backing and literary patronage ʿEmād-al-Dīn always freely acknowledged. ʿEmād-al-Dīn became Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn's secretary, and, except for relatively short periods, was constantly in attendance during his campaigns, dealing with all the manifold chancery tasks, producing letters, appointments, and treaties, and particularly handling the Persian correspondence. After Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn's death in 589/1193 ʿEmād-al-Dīn's role and influence waned. Apart from some diplomatic activity on behalf of al-ʿĀdel Sayf-al-Dīn, Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn's brother, he devoted himself to literary pursuits until his own death.

However important his political career may have been, for succeeding generations it is as a figure in Arabic literature as poet, historian, and anthologist that ʿEmād-al-Dīn remains significant. A work which occupied him over long periods was his *Ḵarīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat al-ʿaṣr*, the anthology which was modeled on the *Yatīmat al-dahr* of Abū Manṣūr Ṯaʿālebī and the latest in a series of continuations of that work (Ebn Ḵallekān, ed. ʿAbbās, V, p. 149). The *Ḵarīda*, organized according to broad geographical divisions, dealt with poets, both contemporary and near contemporary (those after 500/1106), of Iraq, the eastern Islamic world, Syria and the Jazīra, and Egypt and the Maḡreb (including Spain). For each entry basic identification is given and generally rather brief biographical notes, followed by examples of each person's work, mostly verse but with a little prose. Critical comment is sparingly introduced, but the whole provides much autobiographical information.

Before he moved to Syria, he had begun a historical work dealing with the

events of the Saljuq sultanate and especially the careers of the viziers. This was based on a monograph in Persian, entitled *Nafsat al-maṣdūr fī ṣodūr zamān al-fotūr wa fotūr zamān al-ṣodūr*, by Sultan Maḥmūd's vizier, Anūš¡ervān b. Ḵāled (q.v.). The history was completed in Syria, and, like all of ʿEmād-al-Dīn's writings, is in a very elaborate rhymed prose, full of obscure vocabulary and imagery. The complete text, entitled *Noṣrat al-fatra wa-ʿoṣrat al-faṭra*, has not been published, although it is extant in Manuscript no. 2145 at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. A pruned version exists, undertaken in 623/1226, and dedicated to the Ayyubid prince, al-Moʿaẓẓam ʿĪsā, by Bondārī.

During a short period in Egypt in 576/1180-81 he translated Abū Ḥāmed Moḥammad Ḡazālī's *Kīmīā-ye saʿādat* from Persian into Arabic (Bondārī, 1971, p. 358). This work, which is not extant, was commissioned by al-Qāżī al-Fāżel, of whose elegant correspondence (*morāsalāt*) ʿEmād-al-Dīn later on in his life planned to make a special collection (*al-Barq al-šāmī*, ed. Ḥayyārī, III, p. 126). Several volumes of his own correspondence and poetry were collected, but no separate manuscript of his letters has survived.

ʿEmād-al-Dīn's fame rests primarily on the historical works he wrote celebrating the life and achievement of Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn and chronicling his own association with the sultan. His work became almost immediately a quarry to be mined by younger contemporary historians and utilized by following generations, and remains one of the most important sources for this period. The one work which survives in full is his monograph on the period from the reconquest of Jerusalem until the death of Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn, entitled *al-Fatḥ al-qossī fi'l-fatḥ al-qodsī*. At least some parts had been written during the lifetime of the sultan as a celebratory offering, since ʿEmād-al-Dīn records the reading of the passages in Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn's presence (Bondārī, 1979, p. 301).

A much larger undertaking was *al-Barq al-šāmī*, which was composed in his late years of retirement at Damascus. He completed it in 594/1198. This is as much a personal memoir of the part he played in the political and military events of the period as it is a straight chronicle of them. Unfortunately only two sections of the work are extant in their original form. The Bodleian Library at Oxford possesses the only two manuscripts, namely Manuscript Bruce 11 (part 3, covering the years 573-75/1177-80) and Manuscript Marsh 425 (part 5, covering years 578-79/1182-84). Other manuscripts have been said to exist, incorrectly as concerns St. Petersburg and without real proof for Morocco. It is fortunate that Bondārī also excerpted *al-Barq al-šāmī* — in fact, it was the first work he epitomized — although his version, which he called

Sanāʾ al-Barq al-šāmī, is extant only for the period from ʿEmād-al-Dīn's early years in Syria, which he spent in the service of Nūr-al-Dīn, until the year 583/1188. Bondārī in his introduction acknowledges the richness of the style, but adds, in persiflage of his own: "I found the pearls of what he wished to express hidden in the wave-clashing seas of his rhyming periods . . . " (Bondārī, 1971, p. 50). For the rest of our knowledge of *al-Barq al-šāmʿī* we rely on the extracts to be found (again in abbreviated form) in the 13th-century *Ketāb al-rawżatayn*, where the need to make ʿEmād-al-Dīn's difficult prose more accessible is commented on (Abū Šāma, I, p. 5)

To cover this sad (in his view) turn of events following the death of Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn, ʿEmād-al-Dīn wrote some small monographs. For example, *al-ʿOtbā wa'l ʿoqbā*, completed before *al-Barq*, took the narrative to 592/1196. The *Neḥlat al-reḥla* was similar in its contents to the preceding work, and finally the *Ḵaṭfat al-bāreq wa-ʿaṭfat al-s¡āreq* carried events from 593/1196 until the year in which he died. None of these survives, except in the quotations and summaries found in Abū Šāma's work (Abū Šāma, II, pp. 228-33).

Often ʿEmād-al-Dīn figures in his own writings with a naive self-importance. Much of his own official and semi-official correspondence, examples of the *ens¡āʾ* for which he is famous, illuminates his works. Above all, however, his portrait of Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn and his times is authoritative, lively and laudatory in a measured and judicious manner. His style has often been criticized. Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn Ṣafadī wrote: "He employed much paronomasia, to exaggerated lengths indeed, so that his writing became a sort of incantation and casting of spells. His verse pleases compared to his prose only because metre circumscribed him and did not allow him score for word play" (p. 133). Despite such criticisms it must be admitted that ʿEmād-al-Dīn crafts his demanding prose with great skill, the essential information to be imparted is never lost sight of and is frequently lit up with imagery.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(for cited works not given in detail, see "Short References"):

Abū Šāma, *Ketāb al-rawżatayn fī aḵbār al-dawlatayn*, 2 vols, Būlāq, 1287-88/1870-72.

Fatḥ b. ʿAlī Bondārī, *Zobdat al-noṣra wa noḵbat al-ʿoṣra*, Cairo, 1318/1900; ed. Houtsma in *Recueil* İrak ve Horasan Selçukluları tarihi, Istanbul, 1943.

Idem, *Sanāʾ al-Barq al-šāmʿī*, ed. R. Şeşen, Beirut, 1971 (up to 576/1180); ed. F. Nabarāwī, Cairo, 1979 (up to 583/1188).

Brockelmann, *GAL* I, pp. 383-85; suppl., I, pp. 548-49.

Ebn Rajab, *Ḏayl ʿalā ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābela*, ed., M.-H.ṟ Feqī, 2 vols., Cairo, 1952.

ʿEmād-al-Dīn Kāteb, *Noṣrat al-fatra wa ʿoṣrat al-faṭra*, Paris, ms. no. 1245.

Idem, *al-Fatḥ al-qossī fi'l fatḥ al-qodsī*, ed. C. Landberg, Leiden, 1888; ed. M. M. Ṣabeḥ, Cairo, 1965; tr. H. Massé as *Conquète de la Syrie et la Palestine par Saladin*, Paris, 1972.

Idem, *al-Barq al-šāmī*, parts 3 and 5, ed. M. Ḥayyārī, 2 vols., Cairo, 1987; part 5, ed. R. Şeşen, Istanbul, 1971.

Idem, *Ḵarīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat al-ʿaṣr*, ed. A. Amīn et al., vols. 1-2, Cairo, 1951-52 [Egypt]; ed. S. Fayṣal, vols. 1-4, Damascus, 1955-68 [Syria]; ed. M. Aṯarī and J. Saʿīd, vols. 1-5, Baghdad, 1955-81 [Iraq]; ed. ʿO. Dasūqī and ʿA. ʿAbd-al-ʿAzʿīm, Cairo, 1965 [Sicily, Maghreb and Spain]; ed. M. Marzūqī et al., Tunis, 1966 [Maḡreb].

Idem, *Dīvān*, ed. N. Rašīd, Mosul, 1983.

H. A. R. Gibb, "*Al-Barq al-Shāmī*. The History of Saladin by the Kātib ʿImād ad-Dīn al- Isfahānī," *WZKM* 52, 1953, pp. 93-115.

P. Kahle, "Einige wichtige Quelle sur Geschichte des Sultans Saladin," *Die Welt des Orients 50/2*, 1949, pp. 299-301.

J. Kraemer, *Der Sturz des Königreichs Jerusalem (583/1187) in der Darstellung des ʿImād al-Din al-Kātib al-Isfahāni*, Wiesbaden, 1952.

H. Massé, "ʿImād-al-Dīn" in *EI*2 III, pp. 1157-58.

D. S. Richards, "A Consideration of Two Sources for the Life of Saladin,"

Journal of Semitic Studies 25, 1980, pp. 46-65.

Idem, "ʿImād-al-Dīn al-Isfahānī, Administrator, Literateur and Historian" in M. Shatzmiller, ed., *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria*, Leiden, 1993, pp. 133-46.

Ṣalāḥ-al-Dīn Ḵalīl Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi'l wafayāt* I, ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul, 1931.