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F. DE JONG



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A *KITĀB AL-ʿAZĀMA*:
ON COSMOLOGY, HELL AND PARADISE

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Among the books entitled *Kitāb al-ʿAzama*, my eyes fell on a very naive one, which I decided to edit and study immediately after having seen it. My attention was drawn to this text by Professor Hans Daiber of Amsterdam, who possesses a manuscript of it, and my interest was enhanced by Heinen, who describes this text in outline and gives ample information about the genre to which it belongs.¹ In the version which Heinen had at his disposal, this *ʿAzama* is ascribed to Ibn Abī al-Dunyā. According to the book itself, ʿAbdallāh b. Salām, a converted Jew from the time of the Prophet, read it to the caliph ʿUthmān. There is a spurious *isnād* which goes back to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. The book claims to have been recognised and approved of by several pious third century Muslims, among them Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.

The original *Kitāb al-ʿAzama* was revealed to Adam, who wrote it down on clay tablets, baked them and deposited them in a cave in Sarandīb, in India. This cave was opened each year on ʿĀshūrā day only. The prophet Daniel brought forty scribes and copied down as much as he could in that one day. After his death the book was made public on copper sheets.

I have traced eleven MSS, eight of which are presently at my disposal. The transmission of this text is rather complicated. Its authorship, if we leave aside Adam and Daniel, is most uncertain. The text has not only been ascribed to Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, but also to Ibn Ḥibbān, who was identified by one diligent copyist as Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī. Other MSS mention a certain Abū Ḥayyān, the form of which name in Arabic script is not far removed from Ibn Ḥibbān. One MS even mentions Abū al-Shaykh as the author, but the text under consideration is manifestly different from the one outlined by Heinen.² It would be wiser, for the time being, to consider our *ʿAzama* an anonymous text.

¹ Anton M. Heinen, *Islamic Cosmology. A study of As-Suyūṭī's al-Ḥay'a as-saniya fi l-hay'a as-samiya* (Beirut 1982) 48-49. F. Sezgin, in *GAS* I, 191 and 201, mixes up several works of the same title.

² Cf. Heinen, *Islamic Cosmology*, 38-42. This is the *Kitāb al-ʿAzama* by Abū al-Shaykh which was edited by Ridā Allāh b. Muḥammad Idrīs al-Mubārakfūrī (al-Riyāḍ 1408/1988).

The contents of the MSS differ widely. There is, however, a common stock which exists in roughly two main textual types, while a mixed version is also clearly discernible. The readings differ rather freely, and what is more important, every individual MS indulges in its own extensive additions and variants. For this reason, and also because these texts are very formulaic and almost by nature archaizing, it is difficult if not impossible to classify the MSS chronologically, let alone to date them.

In short, this "text" rather consists in a cluster of texts of a vulgar type, like the *Stories of the Prophets* or the *Arabian Nights*. When classicists meet with this problem, e.g. in the stories about Alexander, their attitude, I am told, is to consider every version of a given story as a costly jewel, entitled to be edited and studied in its own right. The *Kitāb al-ʿAzama*, however interesting it may be, is not a costly jewel, and it is unlikely that scholars will ever sit down and study all its textual variants under a magnifying glass. It would simply not be worth the effort. And yet some method must still be found to deal with materials like these in a sound, if somewhat rough way. Few such approaches have been tried so far in Arabic philology. The *Qisṣat al-anbiyā'* collections exist only in unsatisfying editions. Eisenberg's edition of al-Kisā's recension from five MSS is rough enough, but he fails to give an apparatus criticus or any clue as to the method he followed, while al-Tha'labī's recension exists only in popular hotchpotch versions. The transmission of the *Arabian Nights* is an enormous mess, with one exception: the edition by Muḥsin Mahdī. He opted for one strand of the transmission only, just as a classicist would do. His work is impressive, in part because of his elaborate justification of his method, but he has only dealt with some 250 Nights instead of 1001.³ I think in the case of the *ʿAzama* the best I can do is to edit the richest version of it, in an eclectic way, and to allow ample space for variants in an apparatus.

No direct sources of the *ʿAzama* can be discovered, but one is reminded of the Third Book of Henoch, certain Christian

³ *The Thousand and One Nights. Alf Layla-wa-Layla: From the Earliest Known Sources*. Ed. with intr. and notes by Mushin Mahdi, 2 vols. (Leiden 1984). His method of editing, and other problems of textual criticism, are discussed by Jan Just Witkam, 'Establishing the Stemma: Fact or Fiction?', in *Manuscripts of the Middle East 3* (1988) 88-101. In the field of Indonesian studies Willem van der Molen dealt with similar problems in his *Javaanse tekstkritiek. Een overzicht en een nieuwe benadering geïllustreerd aan de Kurjarakarna* (Leiden 1983).

Apocrypha and minor Midrash texts, like *Kōnen* and *Gan ʿEden*.⁴ A related Islamic text is the anonymous *Aḥwāl al-qiyāma*.⁵ The whole of the *ʿAzama* is loosely woven around Koranic verses, but these are not dealt with systematically, and they are chosen in a playful, Midrash-like manner. The subject matter of the *ʿAzama* can be brought under three headings: Cosmology, Hell and Paradise.

Quite frankly, on cosmology it is rather disappointing. The idea of the authors was to show the structure of the heavens and the earth in their infinity, so as to reveal God's majesty. The text is chaotic; nevertheless it sets out with a reasonably recognizable layer cake of seven atmospheres and seven layers of earth, separated by seas. There is no influence from Greek cosmology. The following is a sample from the *ʿAzama* which describes the denizens of the heavenly spheres:

'And He made creatures therein, which are unacquainted with iron. They work and farm and plant trees which are penetrated by rivers, and on which are birds like Bactrian camels; their feet are bird's feet and their faces are like human faces. They have a Paradise and a Hell; among them are judges and prophets and wise and righteous ones; they have a place of worship; they have day and night; among them are scholars and excellent ones. They divide their days into four parts, a part to laugh, a part to cry, a part in which they call themselves to account and a part in which they seek their livelihood; [on the Day of Judgment] they will not be gathered together with you. You do not know about them and they do not know about you.'

Large numbers are characteristic of this text. There are millions of peculiar fishes and monsters, including Behemoth, and many angels too, bearing Hebrew names not unlike those occurring in the wider parts of Jewish literature; there are myriads of meadows, trees and cities. Individual copyists had no scruples about adding some *alf alf's* wherever they thought fit. The cities are inhabited by beings which are not human, but have certain properties in common with mankind. Their main activity is praising God in many tongues and they do it so loudly that, should the voice of one of them reach us, we would most certainly die. Jinn and spirits I did not encounter;

⁴ *Aus Israels Lehrhallen. Kleine Midraschim zur jüdischen Eschatologie und Apokalyptik*, trsl. and commt. Aug. Wünsche, Vol. 3 (Leipzig 1909).

⁵ Edited by M. Wolff, *Kitāb aḥwāl al-qiyāma. Muhammedanische Eschatologie* (Leipzig 1872). Wolff did not venture to assign a date to his text.

the text prefers bodily beings, and no doubt the angels were imagined as such.

Now where are all these worlds in relation to ours? That is a question repeatedly asked by the caliph ʿUthmān. I would expect our world to be on the top layer above the seven worlds and atmospheres and seas. Indeed we do find human beings there, but some editors apparently could not resist expanding this mankind to such supernatural proportions that we hardly recognise ourselves. In fact, our world is nowhere.

Hell cannot be located either. The higher parts of the cosmos are rather confused; I doubt whether they can be reconstructed at all. Rather than concentrating upon cosmic topography, I will highlight one subject which engaged the author's special attention: the sinners and their respective tortures in Hell. The description of the various categories of sinners is one of the parts of the book which manifests most variation in the different MSS. Every editor, every copyist showed himself eager to invent the most cruel tortures for his neighbour, his wife, his cousin, or the taxcollector. In this Hell, we look in vain for straightforward sinners such as thieves, murderers and drunkards; they are simply not to be found. We do encounter, however, flatterers, poets, unfriendly neighbours, puffed-up scholars and *imāms*, false witnesses and defilers of graves. This may reflect the respectable petit-bourgeois character of both the author and his readership, who were hardly familiar with the seamy side of life but liked to indulge in fantasies about torture. The list of sinners and their punishments has an early counterpart in the *Sīra* of the Prophet. As one example from among the many, we read in the *ʿAzāma*:

"Then other people were brought, whose skin was cut and stripped off and then put back, and so on incessantly. And a herald cried out with regard to them: "These are the ones who had bad relations with their neighbours."

Ibn Ishāq's Ascension story contains four descriptions of sinners according to a similar pattern.⁶ The *ʿAzāma* may have freely used the *Sīra*, but it is just as well possible that both works

independently drew on a long tradition. The same pattern of description occurs for instance in *Apocalypsis Pauli*.⁷

To do at least some justice to the topic of the present Congress, I looked for female sinners in Hell. A well-known Tradition of the Prophet says that most denizens of Hell are women. However, this is not borne out by our text, in which I found only three categories of female sinners:

- Adulterers (both men and women, *al-zānī wal-zāniya*). They are chained together; their genitals are extended to a size of seventy miles; then a bunch of vipers is set on them.

- Women who did not perform the *ghusl* at the correct time, so that they were late for *ṣalāt*. Pitch and red copper are poured over their heads.

- Finally there is the woman who said to her husband: "I am menstruating" when she was not, and put him off until he fell asleep without having satisfied his lust. The verdict is: pitch on her head and snakes on her genitals.

Paradise is situated under the Throne of God. Let us first obtain a glimpse of the Houris. A man enjoys the company of seventy Houris, with each of whom he has intercourse during forty years, without growing tired. As a matter of fact, this takes place in an appropriate setting: a pavilion with the finest mattresses, silk and brocade, jewels, all in the best possible taste. On every Houris is written: "I belong to so-and-so, son of so-and-so." When a man lusts for one of them, she knows it without any hint or invitation, and she opens the door of her tent.

There is a convenient solution to the problem of heavenly reward for Muslim women:

"While a man is frolicking and laughing and dallying like this with the Houris, a tent of light comes down from above his head, in which is a bed of red gold, on which are seventy mattresses of silk and brocade, one above the other, and on the top of them sits a Houri whose light outshines the light of the other Houris, clad in seventy dresses of light. When the man addresses her, she opens the door of her tent and says to him: "My darling, how could you forget me? Don't you remember how I endured with you hunger and thirst and nakedness and affliction? Was I not

⁷ In *Neuwestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung. II. Band. Apostolisches, Apokalypsen und Verwandtes*, hrsg. von Wilhelm Schneemelcher (Tübingen 1989) 663ff.

⁶ Cf. *Das Leben Muhammads [...] nach Muḥammad ibn Ishāq, bearbeitet von Abd el-Malik ibn Hišam*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, 3 vols. (Göttingen 1858-1860) 269.

obedient to you? Did I not serve and respect you? Do you not remember this and that? I am your wife, who obeyed you on earth." Then the man weeps for joy and goes to her and embraces her.'

When the other Houris see the beauty of this rejuvenated woman, and her jewelry, they are slightly jealous. God explains to them that He has given her all this as a reward for all that she suffered on earth. Then the other Houris agree that she is entitled to her high position, and they decide to abstain from jealousy.

Food in Paradise consists of fruit, which is in easy reach, and the meat of birds, all in accordance with Koran 56:20-21, 32-33. Fruits come down to the hand of those who desire them, so that they may eat; and whenever a fruit is cut off, another one comes back in its place and ripens on the spot, and:

'on the trees are birds like Bactrian camels, and the friend of God eats from their meat. When he desires, it falls down before him so that he may eat it, cooked or roasted as he desires, by the omnipotence of God who says to something: "Be and it is". And when the servant [of God] has eaten of it what he desired, immediately the bird comes back to life, fat and fully-grown. Then it flies up and it glorifies God, saying: "Glory to Him who created me and made my meat a sustenance for His godfearing servants.'

One thing is lacking, however, in this land of Cockaigne: wine. Koran 56:18-19 promises the dwellers of Paradise "a cup from a pure spring" which is generally explained as a heavenly kind of wine, since it "causes neither headache nor intoxication". In our text the four Paradise rivers occur, one of which is wine, but it is not dwelt upon, and cups and goblets are mentioned only because they occur in some Koranic verses; their contents are not discussed. Consequently, the "immortal youths" (*wildān*) in Paradise do not go round to serve the wine. Their only task, apparently, is wiping off the sweat that is released during sexual intercourse; a sweat, by the way, that is purer than the strongest-scented musk. The reason that the author failed to describe the wine of Paradise may be that he was so unacquainted with alcoholic beverages that it simply did not occur to him.

For its readership, the *ʿAzama* united several functions: It urges man to contemplate God's greatness in Creation (*tafakkur*). In spite of its clumsiness, our text does sometimes succeed, by its endless

repetition, its huge numbers and its perspective, in offering what in European art was reached in the Baroque period: a glimpse of infinity. Furthermore it encourages man, indirectly, to live in such a way that he will end up in Paradise and not in Hell (*targhib* and *tazhid*). At the same time, the book is written with obvious pleasure, in which the reader may share. When one tries to visualize Hell from this text, the result is similar to present-day sadistic fantasies, horror films and underground comic strips: monsters with whips in their claws, cut off limbs, spouting blood and pus, snakes and dragons wriggling over naked bodies. The sexual pleasures of Paradise are described in a more restrained way than the tortures in Hell; yet, they are more concrete than they usually are in eschatological texts. The text combines edification and amusement, and provides an opportunity for laughter, which is an indispensable ingredient in making religion palatable.

What may be the use of the *ʿAzama* for modern scholars? One interesting aspect of the work is that it gives an insight into popular Koranic exegesis. The Midrash-like way of playing with the sacred texts is worthy of attention in itself. In addition to this, we are provided with numerous explanations of difficult words in the Koran which are not found in early commentaries such as those by Muqātil b. Sulaymān and al-Ṭabarī. Some examples:

- *khusr* (K. 103:1-2) is a spot in Hell between the trees.
 - *zaqqum* (e.g. K. 37:62) is the fruit of a tree in Hell, rather than that tree itself; it is beautifully coloured, but disgusting in taste.
 - *hamim* (*passim*) is an unspecified broth in a vessel of the tormentors in hell, boiling eternally, splashing and speaking with a clear tongue. It says: "When shall I enter the intestines of the disobedient and reckless sinners and take revenge on them?"
 - *zabāniya* (K. 96:18) are the tormentors in Hell.
- One may be of the opinion that we can do without Koranic exegesis like this. But these explanations are no more ridiculous than many others which we find in Muqātil and al-Ṭabarī. The latter scholars certainly performed their task on a higher level, but often enough they resorted to explanations of the same calibre as those quoted above. Therefore we have to take our text seriously with respect to Koranic exegesis, for it reveals one type of source from which serious commentators gleaned their wisdom.

The *ʿAzama* also reflects popular theology. The author often proclaims the principle of *bilā kayf*: mankind cannot know how things are in the world to come. But had he been consistent about this, he would not have written at all. His way of reconciling the

bilā kayf principle with his wish to write this book is based on the idea of partial knowledge. Only God knows everything, whereas we human beings know but partially. Our knowledge may amount to a good deal. About the horned creatures in one of the atmospheres, for instance, we learn: "their faces are on their breasts, they eat with their right horn and drink with their left horn, and between both horns is a distance of ten thousand years". However, something must remain for God alone to know. In this case it is their number: "only God knows their number". The limitation of our knowledge is also reflected by the motif of the cave being opened only one day per year. The whole book could not be copied in one day, not even by forty scribes. The little that we do know is supposed to be contained in the present text.

ʿUthmān asks several times about what happens in Hell and Paradise: "Do they see it with their own eyes (*yuʿaynūnahā*)?". The answer is invariably affirmative. In at least one MS, it is also affirmative with reference to the possibility of meeting God (*liqāʾ*), which is in tune with the pious, unscholarly view of *tadjsim*.

What is also worth contemplating is the relation of the *ʿAzama* to *ḥadīth*. An earlier stage of this text, or a related one, must have been a source of many Traditions, notably in the *ṣifat al-djanna* and *ṣifat djahannam* sections. *Ḥadīth* offers only modest fragments, whereas the *ʿAzama* is a continuing story of wild imagination. It is hardly conceivable that traditionists encountered only fragments in their sources. The plausible chronological order is from a longer story to shorter pieces, just as is the case with the biography of the Prophet.⁸

The *Kitāb al-ʿAzama*, then, is not only entertaining. Although it came into being relatively late - about 900 AD perhaps? - it may well be of use in obtaining a clearer insight into early, "unofficial" Islam.

LOS ANIMALES EN LOS TEXTOS AGRICOLAS ESCRITOS EN ARABE

Camilo Alvarez de Morales
(Granada)

El campo de la literatura veterinaria está totalmente ligado al de la literatura agrícola. Los pocos tratados que sobre animales domésticos existen se refieren de modo prácticamente exclusivo al caballo o, en el mejor de los casos, a los animales de carga, con lo cual las noticias se amplían abarcando también mulos, asnos y camellos, aunque, en general se les denomina a todos como *dawāb*. Esto en lo que se refiere a la zootecnia.

En cuanto a la zoología, la carencia de textos es aún mayor. Fuera de la clásica obra de al-Ŷāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, apenas si quedan testimonios. Se sabe que Ibn Qutayba, al-Qazwīnī y algún otro se ocuparon de este tema; incluso la propia obra de al-Ŷāḥiẓ tiene más de literatura de *adab* que de aspectos científicos.¹ Precisamente en la literatura de este género se encontrarán también noticias sobre animales, así como en la poesía, sobre todo en la preislámica, y en el Corán.² También alguna referencia se encuentra en la literatura jurídica, pero tanto en éste como en los casos anteriores, la visión que dan, o las noticias que ofrecen sobre animales, carecen de todo elemento que pudiera considerarse científico y, desde luego, nada aclaran sobre aspectos de tipo práctico.

Encontramos, pues, un vacío en este ámbito de la ciencia y la cultura árabe que creo interesante se intente llenar. Si la literatura que podríamos considerar especializada no existe o es muy escasa, el camino a seguir no puede ser otro que el de consultar las obras sobre agricultura, ya que en ellas es relativamente normal que se les dedique un apartado, que suele ser el que cierra la obra.

¹ Cf. E.I.², s.v. *ḥayawān* (Ch. Pellat) III, 322.

² Puede verse el artículo anterior, pp. 314-318 y las indicaciones que a este respecto hace en la Presentación que precede a su publicación, C. Ruiz Bravo-Villasante, *El libro de las utilidades de los animales de Ibn Al-Durayhim Al-Mawsili* (Madrid, Edilan 1981) 26.

⁸ Cf. for instance the rich, long story about the *hidjra* in R.G. Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih* (Wiesbaden 1972) I, 117-175, with the abridged and expurgated versions in the *Sira* of Ibn Ishāq and the even smaller pieces in the *ḥadīth*-collections.