

A Medieval Muslim Scholar's Legacy

Ibn Ṭāwūs and the Afterlife of his Library

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Abstract

This article presents an endowment note as the only surviving material trace from the famous library of the Shi'ite scholar 'Alī b. Mūsā Ibn Ṭāwūs (589/1193–664/1266). This note offers new insights into the books he possessed and adds clarity about the legal framework under which it was passed on to Ibn Ṭāwūs' descendants. The article also traces the further history of this manuscript through Damascus to Istanbul and discusses strategies for tracking these notes, which were often willfully destroyed.

Keywords

Ibn Ṭāwūs – waqf – Baghdad – Damascus

Working with manuscript notes can serve a variety of approaches.¹ Sometimes, it is an exercise in applying the smallest and literally most marginal of finds in order to contribute to a larger picture. Since these notes are often dispersed, worn, or purposefully effaced, such small finds frequently hinge on a stroke of luck. Such is the case with the following endowment note.

Endowment notes often follow the same pattern and layout, and their systematic erasure therefore leaves suspicious traces in a manuscript. One of the methods adopted early on was to repeat a simple statement of endowment, sometimes consisting of the single word *waqf* and sometimes expanded to include the name of an endower or institution, several times throughout a copy above the text. Even when erased, the word *waqf* with the final *fā'*

¹ This article was submitted April 1, 2018. Accepted for publication April 21, 2018.

extended into one long horizontal stroke, is often still discernible due to its peculiar shape. There were those who wanted to eliminate even these traces of script that the razor could leave behind. To have a rectangular piece cut out or pasted over with paper strips above the text at regular intervals should therefore arouse suspicion in the attentive scholar. Propelled by this hint, the reader interested in the history of his text should turn every page in the hope of finding traces of script and, in the end, maybe combine those little pieces into a coherent reading of the endower or the institution that once held the volume. This is where luck would mean that the hand that erased all the other endowment notes throughout the volume was careless enough, just this once, to allow, again with some concentration, a relatively clear reading. All these factors came together in the case of MS Köprülü, Fazil Ahmed Pasha 1047, now held in the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul,² to reveal what is, so far, the sole remnant of a famous library.

The manuscript contains the 255-folio fragment of a history of the early Islamic empire covering the years 63 until 97 AH. This fragment has long been identified as part of Muḥammad b. Ğarīr al-Ṭabarī's (224/839–310/923) universal history *Tārīḫ al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*. M.J. de Goeje and Ignazio Guidi already used the volume for their work on the second part of the international edition of the *Annales* that appeared in Leiden between 1881 and 1898.³

The note in question is found on fol. 25^v and reads as follows:

وقف علي بن موسى بن طاووس علي | ... اولاده ما تناسلوا ...

waqf 'Alī b. Mūsā b. Ṭāwūs 'alā ... awlādihī mā tanāsālū ...

The man named in this note is Raḍī al-Dīn 'Alī b. Sa'd al-Dīn Mūsā b. Ğa'far Ibn Ṭāwūs (born 15 Muḥarram 589 / January 1193, died 5 Dū l-Qa'da 664 / August 1266). He was born into a prominent Shi'ite family in al-Ḥilla and was of some influence in intellectual and, sometimes, political circles while he resided and worked in Bagdad, al-Ḥilla, Najaf, and Karbalā'. He is not only a well-known scholar and served prominently as *naqīb al-ašrāf* first of Bagdad, then the whole of Iraq under the early Mongol rule. His library, too, is exceptionally

2 The manuscript is catalogued in Ramazan Şeşen / Cevat İzgi / Cemil Akpınar, *Fihris maḥḥūāt Maktabat Köprülü / Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Köprülü Library*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 1406/1986), 540. The catalogue dates the part of the manuscript that contains Ibn Ṭāwūs's *waqf* note to the 8th century AH.

3 *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djarir Mohammed Ibn Djarir at-Tabari*. Secunda Series, ed. M.J. de Goeje et al., 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1881–1889), our manuscript begins vol. 1, p. 305.

well studied. Ibn Ṭāwūs himself compiled a list of his books and this, together with more references in his other works, served as the basis for one of the classics of book history in our field, Etan Kohlberg's *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*.⁴ As expected for such an early period where few original manuscripts have survived unscarred, Kohlberg worked exclusively with literary sources. But Ibn Ṭāwūs' detailed testimony allowed him to reconstruct a precise list of titles, which set this work apart from others that would rely on anecdotal narratives.

With all its merits, there had to be some questions that Kohlberg and his source could not answer. Those interested in the history of libraries still wondered in which legal framework the library existed and which, if any, steps its owner undertook to assure its longevity. Hirschler recently observed, in his seminal study on *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands*, that "Kohlberg has shown in his detailed study that the scholar Ibn Ṭāwūs held a private collection in Baghdad of some 1,500 titles, but in this and other cases it is not clear whether or not these manuscripts were endowed."⁵ This, however, is not completely true, although the misconception can be explained as a confusion of terminology. Kohlberg included at least one note about Ibn Ṭāwūs that explicitly mentioned how the latter had endowed a work to his sons, namely a book that Ibn Ṭāwūs had "bequeathed it (*waqqafnāhā*) to his sons".⁶ It is evident, then, that Kohlberg meant endowment when he relates Ibn Ṭāwūs' statement that "he decided to bequeathe [sic.] all his other books [i.e. besides the four Qur'āns for his four daughters, BL] to his two sons and to any further male offspring"⁷ and that it is Kohlberg's somewhat imprecise terminology—and maybe understanding of the nature of *waqf*—that turned an endowment into a bequest and concealed this fact from his readers.⁸

What the above note in MS Köprülü 1047 offers now is not only added clarity on this point, based on documentary evidence, but also the addition of a new manuscript to the titles known to have been in Ibn Ṭāwūs' library. Kohlberg cites the many instances in which Ibn Ṭāwūs referred to the *Tārīḥ* of al-Ṭabarī (though only by title and never quoting from it), but it was in no way clear that he had actually possessed the work in his collection.⁹

4 Etan Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work. Ibn Ṭāwūs and his library* (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

5 Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands. A social and cultural history of reading practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 136.

6 Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar*, p. 77.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

8 Adding to the confusion, Kohlberg does indeed rather use the term "donated" when referring to other *waqf*-libraries, e.g. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar*, p. 80.

9 Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar*, pp. 361–362, #609.

A further benefit that comes with the identification of a manuscript from Ibn Ṭāwūs' library is the ability to observe more traces of its subsequent history. Not unusually, its initial endowment was to be the mere beginning of a longer development. Many a manuscript's trajectory can be described as a tour not only through subsequent *waqfs* and institutions, but also a constant change between the legal status of endowed good and private possession. MS Köprülü 1047 contains, on fol. 8^v, another endowment note, which reads *waqf bi-l-Ḍiyā'īya*. It refers to the Madrasa al-Ḍiyā'īya in Damascus. This institution, long hailed as the most important library of the city, witnessed many recorded and documented acts of theft or re-appropriation and the sources are all but silent on its fate between the 16th and 19th centuries.¹⁰ The last identifiable stage for MS Köprülü 1047 on its tour was again an endowment, this time in the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Ibn Ṭāwūs' manuscript ended up in the rich collection that was connected with the name of the grand vizier Fāzil Aḥmad Köprülü, which was posthumously established in 1088/1677 and became the first independent library in the Ottoman realm.¹¹ Here it finally remained.

From Baghdad to Damascus and on to Constantinople, this manuscript testifies to a journey that spanned empires and centuries. How many of Ibn Ṭāwūs' books followed this one is impossible to tell currently. With attention to the faint traces of endowment notes, their systematic collection, and a bit of luck, we will hopefully find out.

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- 10 See on this collection, now dispersed in libraries around the globe, Šams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalā'id al-ğauhariyya fi tāriḥ al-Šālḥiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad Duḥmān, 2 vols. (Damascus: Mağma' al-Luğa al-'Arabīya, 1949–1951), vol. 1, pp. 77–79, 82; Youssef Éche, *Les bibliothèques arabes publiques et semi-publiques en Mésopotamie, en Syrie et en Égypte au Moyen Age* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1967), pp. 217–235, 295, 297; Boris Liebreuz, *Die Riḡā'īya aus Damaskus. Eine Privatbibliothek im osmanischen Syrien und ihr kulturelles Umfeld* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 176–178.
- 11 On the library, actually a joint undertaking of several generations of Köprülüs, see Ismail E. Erünsal, *Ottoman Libraries. A survey of the history, development and organization of Ottoman foundation libraries* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures, Harvard University, 2008), pp. 43–44.

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
هذا ما كتبه علي بن ابي طالب
سنة عشر الف مفرق ابن زياد طاب عنه منها في بيته
وجلا الساقية وقد كان دعا النجاره الى القتال معه
ودعاني زياد الى ذلك فابوا عليه حتى عدت الى حنين فهدمت
حرفه قال حنين الاسود من شهبان عن عبد الله بن جابر البارقي
قال لعبد الله بن شقيق بن ثور فعلى الى ان الله قد بلغني ان ابن زياد
هداوا عن سبع بديل الى دار مسعود ليوذ من زياد
الى دار ليوذ ليوذ بن الغار بن قيس فبقوا ما حكم
ويهدوا الله شهرا ولقد همت ان ابعث الى ابن زياد فاشده
وثاقا واخرجه عنى فادهر الى ابن مسعود ما فرأ عليه السلام
مى وماله ان يبي شقيق بن ثور مبعثا وكذا ما خرج
هدى من الرطبيك قال وكان معه عمير الله وعبد الله ابنا
زياد قال فدخلت على مسعود واسألتها عنده احد هاهنا
والاخر عرفت انه مبعث السلم عليك انا عيسى قال عليك
السلم عليك يعنى اليك شقيق بن ثور يعنى عليك السلم ويقول
لك الله بلغني مرسى الكلام بعينه الى ما خرجها عنك قال
مسعود والله ملكتك فعلى عبد الله كفى ابو ثور ونسى
كنيته اما كان يكتى اما الفضل فعلى احوه عبد الله انا والله
لا يخرج عنكم فاحمروا وعقدوا لاذمكم والخرج حتى
نقتل بينا الطرفكم فيكم بنجارا عليكم الى يوم القامة قال
فصب حرسنا ابو مال حرسنا الربيع بن الحرث عرو لبيد ان
اهل البصرة اجتمعوا فقتلوا المرهم العمار بن صفوان الراسبي
ورجلان من مصر لحنان والهمر رجلا فلولوه عليهم وقالوا من
رضيتنا فقد رضيتاه وما اعترى الرجل المصري قيس بن الصبح

FIGURE 1 Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, ms Köprülü, Fazil Ahmed Pasha 1047, fol. 25v.
This page preserves the only endowment note in which the name of 'Alī b. Mūsā
Ibn Ṭawūs is still legible

عزمت من بعد ما لا كما سلفه المرحوم نور الدين الملبس
بغيا من في الحن سنة ثمان وستين وثمانين ليلتسالي
بغيره ورجع ما لسان من هذه السنة عبد الله بن الزبير
حدثني الخبر عن الحدس ان سعد بن ابراهيم بن محمد
ما لسان سنة ثمان وستين وكان يبيع يمينه الناجد ويرول
الامر شورى ما لا كما كان ليلته هذا الخبر في سنة ثمان
ادعتي عن سنان سعيه في الامور في سنة ثمان
سلي ما هلا المدينة وانما ليلته في سنة ثمان
الغور يبروا وجدوا واعبروا وعرفوا انه نزل في سنة
ذو الحجة في سنة ثمان وستين في سنة ثمان وستين
المنزلة في سنة ثمان وستين في سنة ثمان وستين
احمد بن محمد بن ابي اسد بن ابي اسد بن ابي اسد
ما لسان سنة ثمان وستين في سنة ثمان وستين
لحس في سنة ثمان وستين في سنة ثمان وستين
ان لك من هذا المرسلة في سنة ثمان وستين
ما نه رطل في سنة ثمان وستين في سنة ثمان وستين
وخذ من هذا المرسلة في سنة ثمان وستين
ان اوعى ما روى في سنة ثمان وستين في سنة ثمان وستين
بين له ما عفاه بابنة الغدده واعلى في سنة ثمان وستين
عشتوا الغصون كسوة في سنة ثمان وستين في سنة ثمان وستين
ان حنكته اناه السور في سنة ثمان وستين في سنة ثمان وستين
رحم الله لو اهدى الله ليلته في سنة ثمان وستين

انما هذا كانه ما لا كما سلفه المرحوم نور الدين الملبس
بغيا من في الحن سنة ثمان وستين وثمانين ليلتسالي
بغيره ورجع ما لسان من هذه السنة عبد الله بن الزبير
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الغور يبروا وجدوا واعبروا وعرفوا انه نزل في سنة
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بغيا من في الحن سنة ثمان وستين وثمانين ليلتسالي
بغيره ورجع ما لسان من هذه السنة عبد الله بن الزبير
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ادعتي عن سنان سعيه في الامور في سنة ثمان
سلي ما هلا المدينة وانما ليلته في سنة ثمان
الغور يبروا وجدوا واعبروا وعرفوا انه نزل في سنة
ذو الحجة في سنة ثمان وستين في سنة ثمان وستين
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رحم الله لو اهدى الله ليلته في سنة ثمان وستين

FIGURE 2 Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, Ms Köprülü, Fazil Ahmed Pasha 1047, fols. 8^v–9^r.
An endowment note for the *Diya'iyya madrasa* on fol. 8^v