

About al-Shayzarī and Ibn Bassām: who preceded the other?

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Abstract:

Hisba (market inspection) manuals are mines of useful information. Many studies on this field concentrate on three books: the ones written by al-Shayzarī, Ibn Bassām and Ibn al-Ikhwah. The three works have many chapters in common, and apart from slight differences in the order of the materials they are largely similar. The chronological order of the three authors is assumed to be as mentioned: (1) al-Shayzarī, (2) Ibn Bassām and (3) Ibn al-Ikhwah. Until today the modern literature places Ibn Bassām roughly within the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, only as estimation. But, as more manuscript material is being edited and published, new information is being discovered about his life time. The coming-up information replace the previous estimations with new precise dates. The new life dates change the chronological order of the three authors, and place Ibn Bassām one and a half centuries before al-Shayzarī.

Hisba (market inspection) manuals are mines of useful information for historians of science, societies, crafts, urban planning, economy and other related fields in Medieval Islam. They can be divided broadly into two categories: Some works deal in a general way with the content of the virtue of *hisba*, the obligations arising from it for the *muhtasib* (market inspector), and the religious and juridical aspects of his office; the others set out mainly to enlighten the *muhtasib* on the practical and technical details of the supervision which he must exercise; and, since this supervision applied principally to the various crafts and trades, these works are practical guides to the administrative control of the professions. Those regulations concern urban morals, including offenses against public morality and standards among craftsmen, traders and consumers in marketplaces monitored by the inspecting official, i.e. the *muhtasib*. They are written for *muhtasibs* to guide them in their work; they were often written by former *muhtasibs* themselves. According to the extant *isba* manuals, the *muhtasib* was responsible for numerous fields. The regulations and specifications include fields like constructions, medicine, urban planning, pharmacy, food industry, etc.

The current author listed twenty classical practical *hisba* treatises and books which are available for today's researchers^[1]. But many studies on this field concentrate on three

[1] GARI, Lutfallah: "*Hisba* and crafts books in the heritage", in Arabic, published in *al-Maṭhūrāt al-Shaʿbiyyah* (Folklore), quarterly journal that was published in Qatar, April 1994, reprinted in the author's book *Iqāṭat Zawāyā Jadīdah* (enlightening new spots of Arabic/Islamic Technology), in Arabic, Riyadh: King Fahd National Library, 1986.

books: the ones written by al-Shayzarī^[2], Ibn Bassām^[3] and Ibn al-Ikhwah^[4]. The three works have many chapters in common, and apart from slight differences in the order of the materials these are largely similar, although each author added certain amount of edifying matter and a number of discussions on difficult cases of his own invention. Whether all three works derive from the same source or the later works are based immediately on either of the other two cannot with certainty be determined. Each author has used his own discretion in the amount of his quotation from Qur'an and *ḥadīth* (Prophet's sayings). But since al-Shayzarī is considered the predecessor among the three, all modern researchers consider that his work was a prototype for the other two^[5].

But who really preceded the others? Let's consult the sources to establish the life dates of each one. al-Shayzarī was a contemporary to Saladin who died in 539H/1193G. This is based on the fact that he dedicated one of his works to that ruler^[6]. Ibn al-Ikhwa (also called Ibn al-Ukhwwa)^[7] was born in 648/1250 and died in 729/1330^[8].

What about Ibn Bassām? Until now the modern literature places him roughly within the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, only as an estimation. The reason behind that estimation is that the earliest extant copy of his *isba* manual is dated 844/1441 and its copyist was not the author; hence the author must have lived before that date. Since it was assumed that his work is merely an elaboration of al-Shayzarī's one, bearing the same title, it was concluded that he lived some time after the latter^[9].

But, as more manuscript material is being edited and published, new information is being discovered about the life time of Ibn Bassām. The coming up information will replace the previous estimations with new precise dates about his life. The new life dates change the

[²] al-Shayzarī, (Abd al-Raḥmān b. Naḥḥ: *Nihāyat al-Rutba fī al-alab al-Ḥisba* (The Utmost Authority in the Pursuit of Ḥisba), ed. al-Sayyid al-Bāz al-ʿArini, Cairo, 1946. English translation by R P Buckley, under the title "*The Book of the Islamic Market Inspector*", Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Extracts were published in French translation, under the name of Nabrawi, by Bernhauer, "*Les institutions de police chez les Arabes ...*", in *Journal Asiatique*, 1860-'61

[³] Ibn Bassām, Muhammed b. Ahmad: *Nihāyat al-Rutba fī al-alab al-Ḥisba*, ed. Husām al-Dīn al-Samarrā'i (Baghdad, 1968).

[⁴] Ibn al-Ukhwwa (Ibn al-Ikhwa), *The Ma'ālīm al-qurba fī al-kām al-isba* (manual of the market inspector), edited and translated by Reuben Levy, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, E.J.W. Gibb memorial Series, 1938. Another edition by M. M. Shaḥbān and S. al-Muḥīḥī, Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1976.

[⁵] see, for example: Cahen, C. and M. Talbi: "*Ḥisba*", *Encyclopaedia of Islam (EI²)*, vol. 3 (1971) pp. 485-489.

[⁶] Brocklemann, Carl: *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, Leiden: E.J. Brill 1939-1942, I: 832. Brocklemann was specific and accurate in stating that al-Shayzarī was only a contemporary to Saladin who died in 539H/1193G. He did not specify his life date. But later researchers erroneously say that al-Shayzarī himself died in 539H/1193G, without any evidence or basis.

[⁷] Ibn al-Ikhwa is the pronunciation adopted by Brocklemann.

[⁸] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalāni, *al-Durar al-Kāmina fī A'yān al-Mī'ah al-Thāmina* (the concealed pearls about the famous people of the 8th Century AH), various editions, I cited the online version.

[⁹] al-Samarrā'i Ḥusām al-Dīn: his introductory study of the aforementioned Ibn Bassām's *isba* manual.

chronological order of the three authors, and place Ibn Bassām one and a half centuries before al-Shayzarī.

In 1967 a book on the history of Tinnīs^[10] by Ibn Bassām was published^[11]. The following extracts from the treatise help us to find when it was written:

(p. 38): "In the year 378 AH (988-989 AD), during the days of Ibn Abī al-Rīsh^[12], a 28½ cubits long whale appeared, without scales or shell, black with white belly. His head was 6½ cubits long, and the tip of his tail was 5 cubits wide. It was carried over to the Royal Court^[13]. The person who salted it entered its mouth standing upright, with no need to bend".

(p. 36): "The city had also 72 churches until they were destroyed by order of al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh in 403 AH (1012-3 AD), may Allah have mercy upon him, and replaced with mosques. The city had exactly 50 merchant inns and covered markets. Six large buildings for merchants were constructed in 405 AH (1014-5 AD)."

The sentence "may Allah have mercy upon him" is used after the mention of a deceased person. Al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh is the Fātimid ruler of Egypt and Syria from 996 to 1021. Therefore, the treatise was probably composed after 411/1021. This was not observed by the editor who said that the latest date in the treatise is 405 AH. The text mentions none of the disasters that befell Tinnīs during the Crusades, from the mid-twelfth century onwards. In 588/1192 Saladin ordered the evacuation of the city; and in 624/1227 his grandson al-Kāmil instructed for its total demolition so that the Crusaders do not benefit from it. The treatise does not mention any of these events; it only gives us a bright view of its prosperity during the author's time. It was certainly written when the town was flourishing peacefully before 550/1155.

Another manuscript came into light in 2002. Its title, *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn wa-mulaḥ al-huyūn*, was translated as "The Book of Curiosities of the Sciences and Marvels for the Eyes", or simply "The Book of Curiosities"^[14].

[10] Tinnīs was one of the richest manufacturing centres and a prominent trading post, particularly in textiles industry, in the mediaeval Middle East. It was situated in the island which hold its name today, in the Lake Manzala south of Port Said. In 2004 archaeological excavations took place on its site. See Gascoigne, A. L. "An archaeological survey of Tell Tinnis, Manzala, Egypt", *Antiquity*, Vol 79 No 303 March 2005 Article number 79002.

[11] Ibn Bassām, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad: "*Kitāb Anīs al-Jalīs fī Akhbār Tinnīs*" (The Companion Guide to the History of Tinnīs), edited by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl, *Majallat al-Majmā' al-'Ilmī al-'Irāqī* (Journal of the Iraqi Academy) 14 (1967), 151–189; reprinted as a booklet (with the words: "first edition" added!!), Cairo, 2000.

[12] The name Ibn Abī al-Rīsh appeared in the original manuscript of Ibn Bassam's book on Tinnīs and in the "Book of Curiosities" (to be mentioned below). The Būlāq edition of al-Maqrīzī's "Khiḍa" calls him Ibn Abī al-Rīs or al-Rayyis. Only the London's (2002-2004) edition of al-Maqrīzī's "Khiḍa" calls him Ibn Abī al-Dabs. The editors of the "Book of Curiosities" adopted the name Ibn Abī al-Dabs.

[13] This statement was erroneously translated as follows: "He was carried over to town" by the editor of the "Book of Curiosities" (to be mentioned below).

[14] The "Book of Curiosities" was placed by the Oxford Bodleian Library in an internet site of its own, where the visitors find the images of all pages, together with the edition and translation of the text. The site address is: <http://cosmos.bodley.ox.ac.uk>.

The treatise was almost certainly composed before 1050. The tribal group of the Banū Qurrah are mentioned twice in the book as inhabiting the lowlands near Alexandria. On fol. 29-a the author says: “Similarly, there are lowlands near Alexandria, now inhabited by large throngs of the Banū Qurra and others, which used to be covered by sea”. On fol. 41-b: “Lake Alexandria: It used to be covered with vineyards that belonged to the daughter of the *muqawqis*^[15], who used to levy her tax in wine. Once, when under the influence of the wine, in a fit of anger she flooded it with a bay of the sea. The lake existed until Ibn al-Munā came to Egypt and ordered the opening to be blocked, and so the land re-emerged. Nowadays it is inhabited by the Banū Qurra”.

As the Banū Qurrah are known to have been banished and expelled permanently from the region of Alexandria by the Fātimid authorities in 443/1052^[16], it is very likely that this treatise was written before that date.

Sicily is described in the manuscript as being under Muslim rule. It says (on fol. 32-a): “The island of Sicily is the largest of the Islamic islands, and the most honourable on account of its continuous military expeditions against the enemy – may God forsake them! – and the perennial efforts of its people and governors in this respect”. This makes us conclude that the treatise could definitely not have been composed later than the Norman invasion of Sicily in 464/1072.

"The Book of Curiosities" has a chapter on Tinnīs. This chapter is a copy of the aforementioned work of Ibn Bassām. It starts as follows: “The Fourteenth Chapter concerning the island of Tinnīs. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Sālim^[17], who was the market inspector (*muḥtasib*) there, mentions in the book he wrote on the description of Tinnīs that .. etc.”.

We conclude from the previous discussion the following:

- 1- "The Book of Curiosities" was written before 443/1052; and since it is using Ibn Bassām's treatise Tinnīs, then this latter was certainly written before circa 440/1050. We already established that it was written after the death of Al-Ḥākim in 411/1021.
- 2- Hence Ibn Bassām flourished during this period (ca. 412/1022- 440/1050). He certainly composed his *isba* manual sometime around this period.
- 3- Therefore he preceded al-Shayzarī with one and a half centuries. Consequently Ibn Bassām's book was a prototype for the other two authors.

[15] This title is used for Egypt's Coptic king before Islam.

[16] al-Maqrīzī, *It'ād al-Hunafā* (Lessons for the wise men about the history of the Fatimid Caliphs), the internet version, about the events of the year 443 AH.

[17] The author's name on the original manuscript of the treatise on Tinnīs is Ibn al-Bassām al-Tinnīsī. Another source, Ibn Iyās (d. ca. 1524), cites the same treatise and mentions the author's correct name. Hence, the name Ibn Sālim in "The Book of Curiosities" is certainly a copyist error. See IBN IYĀS: *Die Chronik des Ibn Ijās*, edited by M. Mostafa, Arabic text with German introduction of the editor, Cairo: The German Oriental Society and the Egyptian General Organization for Books, 1984, vol. 1.1 (1984), p. 25.