

Ibn al-Azraq

Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf ibn al-Azraq al-Fāriqī

DATE OF BIRTH 1116-17

PLACE OF BIRTH Mayyāfāriqīn

DATE OF DEATH 1176-77

PLACE OF DEATH Unknown, though probably Mayyāfāriqīn

BIOGRAPHY

Ibn al-Azraq's life is shrouded in some mystery, and the little that is known comes from what he writes in his history. He was born in Mayyāfāriqīn in 1116-17, and spent much of his life travelling in the Islamic world, and to areas bordering it. His first mission was to Mārdīn at the age of 19, before spending time in Āmid, Mu'dan, and Mosul, in the last two of which he was a buyer and seller of metals for the Artuqid ruler Ḥusām al-Dīn. He also visited Baghdad three times – in 1139-40, when he spent six months being taught by pre-eminent Muslim scholars, in 1151-52, and again in 1173-74. In 1153-54, he was at the court of the Georgian King Dmitri, where Minorsky believes he was the king's secretary, before leaving for Mayyāfāriqīn by way of Greek and Dānishmendid territory in Anatolia. Following this, in 1154-55, he made a visit to the tomb of Chosroes at Rayy. Ibn al-Azraq then writes that he was again in Georgia in 1162-63, before being made *mutaqallī ishrāf al-waqf* in the region of Mayyāfāriqīn in 1166-67. In 1167-68, he was persuaded to accept the same position in Damascus, which he held for two years, before returning once more to Mayyāfāriqīn. It is uncertain in which year he died, as no medieval Islamic biographer wrote a notice about him, this despite the copious use of the *Ta'rikh Mayyāfāriqīn* by Ibn Khallikān for his biographical dictionary.

From his comments in the text about his life, it is clear that Ibn al-Azraq was connected with the civil service of both Muslim and non-Muslim states for the majority of his life. Thus, he had access to official records and chancellery documents, and surely used them to write his history. However, as a writer, he was evidently not highly regarded by other Muslims of the medieval period, as is demonstrated by his absence from the biographical dictionaries.

Further attempts to reconstruct aspects of his life are difficult, though some have been made, notably by Hillenbrand and Robinson. While his political bias is clearly in favor of the Artuqids, his ethnic background is open to debate, being seemingly either Arab, Kurdish or Turkish. There has also been some controversy over his religious affiliation, with Minorsky claiming that he was an 'Alid supporter, and Hillenbrand that he was a Sunnī.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

Ta'riḫ Mayyāfāriqīn

Secondary

- C.F. Robinson, 'Ibn al-Azraq, his *Ta'riḫ Mayyāfāriqīn*, and early Islam', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 6 (1996) 7-27
- C. Hillenbrand, *A Muslim principality in crusader times*, Leiden, 1990, pp. 5-7
- V.F. Minorsky, 'Caucasica in the history of Mayyāfāriqīn', *BSOAS* 13 (1949) 27-35, pp. 27-31

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Ta'riḫ Mayyāfāriqīn wa-Āmid, 'The history of Mayyafariqin and Amid', 'History of Mayyafariqin'

DATE 1164-65 and 1176-77

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

The *Ta'riḫ Mayyāfāriqīn* is a chronicle which, while generally focused on the area around Mayyāfāriqīn and Āmid in Diyār Bakr, includes discourses which are wide-ranging both geographically and historically. The chronicle probably originally started with the life of Muḥammad, as there are a number of missing folios at the beginning of MS BL Or. 5803, before the manuscript begins with an account of the caliphate of 'Umar. Much in the early sections is derivative, but the work's usefulness is as a welcome contemporary 12th-century chronicle which fills in gaps that would exist otherwise. It appears to have been written in two stages. The first was around 1164-65, and it was then

extended in about 1176-77 to create a longer version. For details, see Hillenbrand, *A Muslim principality in crusader times*, pp. 15-19.

There is great value in the level of detail about certain subjects that are treated. The politics, society and warfare of the Artuqids are described in detail, and there is unique information on Zangī, Nūr al-Dīn, and the status of the caliphate, as well as aspects of Georgian society. Yet this valuable information is qualified by some major deficiencies. The quality of the Arabic is poor in places, leading to difficulties in understanding; the author lacks the insightfulness of other medieval historians; the chronicle is often imprecise in both what it reports and the dating of events; and there are contradictions in what is written. Yet despite these myriad faults, it is still an important piece because of the light it sheds on otherwise darkened periods, places and events in the 12th-century Middle East.

Aspects of Christian-Muslim relations are not at the forefront of the chronicle. There are occasional disparaging references to Christians, particularly the Latin crusaders, with whom the Artuqid rulers of Diyār Bakr came into contact, but only in passing. However, there is one section of the work devoted to the state of relations between Muslims and Christians in the Georgian city of Tiflis (Tbilisi) that offers invaluable insights into relations.

This covers the period of the 1120s and 1150s (pp. 31-35 in Minor-sky's English translation, and pp. 41-43 and 142 in Hillenbrand's), and describes the generous terms which the Georgian King David II gave to the Muslim inhabitants of Tiflis after his capture of the city in 1121-22. These included the removal of heavy tax burdens on them, which the previous, Muslim, administration had used, the acceptance of all the conditions the Muslim population asked for, and a prohibition on pigs being brought into the city. In addition to these terms, King David also minted coins with Islamic inscriptions, permitted the call to prayer, and gave the Muslims a favorable rate of *khidma*.

Having described these concessions, Ibn al-Azraq then relates the situation in Georgia as he found it in the 1150s, when he worked for David's son, King Dmitri. He writes that, when Dmitri came to Tiflis, he went down to the mosque on a Friday, listened to the entire sermon, and then donated 200 gold dinars to the mosque. Dmitri also listened to, respected and rewarded all the Muslims who came to him, to the extent that Ibn al-Azraq claims, 'From him I saw such esteem for the Muslims as they would not have enjoyed even if they had been in Baghdad.'

SIGNIFICANCE

Short as it is, this description gives an invaluable insight into inter-religious relations in Georgia during the early 12th century. It suggests that the Georgian kings had managed to create a society, in Tiflis at least, in which the Christian and Muslim communities lived together in a spirit of mutual respect. These circumstances do not seem to have been common at the time, nor was tolerance for Muslims a characteristic of the dynasty as a whole, as there is no evidence of anything similar in the historical sources. Ibn al-Azraq's own clear surprise at what he found in Tiflis supports the unusual nature of these measures taken by these two Georgian kings.

MANUSCRIPTS

MS London, BL – Or. 6310 (1164-65)

MS London, BL – Or. 5803 (1175-77)

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

Hillenbrand, *A Muslim principality in crusader times*, pp. 27-215 (edition and trans. of the period 1104/5-1176/77)

M.E. Bozaslan and B.A. Avad, *Mervanî Kürtleri tarihi*, Istanbul, 1990 (Turkish trans.)

H. Zayn, *Tāriḫ al-Fāriqī*, Beirut, 1988 (Arabic edition)

A. Savran, *A critical edition of the Artukid section in Ta'riḫ Mayyāfāriqīn wa-Āmid*, St Andrews, 1975 (Diss. University of St Andrews)

B. 'Abd al-Laṭīf, *Ta'riḫ al-Fāriqī*, Cairo, 1959 (repr. Beirut, 1974; Arabic edition)

Minorsky, 'Caucasica in the history of Mayyāfāriqīn', pp. 31-35 (English trans. of the sections relevant to the history of Georgia)

STUDIES

Robinson, 'Ibn al-Azraq, his *Ta'riḫ Mayyāfāriqīn*, and early Islam'

C. Hillenbrand, 'Some medieval Islamic approaches to source material. The evidence of a 12th century chronicle', *Oriens* 27 (1981) 197-225

C. Hillenbrand, 'The establishment of Artuqid power in Diyār Bakr in the twelfth century', *Studia Islamica* 54 (1981) 129-53

J.-M. Fiey, 'Mārūtā de Martyropolis d'après Ibn Al-Azraq (ob.1181)', *Analecta Bollandiana* 94 (1976) 35-45

Minorsky, 'Caucasica in the history of Mayyāfāriqīn', pp. 27-31

- C. Cahen, 'Le Diyār Bakr au temps des premiers Urtuqides', *Journal Asiatique* 227 (1935) 219-76
- H.A.R. Gibb, 'Notes on the Arabic materials for the history of the early crusades', *BSOAS* 7 (1933-5) 739-54
- H.F. Amedroz, 'Three Arabic MSS on the history of the city of Mayyāfāriqīn', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1902) 785-812

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