

*Hašt Bihišt* VI, Story XI:  
A Quotation from Abū Tammām's Ode on Amorium\*

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To Victor Ostapchuk  
ka gahī ba yādaš āram ba zabān-i 'uḍrḥ<sup>w</sup>āhī

Abstract ■ Idrīs Bidlīsī displays a certain technical sophistication in the arrangement of the materials which he received from his predecessors and can be said to represent a rather advanced stage in the formation of the *Hašt Bihišt* literature. By reconstructing, where possible, the sources used by Idrīs, we can reach to both the best readings and understanding of his very difficult and hyperliterate text. Since the transmission of the manuscripts sometimes involved no conscious choices between often conflicting versions, we may, as a result of the reconstruction of the critical edition of *Hašt Bihišt*, use the best readings, instead of corrupt ones. This short article deals with a classical Arabic quotation used in Idrīs' Book VI, especially as a tool to reach a fixed reading of the text and clarify its semantics and connotations.

Keywords: *Hašt Bihišt* VI, Idrīs Bidlīsī, Ottoman, Murād II, Byzantines, Persian, Abū Tammām.

### Introduction

Idrīs Bidlīsī (1457-1520) is known to us as a difficult author. The quality of being difficult is earned in part because of the obscure ways, in which he expresses himself and also because of his numerous references to Arab and Persian classical authors, which sometimes tend to obstruct rather than to clarify his historical

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accounts. Sophisticated and metaphorical structure is especially evident in his massive work, the *Haşt Bihişt*, but it is not totally absent from his other works. A detailed observation will show how Idrīs had classical Arabic and Persian works, so to speak, on his desk when he was writing his own respected works.<sup>1</sup>

The problem has many faces. The way Idrīs accumulated his borrowed material deserves attention, and there the testimony of other classical writers can be of great value. Such quotations do really elucidate the meaning of the difficult language of Idrīs if (and only if) we could identify their history. The sources that Idrīs quotes should be investigated, as well as how accurately he uses them, and in what way he credits them. Turning the issue of accuracy on its head, the way Idrīs transforms his borrowed material should also be explored. Sometimes the wording of classical authors is not found in Idrīs’.

Poetry is always more freely quoted in *Haşt Bihişt* VI than prose, and Arabic verse is particularly adapted by its subject, metre and style to citation of the most diverse variety. Arab classical poets were the popular classical panegyric and epic in *Haşt Bihişt* VI, but make little appeal to the majority of *Haşt Bihişt* students today. The hundreds of citations from Arabic classical literature in the works of Idrīs form a mass of evidence which is now little esteemed. However, a sample taken from the ninth century great Arab poet, Ḥabīb ibn Aws al-Ṭā’ī, better known as Abū Tammām, may attract some attention to this phase of the critical analysis of the *text* of *Haşt Bihişt*.

Abū Tammām’s poem, of which Idrīs mentioned a verse only (see below), is normally known by its *maṭla’* ‘opening verse, place of rising’ (*al-sayfu aṣḍaqu anba’an min al-kutubi* ‘the sword is truer in tidings than [any] writings’).<sup>2</sup> The poem celebrates the Muslim conquest of the Byzantine city of Amorium as the triumph of Islam. The sack of Amorium by the Abbasid caliph al-Muṭaṣim (r.833-843) in mid-August 838 was one of the major events in the history of the Arab-Byzantine conflicts.<sup>3</sup> After sacking the city as the birthplace of the ruling Byz-

1 For a study on the life, times, and works of Idrīs Bidlīsī, see Vural Genç, *Acem’den Rum’a Bir Bürokrat ve Tarihçi: İdris-i Bidlīsī (1457-1520)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2019).

2 Abū Tammām’s fame rest on both his own *Dīwān* and his authoritative anthology of the early Arabic heroic tradition, *al-Ḥamāsa* ‘Courage’. For his biography, see Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā al-Şūlī, *Aḥbār Abī Tammām*, ed. Maḥmūd ‘Asākir et al. (Beirut: Maktab al-Ṭiġārī, n.d.), pp. 137-144, 267, passim.

3 See Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780-842* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 272-280, 303, 444-445.

antine dynasty, including emperor Theophilos (r. 829-842), Abū Tammām went before the caliph at Sāmarrā where he presented his ‘Ode on the Conquest of Amorium’ to him.

As a respected example of *badī* ‘new’ style, Abū Tammām’s ode serves to illustrate the Islamic conquest through astrological terms that express Islamic victory and Byzantine defeat. In this poem Amorium is portrayed as both “mother” to the Byzantines and an “unaging virgin” which probably refers to the rape of conquered community. On dealing with the importance of Amorium conquest special attention has been paid to the heroic and divinely appointed caliph al-Mu‘taṣim, who led his army in the conquest of infidel Christian city. The ode closes with Abū Tammām’s blessing the legitimacy of al-Mu‘taṣim.<sup>4</sup>

Abū Tammām’s poem comes from the venerable tradition of Arabic praise poetry which is called “victory odes”. What survived of it in Idrīs’ *Hašt Bihšt* VI is apparently a reflection of the same tradition.

### Readings and Politics of Idrīs’ Quotation

An only one verse from the long *qaṣīda* ‘Ode on the Conquest of Amorium’ (*fath* ‘*Amūrīya*, 71 verses totally) by Abū Tammām is quoted in Idrīs’ *Hašt Bihšt* VI, as the last concluding line of Story XI. It is not identified by the composer’s name, no other indication of its source is given. This quotation is indeed rare: Esad Efendi 2199 (copied in c. 1506) is the only important early version of the quotation known to me which exactly mentions the same wording of Abū Tammām. This reads:

*fa-bayna ayyāmika l-lātī nuṣirta bihā*  
*wa bayna ayyāmi Badrin aqrabu l-nasabi*<sup>5</sup>

The closest lineage connects the days of Badr to your victorious days

In the autograph manuscript Esad Efendi 2199 Abū Tammām’s verse is correctly mentioned in Idrīs’ own hand. Moreover, Idrīs made a clear stress that it

4 For the *badī* style, literary features of Abū Tammām’s poetry, including the Ode on the Conquest of Amorium, see Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, “The ‘Abbasid Poet Interprets History: Three *Qaṣīdahs* by Abū Tammām,” *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 10 (1979), pp. 49-64.

5 See Idrīs ibn Ḥusām al-Dīn Bidlīsī, *Hašt Bihšt*, Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Esad Efendi 2199, fol. 341r. For the same quotation in the original source, see Ḥabīb ibn Aws Abī Tammām al-Ṭā’ī, *Dīwān*, ed. Muḥī al-Dīn al-Ḥayyāṭ (Beirut: al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Umūmiyyata l-Ġalīla, 1900), pp. 7-12.

is an exact reproduction of this verse. This is demonstrated by the letter *şād* (the abbreviated form of *şahīḥ* ‘authentic’) which appears toward the end of the quotation.<sup>6</sup>

The variant readings I considered imply some deviations and changes from Esad Efendi 2199 which uniquely renders the accurate quotation. The main fact to be noticed is that this set of variant readings, that is Nuruosmaniye 3209 (copied in 1513-1514), Hazine 1655 (dated 1513 but possibly copied in c.1520) and Tabriz 1874 (copied in 1560) all have *al-lawātī* instead of *al-lātī*. There are some other variants in these manuscripts which are against Abū Tammām’s wording. Esad Efendi 2199 also differs from the later versions, which have *ayyāmī* (Nuruosmaniye) or *ayyāmi* (Hazine and Tabriz) instead of *ayyāmika*. Idrīs is therefore right in his Esad Efendi draft when he mentions *al-lātī*; but the following word is *ayyāmika*, not *ayyāmī* or *ayyāmi* (as it is mentioned in later versions).<sup>7</sup>

In practice, such changes always occur. Hazine 1655 and Tabriz 1874 are not “substantive” manuscripts. All later manuscripts are as a rule derivative from an earlier substantive manuscript which is normally an autograph. If so, why the richly produced “autograph” Nuruosmaniye 3209 made the same mistake? For almost all of the modern Turkish studies on the *Haşt Bihişt* it preserves the main (if not the only) substantive manuscript. The foregoing shifts of order or “mistake” in Nuruosmaniye 3209 may most probably be attributed to mere slips of Idrīs’ memory. A more correct conclusion that can be drawn is that this is not the error of Idrīs’ memory, but the error of those copyists who produced this version under his supervision. Admittedly, Idrīs did not pay enough attention to the work of those who collaborated with him in producing Nuruosmaniye 3209. Perhaps his assistants forgot to check the metre which is the *al-başıṭ* in this case and that might be the reason why the assistant copyist made these mistakes.<sup>8</sup> However, I

6 It is also possible to read it *şat* which is another Islamic codicological term, meaning ‘good, neat’. For these terms, see Piżmān Firūzbaḡş, “İştilāḡāt-i Ḥuṣnivişī va Nuşḡaşināşī dar Ṭuḡfatu l-Muḡibbīn,” *Nāma-yi Bahāristān*, 13-14 (2007), pp. 415-424.

7 For the variants, see Idrīs ibn Ḥuṣām al-Dīn Bidlīsī, *Haşt Bihişt*, Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Nuruosmaniye 3209, fol. 303v.; idem, *Haşt Bihişt*, Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, Hazine 1655, fol. 340v.; idem, *Haşt Bihişt*, Tabriz, Kitābhāna-yi Markazī-yi Tabrīz, Maḡmū‘a-yi H. Hussein Nakhdjvani, 1874, fol. 259v.

8 To me, the word “autograph” should not be used for this manuscript in anyway. It is only the conclusion and colophon of Nuruosmaniye 3209 that are written in Idrīs’ hand. Compare Mehrdad Fallahzadeh, “The Eight Paradises (the Haşt Bihişt) and the Question of the Existence of Its Autographs,” *Der Islam*, 91/2 (2014), pp. 374-409.

do not mean reduce the importance of Nuruosmaniye 3209. I only would like to stress that Esad Efendi 2199 should not be completely dismissed even though it is a draft version. On the principle that the more difficult reading is to be preferred, something can no doubt said for the originality of Esad Efendi 2199. It is both a more difficult reading (reflecting Abū Tammām's difficult language and style as well) and a precise quotation of the original text. It is also both the earliest manuscript and the most difficult manuscript to read.

Attention should be drawn now to the Story XI in which this quotation is given. At the end of the section on "the description of how the [Christian] king of Hungary crossed the Danube River to conquer Alacahisar" (*dar bayān-i kiyfīyat-i 'ubūr-i qirāl-i Unkurūs az āb-i Tūna ba 'azm-i tashīr-i Alğa Hīṣār*),<sup>9</sup> Idrīs quotes Abū Tammām's verse. The details of the Story, though not uninteresting, are irrelevant here because I mainly concerned with the quotation. In sum, Idrīs argued that when Murād II (1421-1444; 1446-1451) went to Karaman to suppress Karamanoğlu İbrahim (d.1454), the Hungarian king got together with a number of *beys* burned Alacahisar, destroying it. Murād II gathered the Anatolian and Rumelian armies and set out against the damn Hungarian ruler (*qirāl-i Unkurūs-i la'im*), crossing the Danube at Vidin. Besides some other interesting details in the Story XI, what is related to the quotation is very briefly Murād II's glorious victory in this battle. And this is what compelled Idrīs to quote Abū Tammām's verse as the last line of the Story XI.<sup>10</sup>

Returning to Abū Tammām, I notice Idrīs' attempt to admire Murād II. As a metaphor for the victory of the Ottomans, the quotation draws a mythic resembling between Murād II's victory at Alacahisar and the important Islamic victory at Amorium. Reading Idrīs' quotation in light of Abū Tammām's ode illustrates the intend of Idrīs in the mythmaking of Murād II's victory.

Also, the quotation memorializes the Ottoman military campaign against the Christians (*kuffār*) not only by recounting the historical details, but also by casting the campaign in classical Arabic verse to show Murād II's Islamic agency and divine vengeance.

9 See Bidlīsī, *Hašt Bibišt*, Esad Efendi 2199, fol. 339r.

10 For other Ottoman references to the present battle of Murād II, see for instance *Gazavât-ı Sultân Murād b. Mehmed Hân*, eds. Halil İnalçık and Mevlûd Oğuz (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1989), p. 33ff.

By using the word *al-nasab* ‘lineage’, Idrīs possibly invokes the Ottoman claims to the caliphate, and establish a kinship between the reign of Murād II and the Abbasid caliphate and beyond, that is, the age of the Prophet. The existence of the word *Badr* do possibly lead to this conclusion. The Battle of Badr (also known as *Badr al-Kubrā*) was the Prophet’s first victorious battle which has been passed down in Islamic history as a decisive victory attributed to divine intervention. According to Abū Tammām, al-Mu‘tašim’s victory was also his most important victory (*fath al-futūḥ*, verses 11-24). Based on this well-known metaphorical reference to the links between God and the Prophet/sultan used by several Arab poets,<sup>11</sup> Idrīs probably considered Murād II’s victory as the beginning of his important victories over the infidels. It is interesting that according to Idrīs, in his last prose descriptions of Story XI, Murād II considered this victory as “a gift from God” (*ni‘mat-i ilāhī*). If so, the effect of Idrīs’ quotation is also to identify Islam with the Ottomans. He exploits the conceptual and rhetorical possibilities of the quotation to transform Murād II’s victory into a declaration of Ottoman legitimacy.

### Conclusion

What is mentioned here may appear to be only a stating of unnecessary details. It may even be difficult at first glance to see how any problem could arise over the interpretation of data obtained in this fashion. Nevertheless, it is the opinion of this writer that the careless use of quotations to establish translations or critical editions of the *Hašt Bihišt* sometimes renders inaccurate studies. Admittedly, we cannot easily define a base text in terms of quotations and their critical edition. As the first step, however, it is wise to give the priority to Esad Efendi 2199. Despite the great importance of the Nuruosmaniye 3209, it seems that one should be a little cautious in dealing with it.

We have a good knowledge of the whole *Hašt Bihišt*. Regardless of the important details that mentioned in this chronicle and not in other Ottoman chronicles, we know what Idrīs discussed in general. But details are also significant, and they should not be neglected. It is hard to understand classical Arabic quotations. They are not helpful in making the *Hašt Bihišt* more interesting for us. But they offer second voices that reflect Idrīs’ claims and thoughts.

<sup>11</sup> Compare for instance the “Ode on the Conquest of Acre” by the Mamluk poet Šihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Ḥalabī (d. 1325) who used the same words and metaphor to praise Mamluk victory over the infidels: Yūsuf ibn Taḡrī Ḡamāl al-Dīn Abu l-Maḥāsīn, *al-Manhal al-Šāfi wa l-Mustawfi ba’d al-Wāfi*, ed. Nabil Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, vol. V (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 2003), p. 272.

On the whole, when deciphering of a very difficult text is involved, it is wise that a closer look at the quotations can be suggested. In his Book VI, Idrīs exploited very wisely and intelligently in reproducing quotations. Every quotation has a purpose and history. Correctly understanding the history of these quotations can be considered as one of the ways to understand the sophisticated concepts and style of Idrīs.

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