QUDĀMAH IBN JA‘FAR ON CERTAIN ASPECTS OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

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Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. (Keynes)

Abstract

This paper explores the economic views of Abū al-Faraj Qudāmah ibn Ja‘far al-Kātib as presented in his encyclopedic monument, the Kitāb al-Kharāj wa Šīnā‘at (Ṣan‘at) al-Kiābah. The author, qua secretary and concomitantly spokesman for governmental authorities, utilized the archival sources and considered various economic issues from a technocratic-cum-scholarly perspective; hence the importance of his book. Nevertheless, he reached a few analytical conclusions from the economic viewpoint which are enough to claim his authority for classical Islamic political economy. Herein only his political economic theories with reference to his views on issues of substance, such as the “geography of ‘Abbāsid economic system”, “division of labor”, “value theory”, and “use of money”, are keynoted instead of repeating his quotations on financial technicalities.

A. Introduction

Today, economists are trained to be technocrats with a very limited view of historical, methodological and philosophical aspects of their field, and the history of economic thought is considered in some circles as a remarkably immaterial and trivial scholastic pursuit. Nevertheless, the fashion victim Muslims would abort themselves off the nourishing womb of history if they cut their umbilical cord off from the Islamic intellectual heritage. Whereas in order to figure out the chains of economic thinking,
the loops of ideas formed throughout the Islamic history must be interlinked. Hence, the works on public finance, which can be grouped under the twin generic titles of “Kitāb al-Kharāj” and “Kitāb al-Amwāl”, form an important corpus of specific sources for the history of Islamic economics and/or economic thought. This literature reveals to us the level of understanding of, so to speak, the political economy among statesmen, farmers, and scholars. In chronological order, besides three works of this genre by Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ibrāhīm al-Anṣārī (d. 182/798), by his student Yaḥyā ibn Ādam ibn Sulaimān (d. 203/818), and by Abū ʿUbaid al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 224/838), a disciple of the latter, the fourth extant book is the Kitāb al-Kharāj by Abū al-Faraj Qudāmah ibn Jaʿfar al-Kātib (d. 337/948). These works reflect, in different doses, an authoritative, argumentative and trend-setting blend of legislation and religio-moral consciousness. Thus, this paper examines Qudāmah ibn Jaʿfar’s economic views as presented in his interdisciplinary monument, the Kitāb al-Kharāj wa Ṣināʿat (Ṣanʿat) al-Kitābah.1 Nevertheless, before

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1 The first study of the Kitāb al-Kharāj is its abridgment published by M. G. de Slane (“Notice sur Codema et ses écrits,” Journal Asiatique 20 (1862), 155-181). A. Sprenger followed him giving an evaluation of the geographical part of the book (Die Post- und Reiserouten des Orients. Mit 16 Karten nach einheimischen Quellen, Leipzig, 1864). Later, de Goeye published selected sections from the fifth and sixth parts as an appendix (Nubadh min Kitāb al-Kharāj wa Sināʿat al-Kitābah li-Abī al-Faraj Qudāmah ibn Jaʿfar al-Kātib al-Baghdādī) to the Kitāb al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik by Ibn Khurdādhbih together with its French translation (Leiden, 1889, 184-266). Subsequently, this appendix was translated into Persian by Ḥusain Karachānlu, with an introduction, notes and indices (Kitāb al-Kharāj: Qudāmah ibn Jaʿfar, Teheran: Nashr-i Alburz, 1370) and into Urdu by Abū al-Khair (Hyderabad, 1930). Muhammad Makhzūm published these excerpts separately again with the title of Nubadh min Kitāb al-Kharāj wa Sināʿat al-Kitābah (Beirut-Limassoul, 1408/1988) adding an introduction, some notes and indices. The first ten chapters of Manzilah Five which had not been published by de Goeye, have been edited by Ḥusain Khidāwī Jam together with a Persian translation of the first chapter (Teheran, 1974) and by Mustafā Hiyari (al-Dawāwīn min Kitāb al-Kharāj wa Sināʿat al-Kitābah li-Qudāmah ibn Jaʿfar al-Kātib, Amman, 1986). This manzilah as a whole