

## 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 Šinā'at (Šan'at) al-Kitābah*. 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 'Ubaid 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 Ja'far 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 Ja'far's economic views as presented in his interdisciplinary monument, the *Kitāb al-Kharāj wa Ṣinā'at (Ṣan'at) al-Kitābah*.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, before

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<sup>1</sup> The first study of the *Kitāb al-Kharāj* is its abridgment published by M. G. de Slane ("Notice sur Codema et ses écrites," *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 Goeje published selected sections from the fifth and sixth parts as an appendix (*Nubadh min Kitāb al-Kharāj wa Ṣinā'at al-Kitābah li-Abī al-Faraj Qudāmah ibn Ja'far 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 Karachānlū, with an introduction, notes and indices (*Kitāb al-Kharāj: Qudāmah ibn Ja'far*, Teheran: Nashr-i Alburz, 1370) and into Urdu by Abū al-Khair (Hyderabad, 1930). Muḥammad Makhzūm published these excerpts separately again with the title of *Nubadh min Kitāb al-Kharāj wa Ṣinā'at 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 Goeje, have been edited by Ḥusain Khidwī Jam together with a Persian translation of the first chapter (Teheran, 1974) and by Mustafa Hiyari (*al-Dawāwīn min Kitāb al-Kharāj wa Ṣinā'at al-Kitābah li-Qudāmah ibn Ja'far al-Kātib*, Amman, 1986). This *manzilah* as a whole