BOOK REVIEWS


Dr. Sher Muhammad Zaman has contributed an important source to the history of Islamic culture by making available to Arabists and Islamists this first complete edition of one of the biographical dictionaries of the celebrated Muslim intellectual of Alexandria, Abū Tahir as-Silafi (died 576/1180). Silafi composed three such works, among many others: Mu'jam al-Iṣbahānīyyān, which deals with scholars who transmitted hadīth to him in Isbahān; al-Mashaykhat al-Baghdadiyah, also called Mu’jam Baghḍād, which deals with his teachers in Baghdad; and the present Mu’jam as-Safar, which deals with Muslim intellectuals in all fields of knowledge throughout the world of Islam, East and West. The first two sources remain in manuscript. Partial use of the present source was made in a Beirut publication in 1963; and an incomplete edition was published in Baghdad in 1978, with 145 entries, as compared with the present edition’s 794. Prior to the present edition, the work had been identified erroneously as Mu’jam ash-Shu’ārā’ (Biographical Dictionary of Poets); but Dr. Zaman, detecting the error, has provided proof of the book’s title as Mu’jam as-Safar, a biographical dictionary compiled by the author on the basis of information collected for the most part during his extensive travels, not only on poets, but also on Muslim intellectuals generally.

The editor of this valuable source of social and intellectual history has spared no effort in making his edition an eminently usable tool of research, with many indices (Koranic verses, ḥadīth, poetry, names of persons, place names, titles of books and technical terms - the last, comprehensive as to typology, not meant to be exhaustive), and a number of plates, including Silafi’s autograph. In the introduction, the editor gives an extensive biography of Silafi including a thorough study of the biographical sources on which its is based.

All this work had been finished some years ago, but adverse circumstances, related by the editor, militated against its publication. Deciding that nothing has since appeared of sufficient significance to warrant revision of the introduction, he decided to publish the Book without further delay. Dr. Zaman announces a forthcoming “analysis and evaluation of the Mu’jam’s contents,” a “critical and analytical study of the literary, social and cultural milieu of the Muslim world” in the period of Abū Tahir as-Silafi, who lived to the ripe old age of over a century. We wish Dr. Zaman God speed to an early publication of his forthcoming book.

GEORGE MAKDISI