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THE BOOK OF SPLENDOR OF THE BELIEVER
BY ʿABDALLĀH IBN AL-FADL*

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This manuscript of the «Book of Splendor» from the Melkite Antiochian author, the deacon ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Faḍl (died after 1052)², of whom little is known, will be more closely examined here. It bears the title, *Kitāb bahğat al-muʿmin yataḍammanu masāʿil šarʿiyya wa mawḍūʿāt falsafiyya* (The Book of the Splendor of the Believer including Religious Questions and Philosophical Issues). The manuscript is in a clear handwriting and contains nineteen lines par page. It was copied by the secretary Ṭalğā³, the brother of Meletius the Metropolitan of Aleppo in the year of Hiğra 1032 [= 1622-1623 A.D.].

Ibn al-Faḍl says on the opening page: «I have summarized it in 365 questions, which agree with the number of days in a year. We have further divided the questions in four groups of one hundred so that its sections would agree with the parts of the body. We have named it «The Book of the Splendor of the Believer», so that every worshipper and believer may benefit from it». The work is a sort of catechism. Each of the four parts is

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1) A. NICOLL, *Bibliotheca Bodleiana codicum manuscriptorum orientalium catalogi partis secundae volumen primum arabicos complectens*. (Oxford 1821), nr. XXII, pp. 25-26. Other manuscripts of this work are, *GCAL* II, p.61 and NASRALLAH, *HMLEM*, III, 1 (1983), p.222 [in pp. 191-199]. In the same year Joseph Nasrallah published his article over Ibn al-Faḍl in *POC* 33 (1983), pp. 143-159, but excluding the versions. By saying NASRALLAH, we always refer to *HMLEM*.

2) *GCAL* II, pp. 52-53; NASRALLAH, III, 1, pp. 191-193.

3) J. NASRALLAH, *HMLEM*, IV, 1 (1979), pp. 214-217.

accompanied by a short introduction, and is written or collected (*ḡama^ca*) by the author in the year 6560 (after the Creation) [= 1052 A.D.]. In imitation of the Greek Fathers he arranged his work in question and answer style: *In qāla qā'il mā ma^cnā... ḡawāb faḡul*.

I. ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK

A. ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST SECTION: QUESTIONS 1-100.

The first one-hundred questions treat theological and philosophical topics such as the world and creator, the createdness of the world, the createdness of the four elements (i.e. earth, water, fire and light), definitions of soul, body, nature, substance, accident, discernment, senses and their inherent distinctions, the incorporeality of the creator, the six day creation of the world, the place of man in creation, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the serpent and Eve, the situations of sighing, laughing and crying, poverty and riches, and the resurrection of the body.

As evidence in Question 4, concerning the proof that God is one, he cites extensively from Plato, *Kitāb al-samā^c wa-l^cālam* (*De coelo*) and *Kitāb al-kawn wa-l-fasād* (*De generatione et corruptione*)⁴ of Aristotle, and from the eighth treatise (*maqāla*) of *Kitāb al-samā^c al-ṭabī^cī^ḡ* of Aristotle and Pythagoras⁶. In Question 20, regarding whether or not the Creator knows particulars (*ḡuz'iyāṭ*), he cites *Kitāb manāfi^c al-a^cḡā*⁷ of Galenus⁸. In

4) GAS IV (1971), p. 100.

5) Manfred ULLMANN, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam* (Leiden/Köln, 1972), p. 389. The third treatise (*maqāla*) cites Ibn al-Faḡl in *Ma^cānī nāfi^c a li'l-nafs* in Paul SBATH, *Vingt traités philosophiques et apologétiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens du IX^e au XIV^e siècle* (Cairo, 1929), p. 133; cf. NASRALLAH, III, 1, pp. 227-228.

6) GAS V (1974), pp. 75-76.

7) GAS III (1970), pp. 106-107. ULLMANN, *Medizin* (1970), p. 41, nr. 15. Ibn al-Faḡl also cites Galenus in P. SBATH, (see note 5 above), p. 132.

8) It is noteworthy that Yaḡyā Ibn ^cAdī, quoted by our author in Question 49 (see below), wrote in October 969 A.D. a treatise in response to the same question: whether or not the Creator knows particulars «هل الباري يعلم الجزئيات، أو لا يعلمها؟». Yaḡyā quotes the very same work of Galenus, namely *Kitāb manāfi^c al-a^cḡā*, in § 12-13 of Samir's edition. See Khalil SAMIR, *Science divine et théorie de la connaissance chez Yaḡyā ibn ^cAdī. Textes édités et traduits*, in *Annales de Philosophie* [de l'USJ] 7 (Beyrouth, 1986), pp. 75-115, spec. 76-99 and 110-114 (Editor's note).

Questions 60: What is the definition of light ray (*ḍaw'*)?, he quotes Plato, Plotinus and *Kitāb fī l-nafs (De anima)*⁹ of Aristotle.

In the questions and answers concerning the creation of the world in six days, which constitutes a major portion of the first section, he borrows extensively from the *Hexaéméron*¹⁰ of Basil, which had also been previously translated by him. In addition he cites from John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa without mentioning their works.

In Question 49, concerning whether the creator is the cause of the world, just as the sun is the cause of light rays, and sun and light rays are together, so too creation and world are together, he cites Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī.

In Question 21: What is the definition of the soul?, he cites his work, *Kitāb al-manfa'a* (The Book of Advantage)¹¹. In Question 83: Why was the tree from which Adam ate called the knowledge of good and evil?, he mentions his translation¹² of the commentary on the *Tawrāt* by John Chrysostom.

B. ANALYSIS OF THE SECOND SECTION: QUESTIONS 101-200

The second section consists of a translation of the questions and answers attributed to Caesarius, the brother of Gregory of Nazianzus. This work is in reality not from Caesarius, but rather from a 6th century author¹³. These questions in the translation of Ibn al-Faḍl contain questions I-CXVIII, of which the last question corresponds with question 99 of Ibn al-Faḍl, while questions III and XX-XXV are not handled¹⁴. Questions 85 and 100, which do not correspond with questions CIV and CXIX of Caesarius, are not to be

9) GAS IV (1971), p. 101.

10) GCAL II, p. 56, and NASRALLAH, III, 1, pp. 204-205; BASILE DE CÉSARÉE, *Homélie sur l'Hexaéméron*, éd. et trad. Stanislas GIET (SC) Paris, 1949 [unfortunately the 1968 edition was not available to me]. Q(uestion) 47, p. 158, 37D; Q.51, pp. 116-118, 20A-118B; Q.53, p. 500, 197B, pp. 196-198, 56D-198, 57A; Q.55, p. 142, 29BC; Q.58, p. 214, 64CD-65A; Q.59, p. 162-166, 40C-166, 41B; Q.63, pp. 178-182, 49A-182, 49C; Q.67, p. 250, 81C; Q.68, p. 262, 88C-264, 88C; Q.71, pp. 282-284, 97A-284B; Q.74, p. 294, 100C-101D; Q.76, p.440, 169A.

11) NASRALLAH, III, 1, p. 224, chap. 10-13.

12) NASRALLAH, III, 1, pp. 196-197.

13) Pierre DUPREY, *Quand furent composés les « Dialogues » attribués à Césaire de Nazianze?*, in POC 5 (1955), pp. 14-30, 297-315.

14) PG 38, col. 851-1003.

found in the text of Caesarius. At questions 8, 42, 43 and 83, Ibn al-Faḍl adds a commentary (*hāšiya*) to the text of Caesarius, with respect to Greek words.

C. ANALYSIS OF THE THIRD SECTION: QUESTIONS 201-300

The third section deals with questions of the Gospel, such as the Gospel and its meaning, the Trinity, the incarnation, circumcision and baptism, exegesis of conflicting New Testament verses, the parables of Jesus. Also dealt with are liturgical matters, e.g. prayer towards the East, the ambo and the *epitrachilion* (stola) of the priest; the placement of the bed of the dying so that it faces the East; the separation of body and soul; the obtainment of a new body after resurrection; the post-death cognizance of familiar persons; viewing by the pious of the sinners in the punishment by fire; praiseworthy virtues, serious misbehavior and praiseworthy actions. Here he cites from John Damascene, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Athanasius, and Maximus without mentioning their works.

D. ANALYSIS OF THE FOURTH SECTION: QUESTIONS 301-365

This section contains the exegesis of texts from the New Testament, e.g. the genealogies of Matthew, the differences between Matthew and Luke with respect to the lineage of Jesus, the birth of Jesus, the wisemen from the East, the murdered children of Bethlehem and Ramah, John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus, Jesus' use of parables, conflicting Bible verses, the wearing of girdles by Christians, and the meaning of the world.

E. CONCLUSION

From the preceding observations it becomes evident that Ibn al-Faḍl had an excellent acquaintance of the Greek fathers, and he cited from some of their works which he had translated into Arabic. His work is saturated with Greek thought. His use of the Arabic language agrees with what J. Blau¹⁵ described in his grammar. The questions and answers are in general briefly formulated; it is only in the first section that a few answers extend for more than three pages. The second section is nothing other than a translation of half of the questions and answers of Pseudo-Caesarius. The fourth section,

15) Cf. BLAU.

with an absence of citations from the church fathers, appears to be the most original.

II. IBN AL-FAḌL AS APOLOGIST

In his catechism, Ibn al-Faḍl also presents his readers with material by which to answer questions raised by the Muslims. Despite the fact that these questions and answers do not contain any allusions to Muslim opponents, they are still to be categorized as apologetic. In Question 4 of the first section, Muslims are mentioned once in a summary of religions which believe in one God. Question 4 of the third section is accompanied by the answer that Christians do not believe in three Gods¹⁶, but one God, who is one in essence (*dāt*) and three in attributes (*ṣifāt*). They believe that these attributes are of one nature (*ṭabīʿa*) in one substance (*ḡawhar*).

The exegesis of Bible verses has played a major part in the apologetic polemic (*rudūd*) literature. Muslim opponents emphasized the human nature of Christ, and called attention to contradictory Bible verses (*tanāquḍāt*)¹⁷ in the New Testament, of which they eventually composed an entire list. These verses must have been known to Ibn al-Faḍl because a number of them are taken up in his questions. A few examples will suffice to illustrate.

The third section contains questions which mention the human nature of Christ. Question 20: The Lord says that the Father has sent him (John 5:37), and the Father is greater than the Son (John 14:28)¹⁸. Question 30: Why does Christ respond to those addressing him as «Good Teacher!» with the question, «Why do you call me good (*ṣāliḥ*)? No one is good but God alone» (Mark 10:18). Question 71: «If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not according to my will, but as thou wilt» (Matt. 26:39)¹⁹.

The fourth section contains questions which reveal contradictory Bible

16) Qur'ān, S. 4 (*al-Nisā*): 171.

17) Erdmann FRITSCH, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter* (Breslau, 1930), p. 70.

18) Abū'l-Faḍl al-Mālikī al-Su'ūdī in F. J. van den HAM, *Disputatio pro religione Mohammedanorum adversus Christianos* (Leiden, 1890), p. 65.

19) Floris SEPMEIJER, *Een weerlegging van het Christendom uit de 10^e eeuw. De brief van al-Ḥasan b. Ayyūb aan zijn broer 'Alī* [*A Refutation of the Christianity from the Tenth Century. The Letter from al-Ḥasan b. Ayyūb to His Brother 'Alī*] Ph. D. Dissertation, Free University Amsterdam, 1985 [not published], pp. 83, 65.

verses. Question 9: Why does Matthew trace the lineage of Joseph back to Jacob (Matt. 1:16) but Luke to Hālī (= Eli)? (Luke 3:24)²⁰. Question 50: «I judge no one of the people» (John 8:15). But in another place, judgment is a gift from the Father to the Son (John 5:22)²¹. Question 57: «For judgment I came into this world» (John 9:39). But elsewhere, God did not send his son to judge the world (John 3:17). Finally, Question 62: I will ask the Father for another Comforter (John 14:16)²². In another place, «I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you» (John 16:26). Although according to the *Kitāb al-manfaʿa* (*The Book of Advantage*)²³ he must have been well versed in the Koran and the apologetic polemical material of the exchange between Muslims and Christians, in this catechism Ibn al-Faḍl shows himself to be a very reserved apologist.

III. ANONYMOUS ESSAYS

Finally, «The Book of Splendor» is followed by four essays, of which the author is not mentioned. It is not impossible that Ibn al-Faḍl was either the author or translator. The four compositions are:

- 1) «Select Chapters Pertaining to Various Concepts in the Theology of John the Priest of Damascus, Called the Source of Gold».
- 2) «Regarding the Holy Trinity by One of the Theologians of the Learned Christians».
- 3) «Short, Worthy Chapters from One of the Exegetes of the Books of the Old Testament».
- 4) «Regarding the Belief of the Christians Concerning the Predictions of the Stars»²⁴.

20) AL-QARĀFĪ, Šihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Idrīs: *al-Aḡwiba al-fāḥira ʿan al-asʿila al-fāḡira*, in margin of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān BĀʿEGIZĀ de: *al-Fāriq bayn al-maḥlūq waʾl-ḥāliq* (Cairo, 1322), p. 33.

21) F. J. van den HAM (see note 18), p. 59.

22) This verse is usually connected with the coming of Muḥammad. Cf. FRITSCH (see note 17), p. 76; SEPMEIJER (see note 19), p. 93.

23) Rachid HADDAD, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes (750-1050)* (Paris, 1985), p. 114.

24) NASRALLAH, III, 1, p. 228; Khalil SAMIR, *Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien. Auteurs arabes chrétiens (XI^e-XII^e siècles)*, in *Islamochristiana* 2 (1976), pp. 201-249, here 213-214.