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***Mashā'ir* in the Early Islamic Sources: the Role of al-Azraqi's “*Akhbār Makkah*”**

Spahic Omer*

Abstract

This article discusses the role of al-Azraqi's book “*Akhbār Makkah*” (Reports about Makkah) in the evolution of the Hajj literature and that of the holy cities of Makkah and Madīnah, with special reference to the *mashā'ir* (‘Arafah, Muzdalifah and Minā). The *mashā'ir* are dealt with in their capacity as geographical realities, religious notions and signs, and as the venues of a number of Hajj rituals. The article concludes that in terms of the Hajj spectacle in general, and the *mashā'ir* in particular, al-Azraqi's book is pioneering. It oscillates between the characters of a history book, that of geography and that of topography. Al-Azraqi was the first Muslim scholar to discuss the *mashā'ir* methodically and in detail. He did so from the perspectives of their religious significance, historical development and existing functions. Al-Azraqi wanted to present a comprehensive picture that could help in mapping out the chronological religious trajectory of Makkah as the holiest place throughout human history, with the *mashā'ir* playing a significant part. The method adopted in the article is a combination of descriptive and historical interpretation as well as analysis.

Keywords: *Mashā'ir*, Hajj, al-Azraqi, *Akhbar Makkah*

Introduction

Hajj is one of the most important and, at the same time, most challenging Islamic rites. It would not be an exaggeration to say that in certain ways Hajj even personifies the whole message of Islam, combining its personal and collective dimensions, attending to the needs of spirit and overcoming the limitations of matter. From generating unparalleled spiritual experiences and drawing educational and socio-cultural lessons, to rising to the tests of complex organization, travel and implementation logistics, Hajj has it all.

As the final and ultimate pillar of Islam, Hajj signifies the evidence of the functioning of the rest of pillars. It furthermore represents the achievement of one's religious development and self-fulfilment. It is the climax of one's Islam and of Islam altogether. Hajj belongs to the Creator – just as everything else in the universe does. Man and everything he owns belongs to Him too. Consequently, Hajj signifies one of the rights of the

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Creator and one of the responsibilities of man. Through Hajj man not only discharges a responsibility, but also contributes to settling the spiritual debt of existence he perennially owes to his Creator and Master.

From the moment a pilgrim puts on the garment of ihram, embarking then on a sustained series of ground-breaking activities in the holy mosque (al-Masjid al-Ḥaram) and at 'Arafah, Muzdalifah and Minā (collectively called *mashā'ir*), which are accompanied by correspondingly ground-breaking sensations, to the moment a pilgrim takes off the same garment – and significantly afterwards until he returns home–Hajj is an extraordinary journey through time, emotions, as well as the revealed existential dimensions. The *mashā'ir* or *al-mashā'ir al-muqaddasah* in Arabic is 'Arafah, Muzdalifah and Minā. They stand for three holy sites in the holy city of Makkah. Apart from being compelling geographical realities, the significance of the *mashā'ir* also lies in the fact that they are foremost religious concepts and symbols, and are the loci of a number of Hajj ceremonies.

The representation of the *mashā'ir* in the Islamic scholarly sources was gradual, with the general religious and specifically jurisprudential sides ruling the roost. The matter underwent an evolution. The evolution, in turn, went hand in hand with the emergence of the science of Islamic geography. Once the latter became fully-fledged and the emergence of the holy cities of Makkah and Madīnah and the pilgrimage literature started to take place, the *mashā'ir*, correspondingly, began to arrest the exploratory thoughts and to command the literary attention of people. After all, the *mashā'ir* were essential both to the geographical studies of the holy places and their features, and to the aspirations and goals of any Muslim traveller. If the city of Makkah was indispensable and central, so were its holy sites and monuments (*al-mashā'ir al-muqaddasah*) associated with the Hajj rituals. They were complementary aspects residing within yet a larger universe of the consequence, emotion and experience of the Islamic message.

The *mashā'ir* were increasingly treated as a part of the total religious and socio-political landscape of Islam and its peoples. The remarkable status and functions of the *mashā'ir* were subtly woven into an aggregate depiction of the cultural and civilizational performances of Muslims. The ethnographic, anthropologic and cultural aspects of the *mashā'ir* wonder, commanding the status of a focal segment of the Hajj nexus, were thus present ever more. With the rapidly expanding responsibilities of Muslims in the dynamic civilization-making processes worldwide, the *mashā'ir*, apart from maintaining their religious legalist and purely spiritual predispositions, were likewise assuming a more global and more universal profile.

This article discusses the role of al-Azraqi (d. 250 AH/ 864 CE?) and his book “*Akhbar Makkah*” (Reports about Makkah) in elucidating the history and development of the *mashā’ir*. The importance of al-Azraqi and his seminal book is due to the verity that the study of the masha’ir thus became more meticulous, more comprehensive and more systematic—nigh on scientific. “*Akhbar Makkah*” marked a turning point in the evolution of the holy cities literature, including the *mashā’ir*. The article is divided into the following sections: Before al-Azraqi; al-Azraqi’s “*Akhbar Makkah*”; and al-Azraqi on the *Mashā’ir*.

Before al-Azraqi

Being part of the milieu of the holy city of Makkah, the *mashā’ir* of ‘Arafah, Muzdalifah and Minā are of the most consequential sites not only on earth, but also within the framework of the whole existence. Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) said that Almighty Allah decreed Makkah to be what it is—that is, a holy city, sanctuary, and a place of safety—the moment He created the heavens and the earth. Makkah will remain as such until the Day of Judgement.¹

Therefore, occasional references to those places must have featured in the revealed scriptures of some of the holy prophets that had preceded Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh). This can be supported by two things: first, by the fact that, plausibly, all prophets – except prophets Hud and Ṣāliḥ who had been distracted by their excessively wicked people - had performed Ḥajj; and second, by the fact that more than a few aspects of Makkah, especially such as are related to the city’s consecrated status and its global pilgrimage, are mentioned in the Bible (Genesis 21:17-21, Deuteronomy 33:2, Psalms 84: 1-10, Isaiah 35:8, 60:1-7).

Expectedly, the Qur’ān, too, while dwelling on Ḥajj as one of the fundamental obligations of Islam, refers directly to the masha’ir places. Allah says: “There is no blame upon you for seeking bounty from your Lord (during Ḥajj). However when you depart from ‘Arafat, remember Allah at *al-Mash’ar al-Ḥaram*. And remember Him, as He has guided you, for indeed, you were before that among those astray. Then depart from the place from where (all) the people depart and ask forgiveness of Allah. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful” (al-Baqarah, 198-199).

In these two verses the Qur’ān either mentions explicitly or implies the *mashā’ir*. The first one is ‘Arafat or ‘Arafah, the former referring to a geographical location and the latter to the same location and the Ḥajj rite performed at it. The second one is *al-Mash’ar al-Ḥaram*, which is

¹ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 15, Hadith No. 506.

Muzdalifah. And the third one is the destination of the departure “from the place from where (all) the people depart”, which is Minā. Moreover, in the Qurʾānic chapter al-Ḥajj (Pilgrimage), there are allusions to the Hajj rites and activities, in particular those associated with Minā (al-Ḥajj, 27-37). The case of Prophet Ibrāhīm’s sacrifice (*qurban*), as narrated by the Qurʾān (al-Ṣaffāt, 102-105), is also, in all probability, linked to Ḥajj and Minā as the locus of sacrifice.

Various aspects of the *mashā'ir* feature prominently also in the Sunnah (ḥadīths or traditions) of Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh). Those hadīths were narrated orally until they were systematically committed to writing beginning with the 3rd AH/ 9th CE century. The authentic sayings, practices and affirmations of the Prophet (pbuh), with regard to the masha’ir, were thus stored and preserved eternally in what later came to be known as “the Six Books” or “the Authentic Six” which enjoyed universal acceptance by the mainstream of Muslims.

Those Six Books are the “Ṣaḥīḥ” of al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH/ 870 CE), the “Ṣaḥīḥ” of Muslim (d. 261 AH/ 875 CE), the “Sunan” of Abū Dāwūd (d. 275 AH/ 888 CE), the “Jami’” of al-Tirmidhī (d. 279 AH/ 892 CE), the “Sunan” of Ibn Majah (d. 273 AH/ 887 CE) and the “Sunan” of al-Nasā’ī (d. 303 AH/ 915 CE). To these authoritative works people normally add additional three works: the “Muwaṭṭa’” of Imām Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179 AH/ 795 CE), the “Musnad” of Imām Aḥmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241 AH/ 855 CE) and the “Sunan” or “Musnad” of al-Dārimī (d. 255 AH/ 869 CE), which in fact functioned as antecedents to the former.

Some scattered and either direct or indirect references to the masha’ir are also given in the seminal works on the Prophet’s biography and Islamic history in general. In charge of the works were earliest Muslim historians and biographers of the Prophet (pbuh). The works that stand out are: the “Sīrah” (biography) of the Prophet (pbuh) by Ibn Ishāq (d. 150 AH/ 767 CE), which however only partly survived and most of which has been absorbed by subsequent sources; the “Sīrah” of the Prophet (pbuh) by Ibn Hisham (218 AH/ 833 CE), which basically is an edited recension of Ibn Ishāq’s work; the “Ṭabaqāt” (the Book of the Major Classes) of Ibn S’ad (d. 230 AH/ 845 CE); and “Kitāb al-Tārikh wa al-Maghazī” (Book of History and Military Campaigns) by al-Waqidi (d. 207 AH/ 823 CE).

It is noteworthy that all these works and references do not speak about the masha’ir per se. Rather, they speak either about Ḥajj rituals generally, for the most part from a jurisprudential point of view, or about certain issues pertaining to the farewell Ḥajj of the Prophet (pbuh),

bringing up the case of the *mashā'ir*: their geographies, facilities and activities connected with them, as a secondary subject. Islamic sciences were in their infancy, hence a sense of prioritization prevailed. First and most essential things were to be attended to first.

The same trend continued even after the emergence of the first signs of the proliferation and diversification of Islamic sciences in the 3rd and 4th AH/ 9th and 10th CE centuries. Perhaps the best representatives of the trend were al-Ya'qubi (d. 284 AH/ 898 CE), who was a historian and geographer; al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH/ 923 CE), who was an interpreter of the Qur'ān and a historian; and al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345 AH/ 956 CE), who was a geographer, historian and traveller. These individuals were some of the first Muslim polymaths.

However, signs were on the horizon that things were set to start changing soon. As the accumulation of knowledge grew exponentially, and as the foundations of new sciences were solidifying by the day, including the gradual rise of specialized scholars and the enrichment of academic vocabularies, methodologies and overall styles, scientific concerns were also increasing. Much of what hitherto used to be auxiliary was now starting to gain attention. Some things were yet becoming primary in terms of intellectual importance. The Muslim world was on the verge of a “knowledge revolution”, so to speak, serving as a precursor to what is known in the West today as the “golden age” of Islamic civilization.

Some of the above mentioned scholars had a share in the novel developments. Yet, they might have been regarded as the developments' representatives and even embodiments. By way of illustration, apart from his book on history (*Tārikh al-Ya'qūbī*), which he had composed in his capacity as a historian, al-Ya'qūbī composed another book titled “*Kitāb al-Buldān*” (the Book of Regions), which he had composed in his capacity as a harbinger of Islamic geography. Both books displayed the signs of an ongoing paradigm shift in Islamic scholarship, particularly in geography, history and the first manifestations of social sciences.

However, it was in his magnum opus on history that al-Ya'qūbī exhibited how much the subject of the *mashā'ir* as well stood at the receiving end of the intellectual advancements. And that he did so not in his book on geography, but in the one on history, reveals the remarkable extent of the unfolding knowledge upsurge. Just as though there existed no pertinent topic or theme that was regarded as superfluous. The branches of learning were extending towards each other in such a manner that they started promoting the spirit of integrational harmony.

For example, in his history (*Tarikh al-Ya'qubī*), al-Ya'qubī spoke about the *mashā'ir*, however, he loaded the discourse with a religious, historical, geographical and even comparative nuance. He did thus against the backdrop of the life stories of Prophet Ibrāhīm and his children Ismā'īl and Ishaq. Apart from highlighting some geographical landmarks linked to the *mashā'ir*, which was a novel and refreshing approach, al-Ya'qubī, in addition, mentioned that Ibrāhīm was the first who built a mosque at 'Arafah. The mosque was built of white stones and was the forerunner of all the services and facilities of the *mashā'ir*.¹ It is of note that in his geographical work, al-Ya'qubī spoke at length about the geography of the city of Makkah and some of its surrounding areas.² However, he did not even mention the *mashā'ir*, which perhaps was the case because he knew that he had provided – or will be providing, depending on which book had been written first - enough information about the *mashā'ir* in his book on history.

In the same vein, both al-Ṭabarī and al-Mas'ūdī chronicled who and in what year exactly led the pilgrimage, implying thereby that the pilgrimage itself and events associated with it were of paramount importance in Islamic history. In passing, the pilgrimage is the universal annual gathering of Muslims whose potentials and socio-political ramifications are remarkable. Some such events were duly reported, like the one by al-Ṭabarī in relation to the crisis of the latter years of caliph 'Uthmān b. 'Affān's caliphate. Al-Ṭabarī wrote in his "History of Prophets and Kings" (*Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*): "In this year (29 AH/ 651 CE), 'Uthman led the pilgrimage. At Minā he pitched a tent - this was the first tent that 'Uthmān pitched at Minā-and he completed the (rites of) prayer there and at 'Arafah." Al-Ṭabarī then went on to elaborate on the subject of 'Uthmān's alterations, based on his independent reasoning, to certain secondary pilgrimage (Ḥajj) rites that took place at Minā.³

While al-Ṭabarī reported about the history of Ḥajj and its leadership within the framework of the events of individual years, al-Mas'ūdī, on the other hand, dedicated the entire last section of his book "The Meadows of Gold" (*Muruj al-Dhahab*) to the subject matter. He titled it "Mentioning those who led people on Hajj from the beginning till the year 335 AH".⁴ Leading the Hajj pilgrimage on behalf of a political establishment was a sign of and an attestation to a governmental legitimacy.

¹ Al-Ya'qubī, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qubī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al- 'Ilmiyyah, 2002), vol. 1 pp. 23-27.

² Al-Ya'qubī, *Kitab al-Buldan*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al- 'Ilmiyyah, 2002), pp. 152-154.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Tabari*, translated and annotated by R. Stephen Humphreys, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), vol. 15 pp. 38-40.

⁴ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1982), vol. 2 pp. 739-750.

An additional case in point is a pioneering geographer Ibn al-Faqih who died around 289 AH/ 901 CE - which was only three years after al-Ya'qubī – and whose book on Islamic geography is titled exactly like al-Ya'qubī's: "*Kitāb al-Buldān*" (the Book of Regions). Whereas he dedicated a chapter to a study of the geography of the city of Makkah and the detailed architectural make-up of its holy Mosque, Ibn al-Faqih nonetheless did not touch on the masha'ir. He barely mentioned 'Arafah, saying but that it was twelve miles away from Makkah.¹ This one boosted evidence that despite making some academic strides in the late 3rd AH/ 9th CE and early 4th AH/ 10th CA centuries, the subject of the masha'ir had a long way to go before it was put on a pedestal.

It is clear that scholars were adopting different styles and approaches for dealing with the issues at hand, which, nevertheless, was part of a bigger intellectual and methodical blueprint. Some methods were chronological, others thematic, and some were closer to the spirit of qualitative, and others to quantitative, methods, but they all targeted knowledge as an intangible public good and were intended to contribute to the new scholarship culture. That is why al-Mas'udi commenced and similarly concluded his above-mentioned book on history by warnings and supplications against anybody who might wish to diminish the value of his work by either distorting or misrepresenting it in any way.² A new knowledge culture was crying out for a new integrity culture.

Al-Azraqi's "*Akhbar Makkah*"

With the arrival of al-Azraqi and his book "Reports about Makkah" (*Akhbar Makkah*) in the 3rd AH/ 9th CE century, things changed drastically. The book's content is a combination of the history, geography and topography of the city of Makkah. The book was the watershed for the holy cities literature. It was a standard-setter. Its full name is "*Akhbar Makkah wa ma jā' Fīhā min al-Athār*" (Reports about Makkah and what is Mentioned of its Antiquities). Al-Azraqi died around the middle of the 3rd AH century, certainly much later than 212 AH/ 827 CE and 223 AH/ 837 CE as some erroneously believed.³ He might have died in 250 AH/ 864 CE.⁴

"*Akhbār Makkah*" still bore the marks of the earlier Muslim history literature, with a reviewer of the book somewhat comparing its disposition

¹ Ibn al-Faqih, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, (Beirut: 'Alam al-Kutub, 1996), pp. 74-78.

² Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2 p. 750.

³ Al-Azraqi, *Akhbar Makkah*, (Jeddah: al-Maṭba'ah al-Majdiyyah, 2005), see "Introduction".

⁴ Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Fasi al-Makki, *Shifā' al-Gharam bi Akhbār al-Balād al-Haram*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2000), vol. 1, see "Introduction" p. 17.

to the disposition of the “*Sīrah*” of the Prophet (pbuh) by Ibn Hisham. The style of “*Akhbār Makkah*” revolved around the task of bringing together all the information and reports as were available, albeit without venturing into the labour of sifting through them and trying to arrive at the definitive truth. The onus to do so fell on the discretion of the readers. As a result, “*Akhbār Makkah*” contains myriads of narrations that are seriously questionable; some are outright wrong.

This particular style was common at the time and signified an inevitable phase in the evolution of the science of Islamic historiography. Against the background of the style and the scientific evolution it belonged to, should the instance of al-Azraqi be viewed. His shortcomings were neither intended nor resulting from a calculated nonconformity. They were but a consequence of his independent reasoning and of his candid reading of prevalent reports. For that reason did his intellectual and religious integrity remain strong and his general repute lofty, by reason of which most scholars deemed him honest and reliable for knowledge transmission and hence, narrated from him, including Imām al-Bukhārī.¹

This is analogous to the method of al-Ṭabarī, which he expounded at the outset of his encyclopaedic work on history. Al-Ṭabarī wrote: “In this book of mine, I shall mention whatever information has reached us about kings throughout the ages from when our Lord began the creation of His creation to its annihilation... The reader should know that with respect to all I have mentioned and made it a condition to set down in this book of ours, I rely upon traditions and reports which I have transmitted and which I attribute to their transmitters... This book of mine may (be found to) contain some information, mentioned by us on the authority of certain men of the past, which the reader may disapprove of and the listener may find detestable, because he can find nothing sound and no real meaning in it. In such cases, he should know that it is not our fault that such information comes to him, but the fault of someone who transmitted it to us. We have merely reported it as it was reported to us.”²

Al-Azraqi himself is silent about his methods and intentions. He does not make any sort of introduction in the book where he could explain those things. After proclaiming the *basmalah* or *tasmiyah* (that is, the words: “In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful”), and after invoking blessings and peace upon the Prophet (pbuh), his family and

¹ Al-Azraqi, *Akhbār Makkah*, see “Introduction”.

² Al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, translated and annotated by Franz Rosenthal, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), vol. 1 pp. 170-171.

his companions, al-Azraqi's immediate focus was on core issues, the first topic of discussion being the whereabouts of the Ka'bah before the creation of the heavens and the earth.¹ This method was further necessitated by the fact that the canonical authentic Six Books were yet to be completed, so the universally accepted criterion was yet to be instituted. The readers were left to judge for themselves, in which case, sometimes, a report raised more questions than provided answers.

Regardless, al-Azraqi's "*Akhbar Makkah*" was seminal at the same time. It was an influencer and difference maker. The work oscillates between the characters of a history book, that of geography and that of topography. For the book's reviewer, Rushdi al-Salih Malhas, the book is more on the topography of Makkah than on its history.² The book inspired a genre of literature not only on the city of Makkah and its pilgrimage, but also beyond, the most prominent of which was "*Shifā' al-Gharam bi Akhbar al-Balād al-Ḥaram*" (The Therapy for those who Harbour Affection for the History of the Sacred City) written by Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Fasi al-Makki (d. 832 AH/ 1428 CE). The author regularly refers to al-Azraqi, using his "*Akhbar Makkah*" as a benchmark. Another instance of a similar method is the book "*Mil' al-'Aybah bimā 'Jumi'a bi Tuli al-Ghaybah fī al-Wijhah al-Wajihah ilā al-Ḥaramayn Makkah wa Ṭayyibah*" by Muḥammad bin 'Umar bin Rashid al-Fihri (d. 721 AH/ 1321 CE). Indirectly at least, al-Azraqi's example should have encouraged a corpus of literature on a number of other Muslim cities as well.

Shortly after the "*Akhbar Makkah*" book was completed by al-Azraqi, there emerged another book with partially the same title: "*Akhbar Makkah fī Qadim al-Dahr wa Ḥadithih*" (Reports about Makkah in Ancient and Modern Times). The author of the latter book was Abu Abdullah al-Fakihi, who like al-Azraqi was a Makkah scholar of the 3rd AH/ 9th CE century. He lived longer than al-Azraqi and must have learned about the presence of the latter's ground-breaking work. Al-Fakihi is believed to have died approximately in 280 AH/ 893 CE, which is about thirty years after al-Azraqi.

Al-Fakihi composed his own book with almost the same title because he might have wanted to present a bigger and more comprehensive account about Makkah. He might have wished to do that mainly from the perspectives of the scholars of ḥadīth (the Prophet's tradition) and also *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), which would enable him

¹ Al-Azraqi, *Akhbār Makkah*, vol. 1 p. 1.

² Ibid., see "Introduction".

to rectify the content-oriented deficiencies of al-Azraqi's book.¹ And indeed, when one reads al-Fakihi's book one cannot fail to recognize its jurisprudential and overall theological predilection.

It is true that in his heyday al-Azraqi was a reputable historian and his "*Akhbar Makkah*" an intellectual breakthrough, however, it likewise should be mentioned that his work eventually got lost, only to be found by a German orientalist in some European libraries.² As if the book was outshined by the very literature it had inspired; as if it was the victim of its own initial success.

The book was then published in 1858 CE in the city of Leipzig in Germany, featuring numerous mistakes. After that the book gained currency in the West, so much so that its ensuing popularity in the Muslim world was predicated on the former. In other words, the modern popularity of "*Akhbar Makkah*" was opportune and was perhaps more on account of the contributions of non-Muslims than those of Muslims. The newest edition of the book was meant to remove the mistakes associated with the European edition and to improve its readability.

Western orientalists were more than happy to capitalize on the available lapses contained in "*Akhbar Makkah*" and on the lax methodology of the author when it comes to dealing with multitudes of reports some of which were in conflict with each other. For instance, virtually every orientalist that dwelled on the city of Makkah and its Ka'bah could not but cite al-Azraqi's erroneous accounts according to which, following the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet (pbuh) ordered that all pictures inside the Ka'bah be erased except the one depicting Mary and her baby son Jesus.

Such a thing was befitting Western orientalists and their agendas perfectly. Therefore, no orientalist was inclined to pay attention to the verity that the most trustworthy and, at the same time, most authoritative sources in Islamic orthodox scholarship rejected such accounts. Those Islamic sources agree that each and every picture inside, as well as outside the Ka'bah, was obliterated completely. According to yet another report of al-Azraqi, it was not a picture, but a statue of Mary and her son Jesus that was positioned inside the Ka'bah near the column adjoining the door. The statue was spared demolition and removal during the Prophet's time. It was not disposed of until the year 64 AH/ 683 CE (54 years after the Prophet (pbuh)) when the Ka'bah got burned and rebuilt.³

¹ Al-Fakihi, *Akhbār Makkah*, (Beirut: Dār Khidr, 1994), vol. 1 see "Introduction".

² Al-Azraqi, *Akhbār Makkah*, see "Introduction".

³ Ibid., vol. 1 pp. 103-107.

It appears as though some of the chief tasks of al-Fakihi's "*Akhbar Makkah*" were related as much to supplementing as to correcting the "*Akhbar Makkah*" of al-Azraqi. The former, for the most part, toed the line and tried to fully subscribe to the methods and standards of Muslim theologians, in the light of which, at a number of points, al-Fakihi diverged from al-Azraqi. His work, it follows, is twice as important. It is at once a historical sourcebook and a reference point. That is why al-Fakihi and his "*Akhbar Makkah*" are not as prominent, nor well received, in the West as al-Azraqi and the similar work of his own. Unlike certain aspects of the "*Akhbar Makkah*" of al-Azraqi, al-Fakihi's "*Akhbar Makkah*" in its totality was better regulated and "safeguarded", and so, could not be manoeuvred into serving inappropriate ends.

Al-Azraqi on the *Mashā'ir*

As to the *mashā'ir*, without doubt, al-Azraqi was the first Muslim scholar to discuss them systematically and in depth. He spoke about: the boundaries of Minā, the history of Minā and the history of its pilgrimage rituals, the way the Minā rituals are conducted, the location at Minā where the Prophet (pbuh) stayed and the locations where his companions stayed, the prohibition of erecting buildings at Minā, the history, advantages and the architecture of the Khayf Mosque which is the principal mosque at Minā, the Kabsh Mosque at Minā, the distance between Minā and Muzdalifah, the architecture of the Muzdalifah Mosque, the distance between Muzdalifah and 'Arafah, the architecture of the 'Arafah Mosque (the Namirah Mosque or the Mosque of Prophet Ibrāhīm), the boundaries of Muzdalifah and 'Arafah, and the pilgrimage rituals linked to Muzdalifah and 'Arafah.¹

Al-Azraqi dealt with the *mashā'ir* from the perspectives of their religious significance, historical development and existing functions. A prevalent jurisprudential spirit can similarly be felt to some extent, given that Ḥajj in the function of the final pillar of the edifice of Islam serves as a manifestation, plus affirmation, of a person's spiritual self-fulfilment. Both the pre-Islamic and Islamic histories have been covered. Al-Azraqi wanted to present a comprehensive picture that could help in mapping out the chronological religious trajectory of Makkah as the holiest place throughout human history.

Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) was the final messenger of Almighty Allah to mankind (the Seal of prophets, *khātim al-Anbiyā'*) and as such, represented the concluding phase of those historical processes. He was the crown of history and its dynamic developments. By doing so, al-

¹ Ibid., vol. 2 pp. 139-158.

Azraqi also wished to bring into focus the role of Muslims in history-making kinetics and how they should position themselves vis-à-vis the multi-coloured legacies of the past and the challenges of the present as well as the future in connection with Makkah and beyond.

Thus, al-Azraqi's exposition alternates between Prophet Adam, Prophet Ibrāhīm, pre-Islamic (polytheistic) Arabia, Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh), early Muslim history, and of course the exigencies of his own era. Al-Azraqi's *mashā'ir* exposition bears a resemblance to a mosaic featuring subtle interplays between the nuances of religion, history and culture. Since the dawn of not just human existence, but also existence taken together, the *mashā'ir*—as part of the all-inclusive spiritual Makkah theatre—connoted the microcosm of the human ontological purpose and destiny.

The *mashā'ir* likewise embodied the quintessence of the existential *raison d'être*. From the start, they took centre stage, amalgamating the realm of matter with the realm of spirit and, in such an environment, brought out the best in people (pilgrims in the role of faithful servants and Allah's vicegerents on earth). This transpires in such a way and to such an extent that on the day of 'Arafah, which is the climax and best moment of Ḥajj, Almighty Allah ransoms more people from the hellfire than on any other day, and He draws ever closer and closer, and then boasts about pilgrims before the angels saying: "Look at my servants who have come to Me dishevelled and dusty."¹

Al-Azraqi aspired to capture this religious sentiment and historical outlook. Hence, his "*Akhbar Makkah*" stands for an encyclopaedic work that both educates and enthuses. It takes a reader on a ride with the ebb and flow of religious-cum-historical performances. It is a sheer coincidence, but makes a lot of sense that al-Azraqi's book starts off with discussions about the Ka'bah prior to the creation of the heavens and the earth and about its close relationship with the world of angels—thereby implying the heavenly origins and disposition of the Ka'bah (al-Masjid al-Ḥaram or the Holy Mosque) and of Makkah as its terrestrial setting— and concludes it with discussions about the geography and human settlements of Makkah — thereby implying that man resides between the requirements of the physical and metaphysical worlds and that his civilizational success or failure depends on how successfully or otherwise he manages to strike a delicate balance between the two domains.

¹ Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Book 25, Hadith No. 133. Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Rites of Hajj and 'Umrah from the Qur'an, Sunnah and Narrations from the Pious Predecessors*, www.islamhouse.com, 2010, accessed on January 31, 2022.

That al-Azraqi was a true leader in the latest aspects of the Muslim intellectual developments testifies the fact that he provided unparalleled architectural descriptions of the main masha'ir mosques: the Khayf Mosque at Minā, the Muzdalifah Mosque and the Namirah Mosque at 'Arafah. He gave comprehensive accounts of the Mosques' dimensions, doors, arches, pillars, walls, windows, balconies and how they were situated in relation to some natural landmarks of the three holy sites.¹ In view of this, plus al-Azraqi's thorough explanation of the architecture of the Ka'bah and al-masjid al-haram or the Holy Mosque, the "*Akhbar Makkah*" of al-Azraqi is the first genuine reference in the field of the history of the Islamic built environment.

Al-Azraqi led the way, others followed. By way of illustration, al-Fakihi's "*Akhbar Makkah*" mentions only the basic architectural features of the three Mosques and does so very briefly. He underscores that his intention was to be concise. At the end of describing each of the three Mosques, al-Fakihi points out that he had all the information and details concerning the Mosques' respective morphologies, but he abridged the narratives in order to avoid prolongation.² As if al-Fakihi insinuated that al-Azraqi's narratives were complete and accurate, hence, sufficient. Al-Fakihi's methodological leaning demanded that his emphasis be somewhere else.

Not only that; whatever al-Fakihi presented about the architectural description of the three Mosques, his words were produced verbatim from al-Azraqi's work. This means that he either copied from the "*Akhbar Makkah*" of al-Azraqi, or resorted to the same sources as his predecessor. This certainly was the reason why when Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Fāsī al-Makkī composed a new history of Makkah titled "*Shifā' al-Gharam bi Akhbār al-Balād al-Haram*" (The Therapy for those who Harbour Affection for the History of the Sacred City) approximately 580 years later, he regularly consulted al-Azraqi and not al-Fakihi. The former was a paragon, the latter more of a sidekick, in a manner of speaking.

As for instance, when talking about the Khayf Mosque at Minā, Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Fāsī al-Makkī said that he firstly mentioned its dimensions consistent with the descriptions of al-Azraqi. Only after that did he describe the mosque's form as it was during his own time, that is, about five centuries and a half after al-Azraqi. The author moreover added that writing about the architectural form of the Khayf Mosque after al-Azraqi's

¹ Al-Azraqi, *Akhbār Makkah*, vol. 2 pp. 146-157.

² Al-Fakihi, *Akhbār Makkah*, vol. 4 pp. 309, 325; vol. 5 p. 6.

era was difficult due to the lack of information resulting from the subsequent generations' lack of interest to record them.¹

Like in the case of the Khayf Mosque at Minā, Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Fāsī al-Makkī used the content of al-Azraqī's "*Akhbār Makkah*" as a yardstick on the subjects of the Muzdalifah Mosque and the Namirah Mosque at 'Arafah as well. He had a problem ascertaining the construction date of the Namirah Mosque because al-Azraqī was reticent about the matter;² such was the dependence of Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Fāsī al-Makkī and, in actual fact, the dependence of all succeeding Makkah historians on al-Azraqī.

There was a huge scholarly gap between the historical periods of al-Azraqī and Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Fāsī al-Makkī. In terms of the historicity of the *mashā'ir* throughout the interval in question, little was recorded and much less preserved. Hence, Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Fāsī al-Makkī often based his conclusions on presumptions and "subjective truths", occasionally highlighting: "as I believe" (*fimā ahsabū*) and "without a shred of doubt" (*yaqīnan*).³ When reading through the book "*Shifā' al-Gharam bi Akhbār al-Balād al-Ḥaram*" of Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Fāsī al-Makkī, it sounds as if the author perceived himself in the function of al-Azraqī's heir. He had made it his mission to continue – invigorate and take forward - the latter's legacy.

Conclusion

Being part of the notion and spectacle of the city of Makkah in its capacity as a holy city, the locus of the Ḥajj rituals, and as the most consequential site within the context of the whole of existence, the *masha'ir* featured conspicuously in the early scholarship of Islam. There was virtually no major reference that did not speak of the *masha'ir* one way or another. However, those references did not dwell on the *mashā'ir* as such. Rather, they spoke either about the Ḥajj formalities in general, mainly from jurisprudential points of view, or about certain issues pertaining to the farewell Ḥajj of the Prophet (pbuh) and the pilgrimages of his successors, bringing up the case of the *mashā'ir*: their geographies, facilities and activities connected with them, as a subordinate topic. This was understandable, in that Islamic sciences were in their infancy, hence a sense of prioritization, as well as generalization, prevailed.

¹ Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Fāsī al-Makkī, *Shifā' al-Gharam bi Akhbār al-Balād al-Ḥarām*, vol. 1 pp. 351-354.

² Ibid., vol. 1 p. 400.

³ Ibid., vol. 1 p. 353.

With the advent of al-Azraqi and his seminal book “*Akhbar Makkah*”, things were set never to be the same again. The content of the book is a blend of the history, geography and topography of the city of Makkah. The book was the watershed for the holy cities literature. It was a harbinger. Indeed, it would not be an overstatement to say that there was no subsequent history, geography, or travel book on Makkah and its pilgrimage that did not owe some debt of gratitude to al-Azraqi. If the “*Akhbār Makkah*” book was intended to be about the reports, traditions, landmarks and legacies of Makkah, al-Azraqi not only succeeded in methodically cataloguing and preserving them, but he also supplemented them by creating a new milestone and “tradition”. His “*Akhbār Makkah*” became a Makkah legacy in its own right.

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