SOME NOTES ABOUT THE *KUTUB AL-ANWĀʾ* LITERATURE IN THE MEDIEVAL MUSLIM WEST

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From the very earliest times, the Arabs have been interested in all that is concerned with the passage of lunar time. During the pre-Islamic period, we know that the Arabs used a rudimentary system to measure time which was, in all probability, inherited from the "Calendar of the Pleiades" or *suqūṭ al-istirār*.[1] In the Arab tradition, we can also discern a tradition learnt from the Indians (*al-Hind*), which enabled them to distinguish the seasons (*manzila*, pl. *manāzil*) of the moon. Here it is necessary to remember that the Prophet of Islam was against the system of *anwāʾ* as, amongst other motives, it referred to the period of the *Jāhiliyya*. Despite this prohibition, the first Muslims continued using Syriac and Persian solar calendars, and the Islamic one for the liturgy.[2] Besides mentioning the dual sense of "star" / "rain" that the word *naw'* implies in the North African dialects, we offer a brief conceptual definition of the *anwāʾ*, plural of *naw'* or "mansion", as follows: the acronychal setting of one of the "mansions", accompanied by the rise of an opposing asterism (*al-raqīb*). We can say that the *anwā'* represent a system of twenty-eight opposing asterisms.[3]

Thus the Arabs continued regardless with these practices of measuring time, and this system has been preserved both empirically and theoretically, above all in North Africa. As would be expected, it is the Arab philologists who have been concerned with compiling information about the Arab *anwāʾ*. A form of literature called *kutub al-anwāʾ* or "books of mansions" arose in an early era.[4] In the East, from the 9th century, various works of this type were written, which unfortunately have not survived: Ibn Kunāsa (ob. 822), Ibn al-Aʿrābī (ob. 846) and al-Mubarrad (ob. 898). However, the *Kitāb al-azmina* by Jean ibn Māsawayh (ob. 857) and the

1 Pellat 1954: 20–25; Forcada 1992b: 106.

2 Pellat 1960: *sub voce*; Varisco 1987: 251–255; Muñoz 1990: 34–35.

3 Bousquet 1950: 157–158; Muñoz 1986: 625–626.

4 Pellat 1954, 25–30.

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Kitāb al-anwāʾ fī mawāṣim al-ʿarab by Ibn Qutayba have reached us.[5] These works principally contain an explanation of the system, a list of mansions and examples. Finally, one should emphasise the role of the Eastern astronomers insofar as their interest for the *anwāʾ* is concerned, for as well as works on astronomy, they were responsible for writing works very similar to the *kutub al-munākh* or almanacs.[6]

All this served to create and feed the tradition of the *kutub al-anwāʾ* in the Islamic West. The person responsible for introducing this type of literature was Ibn Qutayba. Prior to his book, no other work is known, and this perhaps leads one to believe that, in the case of the Islamic Medieval West, all the *kutub al-anwāʾ* written thereafter, borrowed from and relied on the book by Ibn Qutayba. In al-Andalus, it is known that the literary tradition of *kutub al-anwāʾ* and *kutub al-azmina* or "books of time" began in the 10th century.[7] The oldest of the "books of mansions" is that of ʿArīb ibn Saʿīd (c. 980) and although it is true to say that he was responsible for kindling a whole scientific and literary movement,[8] we should add that this Andalusian author, in all probability, used the work of Abū Ḥanafī al-Dīnawarī (ob. 895). Considered exemplary, the work of ʿArīb ibn Saʿīd is worthy of special attention as can be seen in the article "Calendar of Cordoba". Of the various authors who wrote books entitled *Kitāb al-anwāʾ*, we give special mention to some figures such as Maslama al-Majrīṭī (ob. 1007), Ibn ʿĀṣim (ob. 1013), *al-Kātib* al-Andalusī (11th century), Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Umawī al-Qurṭubī (ob. 1205-6) and Ibn al- Bannāʾ al-Marrākushī (ob. 1321).[9] If we leave aside all the authors mentionned above, we have to concentrate us on the first of them: Maslama al-Majrīṭī. Why is it so important to talk more about this astronomer ? Because there seems to be no doubt that he was the leader of a great tradition of adapting Eastern sources on astronomy in al-Andalus, and followed during the next century by new developments in astronomical theory and in the construction of instruments.[10]

Thanks to this calendary literature, we have been left with an important source of information from which we can reconstruct the agrarian rhythms, practices and rituals around which the rural world of that time revolved. In general, this literature provides us with important details about astrology, meteorology, language, folklore, diet and agriculture. No less interesting, is the information about

5 Troupeau 1968: 115–125.

6 Muñoz 1995: 1069–1072.

7 Samsó 1978: 117 and ss.

8 López 1990: 327; 340–346.

9 Forcada 1992a: 183–189; Forcada 1992b: 103–106.

10 Vernet 1986: *sub voce*.

Christian, Persian and Arab celebrations which the texts reveal.[11] Proverbs and sayings also make up this body of data collected from the *kutub al-anwāʾ*, from the age of the *Jāhiliyya* to the 18th century. Somewhere between a specialised literature of theoretical and explanatory books, and the everyday rural practices, it is perhaps convenient to end by remembering the many *ad petendem pluviam* rites in North Africa and the so called *ṭulūb al-nawʾ* or supplications for rain[12]. This diffusion of traditional elements, and to a certain extent classical ones, has been transmitted thanks to all the erudite (*ʿulamāʾ*) who have existed throughout Islam, and North Africa as well.

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11 Muñoz, 1990: 24–25.

12 Laugel, 1958: 335–337.