Authors as Readers in the Mamlūk Period and Beyond
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chapter 7

al-Maqrīzī as a Reader of *The Testament of Ardašīr*

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Abstract This chapter discusses the way al-Maqrīzī quotes *ʾAhd Ardašīr* through Miskawayhi. As we have at our disposal al-Maqrīzī's holograph and the manuscript of Miskawayhi's *Taǧārib* he used, we can see exactly how al-Maqrīzī understood the text he quoted. This is particularly illuminating in cases where Miskawayhi, or the copyist of the manuscript, had misunderstood the *ʾAhd* and al-Maqrīzī had a partly corrupt text in front of him. Even though elsewhere al-Maqrīzī can be very free with his sources, with this text he avoids emendations and aims at a high fidelity to the text. Sometimes, however, we can see how he has misunderstood the text and changed its original meaning.

Keywords al-Maqrīzī. ʿAhd Ardašīr. Mistakes. Copying. Quoting.

Arabic literature, historiography included, is cumulative and traditional in character, copying longer or shorter extracts from earlier works and compiling new works partly or wholly based on these extracts. This generates polyvalence in texts: while in its original context, a fragment had a certain function, according to which it was understood by its readership, in other contexts it may have a different meaning for a new readership.

Later authors usually modified the excerpts they quoted, abbreviating or rephrasing them or mixing them with material from other sources. Accordingly, we see them as authors creating a new text rather than readers trying to understand an old one. Few text types, such as quotations from the Qurʾān, were usually quoted without changes: even poems underwent abbreviations and verses were often reshuffled to create a new poem in a new order, even if they were less often completely rephrased.

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This article studies one specific case as an example of how an author read, understood, and dealt with a text he quoted. The text in question is *ʿAhd Ardašīr* (The Testament of Ardašīr), an early Arabic translation of a probably sixth-century Middle Persian text.[1] As such, its language is somewhat archaic and its train of thought is not always easy to follow. Its earliest surviving form is represented by MS Köprülü 1608, ff. 146b-155b, used for his edition and translation of the text by Mario Grignaschi.[2] The manuscript is late, probably from the early eleventh century AH,[3] and its last copyist was not very learned as shown by several crude mistakes, but in general it represents an early stage in the transmission history of the text and the mistakes are mostly transparent and the original text easy to reconstruct. The other texts that transmit the *ʿAhd* contain numerous passages that are further removed from the original.

Next in stratigraphy comes the anonymous *Nihāyat al-arab* (196-200), which contains an abbreviated version of the text. The date of the *Nihāya* is uncertain, but it may partly go back to the ninth, or even eighth century.[4] Typically, the author of the *Nihāya* has not attempted to copy the exact original wording of the text but has freely rephrased it.

The unabbreviated text next surfaces in Miskawayhi's (d. 421/1030) *Taǧārib al-umam* with some significant changes, most of which are clearly inferior readings that confuse the sense of the original and sometimes result in a text that cannot be understood.[5] Another, heavily abbreviated version, *al-Muntaẖab min ʿAhd Ardašīr ibn Bābak fī al-siyāsa*, was edited by Aḥmad Bek Tīmūr from a manuscript dated 710/1311 and published by Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī in his *Rasāʾil al-bulaġāʾ* (299-301).

The focus in this article is on the next, and final, level. From Miskawayhi's *Taǧārib* the text was copied by al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) into his *al-Ḫabar ʿan al-bašar* (II §§ 23-54). What makes this level particularly interesting is that we can see exactly how al-Maqrīzī has worked and how he read and understood the text, with no outside influence to muddy the water. This is because we still have the very manuscript of the *Taǧārib* al-Maqrīzī used, MS Ayasofya 3116, as

1 There is no proper study of the text, and I will not delve here any deeper into the question of its early history before MS Köprülü 1608. It is mentioned as a translation from Middle Persian in Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 126, (probably wrongly) attributed to al-Balāḏurī (d. 279/892). Possibly identical with *ʿAhd Ardašīr Bābakān ilā bnihi Sābūr*, see Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 378.

2 Grignaschi 1966, 46-90.

3 Grignaschi 1966, 2.

4 Hämeen-Anttila 2018, 93.

5 Ed. Ḥasan, 1: 97-107; ed. Emāmī, 1: 122-14; ed. Caetani, 1: 99-127.

shown by a reader's note on it,[6] and, moreover, this has been conveniently edited in facsimile by Leone Caetani. Al-Maqrīzī's own text is further preserved in a holograph, MS Fatih 4340, the relevant section of which has been edited, together with the facsimile reproduction of the holograph.[7]

The text of the *ʿAhd* has been inserted into Miskawayhi's *Taǧārib* and al-Maqrīzī's *Ḫabar in toto*, with no attempt either to elaborate, lengthen, or abbreviate it. It is often claimed that by grafting texts into a new context authors were consciously manipulating their meaning. Sometimes this clearly is the case, but often the evidence for such hidden agendas is vague and depends on subtle changes, which may as well be due to the oversensitivity of the scholar studying the text. However that may be in other cases, in this particular case it is difficult to see any hidden agenda behind the changes the text has undergone. Thus, the existing text shows al-Maqrīzī as a reader trying to understand the text, rather than a writer deliberately manipulating it.

Even a superficial look at the manuscript shows that al-Maqrīzī has endeavoured to keep the text in the form he found it: usually in the *Ḫabar*,[8] he uses one main source at a time and adds to it material from other sources, which has often been written in the margins of the holograph. In the case of the *ʿAhd*, al-Maqrīzī uses no other sources but faithfully copies the whole work from a single source, Miskawayhi's *Taǧārib*, with no additions of his own and, moreover, does it remarkably carefully, so that the margins of this section (ff. 139b-145b) are clear, whereas most of the margins are full of corrections and additions.[9]

As the text of the *ʿAhd* does not have religious prestige, even though Ardašīr was generally considered a wise and just king, it may be that the unwillingness to tamper with the text mainly rises from its being a complete, clearly defined work. It seems that Miskawayhi's and al-Ṭabarī's texts were freely modified and considered mines of material to be quarried, but the *ʿAhd* was a complete and unified whole not to be touched.

The copy al-Maqrīzī was using contained numerous mistakes, whether by Miskawayhi or the copyist of MS Ayasofya 3116. Mostly al-Maqrīzī copies these as such into his text, even when it is hard to

6 Bauden, forthcoming and chap. 6, Bauden's contribution in this volume.

7 Hämeen-Anttila, forthcoming.

8 When speaking of the *Ḫabar*, I primarily refer to the section on pre-Islamic Iran, which, I believe, also reflects more generally al-Maqrīzī's use of sources. However, his attitude towards the sources slightly varies between the sections of the *Ḫabar*, and I have only studied this section in detail.

9 See Hämeen-Anttila, forthcoming.

see how the copied text could have been understood. E.g. MS Köprülü 1608, f. 147b, reads:

وهذا الباب من الأبواب التي يكثر بها سكور الفساد ويهتاج بها قرائن البلاء ويعمى البصير عن لطيف ما ينهتك من الأمور في ذلك.

> This is one of the ways that add to the inebriety of corruption and through it the effects of affliction are awakened and [even] an intelligent person is made blind of the [at first] subtle breeches of affairs.[10]

In Miskawayhi, *Taǧārib* (ms Ayasofya 3116, 100), and following him, al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫabar* II § 25, this has become (diacritics and vocalisation from al-Maqrīzī):

وهذا الباب من الأبواب التي تكسِر سُكُورَ الفساد ويُهاج بها قرُبات البلاء ويغني البصيرَ اللطيفَ ما ينتهك من الأمور في ذلك.

This does not make much sense, and we may translate it as:

> This is one of the ways that break the inebriety of corruption, and through it the proximities of affliction are awakened. The affairs that have been profaned in that will be enough [as a warning example?] for an acute observer.

More than anything this remains empty words, and it is only their vagueness that protects them from sounding completely out of place. It is not easy to imagine what al-Maqrīzī has thought of the sentences. Did he stop thinking about what he was copying or did he not realise that the words do not make much sense? Was the *ʿAhd* for him too prestigious to be corrected without evidence or abbreviated by excising what was beyond emendation?

In *Ḫabar* II § 29, al-Maqrīzī either has not noticed that there is a problem or if he has, he has not found a suitable way to correct it. Following Miskawayhi, he reads:

واعلموا أن العاقل سال عليكم لسانه وهو أقطع سيفيه.

As such, the sentence means: 'Know that an intelligent man uses his tongue against you,[11] and his tongue is sharper than his sword'. Although grammatically blameless, the sentence is odd in the context:

10 All translations are by the Author.

11 This is meant to be read *sāllun ʿalay-kum lisāna-hu*, but it is possible that al-Maqrīzī read it as *sāla ʿalay-kum lisānu-hu*.

why should intelligent men use their tongue against kings for no obvious reason? MS Köprülü 1608, f. 149a provides the answer to the problem, as it reads *al-ʿāqil al-maḥrūm* 'intelligent man deprived/left without'. If al-Maqrīzī was sensitive to the problem, he silently accepted his inability to correct the issue and left the odd sentence as he found it.

In most of these cases, al-Maqrīzī's problems arise from mistakes made by Miskawayhi or the copyist of MS Ayasofya 3116. In *Ḫabar* II § 38, we have a case where it is al-Maqrīzī who has carelessly misread the text and produced a sentence that does not make sense. He reads:

وهكذا الملك وولي عهده لا يَسُر الارْفعَ الا وَضْعُ سُؤْلِه في فَنَائه

The original of Miskawayhi, *Taǧārib* (ms Ayasofya 3116, 113), reads (vocalisation from the original):

وهَكذَا المَلِكُ ووَلِيُّ عَهْدِه لا يَسرُّ الارفَعَ ان يُعْطَى الاوضَعُ سُولَهُ في فنائِه

> So it is with the king and the heir-apparent. The higher of them will not be pleased to see the lower have his wish fulfilled and see him pass away.

When reading the text, al-Maqrīzī has overlooked the words ان يُعْطَى and then changed the vocalisation (*al-awḍaʿu suʾla-hu* > *illā waḍʿu suʾli-hi*; note that it is basically simply the spacing that needs to be changed: الاوضع سؤله > الا وضع سؤله) in an attempt to make sense. The deliberately altered vocalisation shows that this was not a mere mistake in copying, but al-Maqrīzī tried to understand what he had (mis)read. He did not notice his mistake even though the continuation should have alerted him to the correct reading:

ولا يَسُر هذا الأوْضَعَ أن يُعطَى الآخَر سُؤْلَه في البقاء

Examples such as this make one suspect that the phenomenally productive al-Maqrīzī has at least in this last major work of his worked hastily, not always stopping to look carefully at the text he was reading and copying. In the case of Miskawayhi, this would be understandable, as he was still excerpting the book a few months before his death, as we can see from his reader's note, dated 844.[12]

Another attempt at correcting a corrupt text is found in *Ḫabar* II § 38, where al-Maqrīzī writes about divulging the name of the heir-apparent:

12 See Bauden in this volume, chap. 6.

ومتى تداينا بالتُهمَة يتخِذ كل واحد منهما وغرًا على احيا صاحبه. ثم تنساق الأمور إلى هلاك أحدهما

The word إحياء is one of the very few marginal corrections in the section that contains the *ʿAhd*. The text derives as such from Miskawayhi, *Taǧārib* (ms Ayasofya 3116, 113), with the exception that MS Ayasofya 3116 uses diacritical dots more sparingly than al-Maqrīzī and actually writes احما, not احيا as al-Maqrīzī. The marginal addition shows that al-Maqrīzī stopped to think about the passage and checked it against Miskawayhi. The text is somewhat strange and while it is just conceivable to make sense of يتخِذ كل واحد منهما وغرًا على احيا صاحبه, it is not a very natural way to express the idea of each feeling hatred of leaving the other alive. But this is how al-Maqrīzī will have understood it, after first accidentally dropping the word احيا, which would actually make the sentence slightly less odd. But the change was not deliberate, as we can see from al-Maqrīzī restoring the word in the margin.

The enigma is solved by ms-Köprülü 1608, f. 151a, which reads:

ومتى تباينا بالتهمة يتّخذ كل واحد منهما أحيا وإخوانا وأهلا ثم يدخل كل واحد منهما وعر على أحبّا صاحبه. ثم تنساق الأمور إلى هلاك أحدهما.

There are two simple mistakes in this sentence, both easily corrected. The first أحبّا has been written ألحيا, and the dot of *ġayn* has been dropped from وغر. In both the correction is obvious. Otherwise, this makes good sense:

> When they drift further from each other they take for themselves friends, confidants, and family, and they both feel hatred against the friends of the other. This will undoubtedly lead to the destruction of one of them.

The copyist of MS Ayasofya 3116 has dropped some crucial words and, as usual, been sparing with diacritical dots, which has left the latter word for 'friends', احما, in an ambivalent form. As 'friends' does not make much sense in the corrupt sentence as found in MS Ayasofya 3116, al-Maqrīzī has tried to make sense and, perhaps misguided by the continuation, which mentions 'destruction', has read this as the opposite, 'leaving alive'. Here, al-Maqrīzī has not consciously changed anything, merely added diacritical marks in the way he considered appropriate.

While usually following the original even when it leads him into difficulties, there is one case in the *ʿAhd* where al-Maqrīzī has opted for correcting the text. This comes in *Ḫabar* II § 45, where Miskawayhi, *Taǧārib* (ms Ayasofya 3116, 120) reads:

وفي الرعية صنف دعوا إلى أنفسهم الجاه بالآباء والرد له ووجدوا ذلك عند المغفلين نافقا وربما قرب الملك الرجلَ من أولئك لغير نبل في رأي ولا إجزاء في العمل ولكن الآباء والرد أغرياه به.

Despite the misplaced *madda*, the word pair الآباء والرد has to be read *al-ibā' wa-l-radd*, which is also supported by MS Köprülü 1608, f. 153*r*, where the first of these appears unequivocally in the form *bi-l-ta'abbī wa-l-radd*. The scribe of MS Ayasofya 3116 has written the *madda* in the first instance clearly above the first consonant (بالآباء) and in the second it is not clear whether it belongs to the first or the second consonant (*ibā'* or *ābā'*). The place of the *madda* is ambivalent also in al-Maqrīzī, but he has clearly read the word as *al-ābā'*, dropping the word الرد from both cases and putting the final verb in plural, instead of the dual in original:

وفي الرعية صنف دعوا إلى أنفسهم الجاه بالآباء ووجدوا ذلك عند المغفلين نافقا وربما قرب الملك الرجلَ من أولئك لغير نبل في رأي ولا إجزاء في العمل ولكن الآباء أغروه به.

The changes make it clear that al-Maqrīzī took the word الآباء to mean 'fathers/ancestors' and could do nothing with the following *al-radd* (*la-hu*) so he dropped it from both places, which also makes it less probable that it was dropped accidentally. In the latter sentence, he changed the verb from the dual (*aġrayā-hu*, subjects: *al-ibā'* and *al-radd*) to the plural (*aġraw-hu*, subject: *al-ābā'*) Thus, for him the text read:

> Then there are those who claim high rank through ancestors. They find this useful among inattentive people. A king may draw close one of these not because of any nobility of thought or sufficient deeds, but because the (mention of) ancestors makes him want (to have) him (in his entourage).

The original speaks of ostensibly simulating reluctance to accept a nomination, but al-Maqrīzī changes this to claiming such a nomination on the basis of illustrious ancestors.

To sum up the relations between the versions of *'Ahd* in MS Köprülü 1608, Miskawayhi's *Taǧārib*, and al-Maqrīzī's *Ḫabar*, the text has mainly been transmitted intact and both later authors probably understood most of the text in the same way as its author/translator intended it to be understood. At least al-Maqrīzī, however, was removed, both spatially and temporally, from pre-Islamic Iran, which he did not know too well. He would probably have been unable correctly to understand the references to Zoroastrian and Sasanian institutions. Occasionally, the text uses Arabic terms that refer to Sasanian institutions. While it is probable that the author/translator and some among his audience knew the Middle Persian equivalents and functions of these, it is also probable that they were not as clearly understood by Miskawayhi and it is highly dubious whether al-Maqrīzī had any idea of what functions each of these had. To take but one example, MS Köprülü 1608, f. 148b, speaks of *al-'ubbād* and

al-mutabattilīn, changed into *al-ʿubbād* and *al-nussāk* in Miskawayhi, *Taǧārib* (ms Ayasofya 3116, 105) and retained as such by al-Maqrīzī (*Ḫabar* II § 29). The words are rather vague in Arabic and do not directly refer to any category of Zoroastrian religious officials, but it is quite possible that the author/translator equated these with *hērbads* and *mōbads*, both here and in *Ḫabar* II § 35.

Miskawayhi or the copyist of his work did not do very careful work, and the version of the *Taǧārib* is often corrupt. In most cases, al-Maqrīzī has copied the corrupt text without trying to emend it or to avoid the problem by abbreviating or rephrasing the passage. This is probably due to the prestige of the text, but whether this is simply because it was a complete whole or specifically because this particular text enjoyed great repute still in the Mamlūk period is not clear.

This has led al-Maqrīzī as a reader to try and find interpretations that would make sense. When he has made no changes in the text, this remains invisible to us and we can only speculate on how he might have understood certain passages. In some cases, we may doubt whether al-Maqrīzī understood what he was reading or whether he gave up and merely copied what he saw. In a restricted number of cases, al-Maqrīzī has either tried to emend the text or has provided diacritical marks, other than those intended by the author/translator, to a word originally without diacritics. These enable us to see how al-Maqrīzī as a reader interpreted the text when the original interpretation had been lost, either by mistakes in copying or by missing diacritical marks.

One final point. Why did al-Maqrīzī include the *ʿAhd* in his history of Iran? His section of Sasanian Iran also includes two shorter texts, *Sīrat Anūširwān wa siyāsatu-hu* (The Life of Anūširwān and his ways of governing) (*Ḫabar* II §§ 161-83), also quoted from Miskawayhi, *Taǧārib*, and, as an appendix to this, still following Miskawayhi, a speech by Anūširwān to his people (*Ḫabar* II §§ 184-90). In the earlier sections of Iranian history, he had included the maxims of philosophers at the burial of Alexander (*Ḫabar* I §§ 202-4) and some material on Aristotle and Plato (*Ḫabar* I §§ 237-46) from other sources. All these are much shorter than the *ʿAhd*, and only the *Sīrat Anūširwān* is quoted as an independent, complete text, like the *ʿAhd*.

All these inserted texts belong to wisdom literature. By including such extensive chunks of text al-Maqrīzī both follows the tradition which had seen many of the pre-Islamic Persian kings as sages akin to prophets and strengthens it. The *ʿAhd* and *Sīrat Anūširwān* are also rare texts, which may have been an additional reason for al-Maqrīzī to quote them in full in his work, giving it the added value of preserving two rare texts. Thinking in the context of the fifteenth century, the existence of these texts in the *Ḫabar* would have been a major asset, as they would otherwise have been extremely difficult to find.

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