

## RECENT BOOKS

### AL-TINBUKTI'S *NAYL AL-IBTIHĀJ*

*Nayl al-ibtihāj bi-taṭrīz al-dībāj* by Aḥmad Bābā al-Tinbukti, ishrāf wa-taqdīm (edition supervised and introduced by) ʿAbd al-Ḥamid ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥarāma. Notes and indexes by students of the Kulliyat al-daʿwā 'l-Islāmiyya. Tarablus: Manshūrāt Kulliyat al-daʿwā 'l-Islāmiyya, 1398/1989.<sup>1</sup>

The *Nayl al-ibtihāj* is one of the most important bibliographical resources for the study of Islamic scholarship in Andalusia and in North and West Africa down to the end of the 16th century. The first modern edition of the work was a lithographed text published in Fez in 1317/1899 and there have been at least two printings in Cairo on the margins of Ibn Farḥūn's *al-Dībāj al-mudhahhab fī maʿrifat aʿyān ʿulamāʾ al-madhhab*, one in 1329/1911 and the other in 1351/1931-2. None of these editions has been a critical one and all have long since acquired the status of rare books.

In view of this a new edition is to be welcomed, but (it must be said) with reservations. These reservations are, moreover serious. In the first place this is not a 'new' edition based on a comparison of the known manuscripts, nor yet are its accompanying notes in any sense 'critical'. Secondly, it is not an easy edition to obtain, being published in Libya by an Islamic missionary college rather than a commercial press and hence designed to be given away rather than sold. I was fortunate enough to obtain my copy from the director of the Centre Ahmad Baba in Timbuktu, Dr Mahmoud Zouber, who had been given a number of copies by the Libyan college.

As the 'supervisor' of the publication makes clear in his introduction, the editing task was an 'exercise' for students of

1 Islamic dating in Libya begins in the year of the death of the Prophet (632 C.E.) rather than the year of the *hijra* (622 C.E.)

the college. Hence, he says, there was no need to burden it with additional commentaries and notes except to indicate some of the additional sources for the lives of the scholars whose biographies are given. Students did not attempt or claim to be producing a critical edition based on the manuscripts; rather they attempted to correct errors in previous editions. We shall see below how far they were successful in this objective.

In his introduction °Abd al-Ḥamīd °Abd Allāh al-Harāma makes a number of critical comments about the work, some of which merely reveal the optic through which he (and presumably the college) interprets Islam, while others make it clear that a critical edition of the *Nayl al-ibtihāj* and a study of Aḥmad Bābā's methodology are long overdue. On the first count he makes clear his distaste for Sufism in the following words:

Some readers may find in the book things they disagree with, especially in the biographies of Sufis, and may therefore undervalue the book, though it in fact contains valuable material. ... It is no secret that the book contains Ṣūfī *shaṭaḥāt* which conflict with cognitive logic and with the clear text (*ẓāhir*) of the *sharī'a*, as well as other exaggerations which had to be retained since they form part of the content of the original text. We saw no need to comment on them separately as they occur, so we refer to them here in global fashion. The general reader will notice them as he goes through the book. How much more the judicious critic!

We may detect here a desire to bowdlerize the text that is only with difficulty resisted on grounds of scholarly impartiality, though a spiritual 'health warning' was deemed appropriate. One may wonder if future editors of such stripe will be so tolerant.

For scholars less concerned with endangering their spiritual health but more concerned with intellectual probity and the use of sources, his criticisms of Aḥmad Bābā's methodology may seem more damning. The editor takes him to task for cavalier treatment of quotations which, he says, the author generally abridges and edits in his own way, sometimes distorting their meaning. A genuinely critical edition of the *Nayl*, tracing quotations to their source and carefully examining the works upon which Aḥmad Bābā drew for his biographical dictionary

(and which he thoughtfully lists at the end of the work) would allow us to arrive at a more informed judgement about the way in which the author worked and the extent to which his use of sources has distorted the meaning of texts he drew upon.

After the general introduction covering pp. 7-10, there are eight pages devoted to the life and work of Aḥmad Bābā. The editor refers to the obvious Arabic sources, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (both editions), Brockelmann's *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur* and Mahmoud Zouber's *Aḥmad Baba de Tombouctou (1556-1627), sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1977). The reviewer was scarcely surprised that his own writings on Aḥmad Bābā in English were not noticed, but it was a more serious omission to not refer to the fullest of all biographies of Aḥmad Bābā contained in al-Bartilī's *Fath al-Shakūr* which was published in Beirut, edited by Muḥammad Ḥajjī and Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Kattānī, in 1983.<sup>2</sup> A list of works provided in this section runs only to thirty, although Aḥmad Bābā wrote at least sixty. It would appear that no real use was made of the very full list in Zouber's 1977 study. There was, however, one title that is new to me. Item 28 is given as *Istiṭrād al-zurafā'* and it is said to be taken from the *Badhl al-munāṣaḥa* [fī 'l-muṣāfaḥa of Aḥmad b. °Alī al-Būsa°idī al-Hashtūkī, a pupil of Aḥmad Bābā]. Interestingly, al-Hashtūkī says that it was a study of the *ḥadīth* about the 'twelve caliphs' and that Aḥmad Bābā did not make it public until after his return to Timbuktu, suggesting that he may have felt the Sa°dian authorities would consider it subversive.<sup>3</sup>

The actual text of the *Nayl* covers pp. 27-641 of the book. Each entry is numbered (a total of 802) and is highlighted in

- 2 I published a text and translation of this biography in my article 'A new source for the biography of Aḥmad Bābā al-Tinbukti (1564-1627)', Bull. SOAS, 26 1964, 568-93.
- 3 The *ḥadīth* probably referred to is the following: 'This religion will remain firmly established until there have been twelve caliphs, each of whom will enjoy the consensus of the community, ... then anarchy will follow'. The remarks of al-Hashtūkī are quoted from Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Qādirī, *Nashr al-mathānī li-ahl al-qarn al-ḥādī °ashar wa 'l-thānī*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥajjī & Aḥmad al-Tawfīq, Rabat 1397/1977, I, 274.

bold type making the beginnings of entries easy to locate—often a problem in other editions. At the end of the book is a simple index of entries in the order in which they occur and an index of sections of the book according to letter of the alphabet (*ḥarf al-hamza*, *ḥarf al-bāʿ*, etc.). Regrettably there is no genuine alphabetical index of persons whose biographies are given, much less a general *fihrist al-aʿlām*, or index of *nisbas*, etc. There is absolutely no vocalization of the text, though it must be said that the type-face used is large and clear and the book is strongly bound in rexine.

In conclusion, let us see how far the students of the *Kulliyyat al-daʿwā* have been able to correct errors in previous editions, as they claimed. On this matter, it has only been possible to take a 'sample census' and in order to get some idea of error frequency in this new edition I looked at the biography of Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Maghīlī (no. 701) which covers some three pages. The following errors were noted:

<i>For</i>	<i>read</i>
baʿḍ aʿdāʾihi	bugḥḍ aʿdāʾihi
[ilā ʾl-akh] al-Qāsim b.A.n.d.r.s	al-qāʾim bi-mā indarasa
A.h.r	Ahīr (i.e. Air)
tanabbuh al-wāqif	tanbīh al-wāqif
Yaḥyā b. Badīr	Yaḥyā b. Yadīr
al-Fijī	al-Fijjī

Regrettably, scholars still stand in need of a reliable and readily available edition of this important work. A critical study of it is also a desideratum.

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