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VOLUME 34

The Epistle on Conduct and Wisdom

رسالة يتضمن آداب وحكمة



An assembly listens to a sermon at Rayy. The scene belongs to the Maqāmāt narrative.

Maxims, poems and anecdotes from a medieval Arabic compilation

ARABIC-ENGLISH COLLECTION Text · Translation · Commentary

Reading guide

The English text, commentary and sources are brought together in the first part. Documentary reproductions appear at the end of the volume. Historical illustrations accompany the text.

Part One · English 3

Part Two · Arabic text 18

Appendix · Facsimiles 27

Arabic quotations needed for the commentary remain beside their explanations. The continuous Arabic transcription follows in a separate part.

References to editions and manuscripts have been retained. Contents-page references and internal links point to the new pagination.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

About the text

Dating

639 AH, or 1241-1242 CE: the date of the copy. The date of composition remains unknown.

Origin and preservation

British Library, Oriental Manuscripts collection, Add MS 7473, ff. 31v-33r, now accessible through the Qatar Digital Library. The copyist inserted the epistle between two treatises.

Summary

An anonymous compiler brings together good conduct, faith and friendship. He invokes a verse on the distribution of sustenance, sets prudence beside generosity, then quotes poets and men of letters from the Abbasid period. The catalogue record and colophon give this small collection two different names.

Arabic · p. 18 English · p. 4 Nuances · p. 11 Sources · p. 16

PART ONE

English translation

الترجمة الإنجليزية

01 · Religious conduct and friendship · f. 31v

In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful. It is His help I seek. Good conduct in religion comes before religion. Whoever has no rule of conduct has no religion. The noblest wealth is to renounce vain wishes. Whoever knows the reversals of days does not neglect to prepare for them.

Avarice is the cloak of poverty. Nobility of character is fidelity. Friendship is a kinship one acquires. Trusting before testing someone is the opposite of prudence. Groundless accusations breed the first estrangements. Do not trust someone who soon grows weary, even if he adorns himself with the outward signs of attachment.

Flashing lightning offers no lasting help to someone crossing darkness. A penniless man who maintains ties is better than a rich man who neglects you. Losing a trustworthy brother is like losing a limb. Exhortation is a refuge for those who retain it. A man's admiration for himself is one of the envious enemies of his reason.

Whoever lets his gaze wander multiplies his regrets. Whoever loves without knowing merely toys with himself. Whoever restrains desire preserves his dignity. Youth's impetuosity is born of idleness. Discord ruins judgement. The power to act makes resentment forgotten. Whoever obtains what he wants grows haughty. Reversals of fortune reveal what men are made of.

02 · Counsel and the testing of ties · f. 32r

Doing harm invites hatred. Passion is an enemy one follows. Religious law protects those who master it. Reason is a friend one neglects. Whoever rides forbidden paths is close to stumbling. Envying one's friend betrays a sick friendship. Your wish seldom keeps its word. It is beneath the glitter of desires that minds most often stumble.

Your companion is prudence, which gives you contentment [uncertain reading]. Bereft of help is the man whom need drives to seek favours from others. No gift equals mutual aid. Estrangement is punished by hardness of heart. Humility clothes those who wear it in affection at every encounter [uncertain reading]. Prudence is to pause before a doubtful situation. Let a welcoming face suffice to soothe even a hostile man.

Fate arrives ahead of precaution. Son of Adam, you are the target of life's vicissitudes. Eternity itself flows through today and tomorrow. Your yesterday has passed; tomorrow belongs to another [probable meaning]. Many perish before their day is done. The heart is held in pledge; it is freed by ceasing to covet. Generosity of character holds treasures of sustenance. Guard your soul against despair and expect good from your Lord. What you thought hard to obtain for your livelihood will become easy.

Misfortunes are shared equally among creatures. Reversals still lie ahead, yet they are already almost here. Death lies in wait. [A maxim of uncertain reading beginning ‘Whoever praises you…’.] Among generosity's noblest traits is to overlook what you know. Swallowing the bitterness of self-restraint extinguishes anger's fire. Those held back by good manners are raised up by the success God grants. A skilful approach is better than influential support. It takes a man of judgement for you to learn to correct some of your actions [uncertain meaning]. The sting of bloodletting costs you less than letting an opportunity pass.



A session in a library. Several readers follow an explanation together.
Yaḥyā al-Wāsiṭī, al-Ḥarīrī's Maqāmāt, Baghdad, 1236-1237. Paris, BnF, Arabe 5847, f. 5v.

03 · Sustenance and others' opinions · f. 32r

Everyone wishes to obtain more, yet remains satisfied with his intelligence. A reasonable man questions his own judgement and places little trust in his soul's suggestions. The ignorant man does not know his failings and will not accept the advice of those who wish him well. A man's faults are hidden from him. If he knew what others thought of them, how great his regrets would be!

Through the measured shares of sustenance that God, great and mighty, distributes to His servants, the world finds balance and earthly life becomes possible for its inhabitants. 'If God gave His servants abundant sustenance, they would commit excesses on earth.' People would have no need of one another, livelihoods would unravel and mutual services would end. [Uncertain reading.] Watch each breath you take: a guardian counts them [what follows is obscure].

[Words of uncertain reading about human ailments and bodily care.] Whoever lets his soul do all it loves is denied his rightful share of rest by it, and that rest recedes from him. [A sentence of uncertain reading about the free man and what he keeps secret.] Whoever adorns himself with contentment comes to savour dignity preserved. Do not covet everything you hear about. [An uncertain sentence contrasting ease and difficulty.] Cover your brother's fault, since you know what lies within yourself.

The person most deserving of contentment is the one who knows the world's shortcomings. Earthly needs exhaust strength and bodies. Whoever receives contentment also gains respect. How modesty can undermine fine qualities, and how it can embellish faults [uncertain reading]! Good character is the finest companion; good upbringing the finest support. Whoever lacks intelligence has no fortune. No poverty is harsher than ignorance, no support surer than consultation. Better to remain obscure than enjoy an ill reputation. Self-respect is the foundation of noble character. Haste is the sister of regret. Excessive reserve brings estrangement. Those who know how to be self-sufficient are esteemed by their own people.

04 · Forgiving, consulting, visiting brothers · f. 32v

Whoever clings exclusively to his own opinion stays far from sound judgement. Whoever delights in his own opinion consults no one, and whoever consults no one never stops stumbling. The self-admiring have no judgement; the proud have no friend. Speak well and you will benefit, or remain silent and be safe. No advantage exceeds success granted by God. Whoever faces events sees them; whoever turns his back remains bewildered. Not all who seek find, and not all who guard against danger escape it.

A distant man may be closer than someone near. The worst baseness is to abuse one's strength when holding power. Better estrangement from a wise man than company with an ignorant one. How close punishment is to wrongdoers! The foundation of religion is firm conviction. Complete sincerity consists in avoiding disobedience. Ask about the companion before

the journey, about the neighbour before the house. Accept the excuse of someone who comes to offer it [what follows is uncertain]. Heed your brother even if he refuses to listen to you, and keep visiting those who treat you coldly.

Accustom your soul to generosity and to the noblest in every trait of character. What a fine remedy for worry is full conviction! There is no good in a pleasure that leaves regret. The reasonable man is one whom experience teaches. At the end of sins lies ruin. The evildoer is dead, though he dwells among the living. The doer of good is alive, though he dwells among the dead. Surround yourself with sincere brothers. They are your adornment in ease and your resource in trial.

Do not make yourself anyone's enemy. You will always meet either a shrewd opponent or an ignorant one. Beware the first man's cunning and the second's harmfulness. Two qualities encompass all generosity: doing others justice at one's own expense, and helping one's brothers from one's own possessions. A believer's dignity is to have no need of other people. Contentment is inexhaustible wealth. Men worthy of the name are scholars and those who provide for others' needs. The true kings are ascetics. The lowly are those who live at the expense of their religion.

05 · What can be done today · ff. 32v-33r

I have not congratulated myself on a success if I was careless at the outset, nor blamed myself for a setback if I acted prudently. No day begins with its outcome known. A man may await a tomorrow he will never reach. Take revenge on your covetousness by being content with what you have, as you take revenge on an adversary by seeking redress.

A man deserves praise and glory only after putting others before himself, fighting desire and curbing his wrath through self-restraint. Make reason the guardian of your qualities; it will tell you how to act. Then look at what you praise in others and adopt it, and what you blame in another and reject it for yourself. Do not grow comfortable with someone who sees your faults and

keeps silent about them [uncertain reading], for that ease accustoms you to repeating them.

Inherited nobility lasts only for those who build an equal nobility upon it [the sentence's ending is uncertain]. The wise should honour what was right in their conduct without taking pride in an opinion they once held [probable meaning]. Thank those who pointed out your faults when they spoke truly. Humility, graciousness [uncertain reading] and affection towards others were recommended. [A few obscure words.] It was also said that doing fine deeds becomes a habit.

Whoever disputes excessively wrongs others; whoever does too little is wronged; whoever devotes himself to quarrelling cannot fear God as he should. Our remaining time narrows and breath is close to ceasing. You live only on what remains of it. Make haste: the matter comes faster than the blink of an eye. Let an opportunity pass when you could seize it, and regret tears you apart [uncertain ending]. Those who do not hear the warnings of God, blessed and most high, will gain little from seeking a sage's exhortation. Whoever fails to recognise the beauty of what he has received does not know what deserves his gratitude. Whoever does not understand that God, great and mighty, also gives by withholding fails to recognise His gifts.

06 · Two poems, an anecdote and a letter · f. 33r

If one day your soul demands a pleasure that opens the path to evil, leave it and oppose what it desires. Its passion is the enemy, and resisting it is a friend.

Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan had a friend who had known hardship. Entrusted with an office, he grew rich, then left his post. Muḥammad came to greet him and found him changed. He wrote him these verses: ‘If the world has brought you wealth, and today you live in ease after hardship, your enrichment has revealed in you traits of baseness that poverty kept beneath its veil.’

Bearing patiently with a brother against whom one has some grievance is better than starting a friendship anew with another. ‘Giving to no one satisfies everyone more.’ The author of this saying did not mean to advocate avarice. He had in mind someone unwilling to favour any one person [uncertain reading]. A similar remark is attributed to al-Aṣmaʿī: ‘If I divided a thousand dirhams among people, more would blame me than if I had taken that sum from them.’

Sahl ibn Hārūn ibn Rāhibūn, al-Maʾmūn's secretary, was a distinguished writer, poet and orator. His books attest to his eloquence and wisdom. Among other works, he wrote ʿAfra and Thaʿla, intended to rival Kalīla and Dimna. He also composed a book of many merits on al-Maʾmūn's life and wrote much poetry. He penned an epistle praising avarice and preferring it to generosity. The height of eloquence is to make falsehood pass for truth and truth for falsehood through beautiful words and well-chosen thoughts. He said, ‘Better to congratulate someone on the reward to come than offer condolences for present misfortune.’

Al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabīʿ wrote to al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl: ‘If men of heart aspire to worldly goods, it is to have the means to perform noble deeds and render services. I hope your desire to do so will match the benefits you enjoy.’

Here end, through the help and kindness of God most high, the selections of belles-lettres with their supplements. ‘There is no god but Him. Take Him, then, as your guarantor.’ Next comes the treatise of al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl ibn al-Šamḫ ibn Ġālib on the various kinds of information reported by a multitude of people: those to be denied credence, those to be believed and those on which judgement must be suspended.

NOTES AND SOURCES

Translation nuances and explanations

وجوه المعنى والبيان

01 · Religious conduct and friendship · f. 31v

أدب الدين

Adab encompasses upbringing, manners and moral discipline. ‘The conduct religion requires’ would clarify the relationship between the two terms.

مستفادة

‘Acquired’ gives friendship the strength of a bond that birth did not supply.

وصول / جاف

The first adjective means continuing to visit and help one's kin. The second signals distance, even harshness.

الحفيظة

‘Resentment’ or ‘anger born of wounded pride’. The ability to retaliate may dispel this resentment.

Return to the Arabic · Return to the translation

02 · Counsel and the testing of ties · f. 32r

الهوى

Passion or inclination. The paradox of an ‘enemy one follows’ arises from choosing to obey it.

الشبهة

What admits of doubt. The expression may concern a moral decision or a situation whose lawfulness remains uncertain.

التوفيق

A favourable outcome or success made possible by God. The term can be understood in either register.

الفصد

Opening a vein for bloodletting. The proverb contrasts a painful intervention with the cost of lost time.

صديق منقطع

A friend one neglects or cuts oneself off from. Al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's parallel maxim says ‘a neglected friend’, contrasting with passion, ‘an enemy one follows’.

Return to the Arabic · Return to the translation

03 · Sustenance and others' opinions · f. 32r

الأرزاق

The shares of sustenance allotted to each person. ‘Income’ would poorly convey the author's emphasis on their distribution by God.

التسخير

Putting an activity or creature at the service of another. The passage evokes human interdependence.

المروءة

The ideal of dignified, generous and honourable conduct. ‘Honour’ covers part of its meaning.

ستر

To cover, veil or keep to oneself. The advice makes awareness of one's own faults a reason for discretion towards others.

Return to the Arabic · Return to the translation

04 · Forgiving, consulting, visiting brothers · f. 32v

رُبّ بعيد

‘A distant person’ or ‘many distant people’. The maxim contrasts someone living far away with someone intimately close to you.

صحّة اليقين

‘Sound’ or ‘firm’ conviction. The adjective suggests a tested inner quality.

المعاصي

Acts of disobedience towards God, commonly ‘sins’.

يأكل بدينه

Literally ‘eats through his religion’. The expression targets those who make a living from ostentatious piety.

Return to the Arabic · Return to the translation

05 · What can be done today · ff. 32v-33r

الإيثار

Giving others preference, even when it means depriving oneself.

الحلم

Self-restraint, especially when one might give way to anger.

الخصومة

A quarrel, adversarial debate or lawsuit. Without vowels, ẓalama and ẓulima are written identically, but contrast the wrongdoer with the victim.

المنع

To refuse, withhold, deprive. The term gains a devotional sense when the compiler sees even deprivation as a possible form of divine giving.

Return to the Arabic · Return to the translation

06 · Two poems, an anecdote and a letter · f. 33r

النفس / الهوى

The soul, or the self demanding satisfaction. Here hawā means the inclination the verse presents as its enemy.

الصنائع

Services rendered, favours or benefits. The letter concerns the use a generous man may make of his wealth.

الملح

‘Selections’, witty observations or sayings. This closing name is more literary than the opening rubric's title.

وكيلاً

‘Guarantor’ or ‘protector in whom to trust’. The colophon echoes Quran 73:9 from ‘There is no god but Him’ onwards.

Return to the Arabic · Return to the translation

Understanding the manuscript

The four manuscript images were read directly. The text begins on 31v after the end of Sinān ibn Thābit's treatise. The next treatise is announced at the end of the colophon. The six divisions, punctuation and reading orthography are editorial.

Several passages on both sides of f. 32 are difficult to decipher. The [؟] marks an uncertain reading. Other brackets indicate a restoration or explain a difficulty. Gaps in interpretation remain in the translation.

On f. 32r, the quotation of Quran 42:27 ends at ‘on earth’. The following sentences on work and mutual need are the compiler's commentary. The colophon also echoes the end of Quran 73:9.

Early parallels illuminate several sayings. The statement about prudence before success or failure also occurs in al-Ḫarā’iṭī's Makārim al-aḫlāq. Ibn

Qutayba also reports al-Aṣmaʿī's remark about dirhams, but his version gives a larger sum. These parallels do not establish that their authors composed the entire compilation.

The rubric's title bears يتضمن and two nouns with no written endings. The closing words read ‘selections of belles-lettres and their supplements’. Searches by title, shelfmark and incipit lead to manuscript records. No commercial edition of this exact arrangement has been identified. Several individual maxims circulate elsewhere.

REFERENCES

Sources and illustrations

Read the witness and its records

Qatar Digital Library / British Library, Add MS 7473, ff. 31v-33r: compilation record and colophon.

Facsimile of folio 31v.

Facsimile of folio 32r.

Facsimile of folio 32v.

Facsimile of folio 33r.

Ibn Qutayba, ʿUyūn al-aḫbār. Parallel to al-Aṣmaʿī's saying.

Al-Ḫarāʾiṭī, Makārim al-aḫlāq, chapter on prudence: a parallel saying.

Al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī, Muḥāḍarāt al-udabāʾ. Parallel to the maxim on reason and passion.

Image credits

Arabic part · passage 1. British Library, Add MS 7473, f. 31v, detail. Qatar Digital Library, public domain.

Arabic part · passage 2. British Library, Add MS 7473, f. 32r, detail. Qatar Digital Library, public domain.

Arabic part · passage 3. British Library, Add MS 7473, f. 32r, detail. Qatar Digital Library, public domain.

Arabic part · passage 4. British Library, Add MS 7473, f. 32v, detail. Qatar Digital Library, public domain.

Arabic part · passage 5. British Library, Add MS 7473, f. 32v, detail. Qatar Digital Library, public domain.

Arabic part · passage 6. British Library, Add MS 7473, f. 33r, detail. Qatar Digital Library, public domain.

Cover. Al-Wāsiṭī, al-Ḥarīrī's Maqāmāt, 1236-1237. Paris, BnF, Arabe 5847, ff. 58v-59r.

Translation · passage 2. Yaḥyā al-Wāsiṭī, al-Ḥarīrī's Maqāmāt, Baghdad, 1236-1237. Paris, BnF, Arabe 5847, f. 5v.

PART TWO

Original Arabic text
النص العربي

The complete anonymous epistle, from its rubric to the colophon and announcement of the next piece. The translation conveys the discernible meaning of every passage. Several statements in the copy remain uncertain in reading or interpretation.

01 · Religious conduct and friendship · f. 31v

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم وبه أستعين. أدب الدين قبل الدين. من لا أدب له لا دين له. أشرف الغنى ترك المنى. من عرف تصرّف الأيام لم يغفل الاستعداد.

البخل جلباب المسكنة. حسب الخلائق الوفا. المودّة قرابة مستفادة. الطمأنينة قبل الخبرة ضدّ الحزم. التجنّي أوّل مولّد للقطيعة. لا تأمن ملولاً وإن تحلّى بالصلة.

ليس في البرق اللامع مستمتع لمن يخوض الظلمة. وصول معدم خير من جاف مكثر. فقد الثقة من إخوانك قطع عضو من أعضائك. الموعظة كهف لمن عاها. عجب المرء بنفسه أحد حسّاد عقله.

من أطلق طرفه كثر أسفه. من أحبّ ولا يعرف فإنما يمازح نفسه. من حصّن شهوته صان قدره. مع الفراغ تكون الصبوة. الخلاف يهدم الرأي. القدرة تنسي الحفيظة. من نال استطال. في تقلّب الأحوال معرفة جواهر الرجال.

02 · Counsel and the testing of ties · f. 32r

الأذى يجلب القِلى، والهوى عدوّ متبوع. الشرع عصمة من اتّقنه. العقل صديق منقطع. راكب المحارم مشرف على الكبوة. الحسد للصديق من سقم المودّة. قلّما تصدقك الأمنية. أكثر مصارع العقول تحت بروق المطامع.

أخوك الحزم المتحف بالقناعة [؟]. المخذول من قادته إلى الناس حاجته. لا بذل أعظم قدراً من المساعدة. الهجران يكسب عقوبة القسوة. التواضع يكسو المحبة في كل طرفة حضرة [؟]. الحزم الوقوف عند الشبهة. حسب البشر سكون البغيض.

يجيء القدر فيسبق الحذر. ابن آدم غرض الدول. مدّة الأبد تمضي باليوم وغد. مضى أمسك ومضى غدا لغيرك [؟]، وربّ هالك قبل انقضاء يومه. القلب رهين وفكاكه ترك الطمع. في سعة الأخلاق كنوز الأرزاق. احم نفسك القنوط وأحسن الظنّ بربك يسهل لك ما استصعبت من رزقك.

المصائب مقسومة بالسوية بين البرية، ودول منتظرات، وكأن قد. الموت كامن بالرصد. من زكّاك لآفاله [؟] عند ورود آكافه [؟]. من أشرف خصال الكرم غفلتك عمّا تعلم. يجرّع مضض الحلم تطفئ نار الغضب. من يقعد به حسن أدبه نهض به التوفيق. اللطافة في الحيلة أجدى من الوسيلة. لا بدّ من حازم حتى تذمّ بعض ما تعمل [؟]. حرّ الفصد أخفّ عليك [من] الفوت.

03 · Sustenance and others' opinions · f. 32r

كلّ الناس مستزيد وراض عن عقله، والعاقل من اتّهم رأيه ولم يثق بما سوّلت له نفسه. والجاهل لا يعرف تقصيره ولا يقبل ممّن النصح له. المنقوص مستور عنه نقصه، ولو عرف رأي غيره عليه لعظمت حسراته.

بتقدير اقسام الله جلّ وعزّ لعباده في الأرزاق اعتدل وزن العالم وتمّت هذه الدنيا لأهلها. «ولو بسط الله الرزق لعباده لبغوا في الأرض»، واستغنى بعضهم عن بعض وفسد المعاش وبطل

التسخير. دينك [؟] جلّها وقلّ الذي أتات منه، وانظر كلّ أنفاسك، وعليها رقيب يحصيها الأبعاد والشهوات [؟].

أعظم أدواء الإنسان وأكثر علاجها للجسم [؟]. من سامح نفسه فيما تحبّ منعته الحظّ من راحته، وبَعُد حظّه من الراحة. الحرّ يصبر سرَّه بما لا تسل [كذا] أسوة. من تحلّى بالقناعة فقد استحلى الصيانة. لا تطمع في كلّ ما تسمع. ليس يسرٌ يقوم العسير [؟]. استر سوء أخيك لما تعلم فيك.

أحقّ الناس بالرضا من عرف نقص الدنيا. حوائج الدنيا تنهك القوى والأبدان. من رُزق القناعة صحبته المهابة. ما أضرّ الحياء بالمحاسن وأزينه للمساوئ [؟]. حسن الخلق خير قرين، والأدب خير معين. لا مال لمن عدم العقل، ولا فقر أشدّ من جهل، ولا ظهير أوثق من مشورة. خمول الذكر أسنى من الذكر الذميم. الصيانة رأس المروءة. العجلة أخت الندامة. الانقباض يكسب القطيعة. من استغنى كرم على أهله.

من استبدّ برأيه كان من الصواب بعيداً. من أُعجب برأيه لم يشاور، ومن لم يشاور فهواً الدهر عاثر [كذا]. ليس لمعجب رأي ولا لمتكبّر صديق. قل خيراً تغنم أو فاسكت تسلم. لا فائدة أفضل من التوفيق. من استقبل الأمور أبصر، ومن استدبرها تحيّر. ليس كلّ من طلب وجد، ولا كلّ من توقّى نجا.

رُبّ بعيد أقرب من قريب. ألأم اللؤم البغي عند القدرة. قطيعة العاقل خير من صلة الجاهل. ما أقرب النقمة من أهل البغي. رأس الدين صحّة اليقين. تمام الإخلاص اجتناب المعاصي. سل عن الرفيق قبل الطريق، وعن الجار قبل الدار. اقبل عذر من اعتذر إليك دامّ إن حاجته إليك [؟]. أطع [أخاك] وإن عصاك، وصِلْه إن جفاك.

عوّد نفسك السخا، وعوّدها من كلّ خلق أكرمه. نعم الطارد للهمّ اليقين. لا خير في لذّة تُعقب ندماً. العاقل من وعظته التجارب. عاقبة الذنوب العَطَبة. المسيء ميّت وإن كان في منازل الأحياء، والمحسن حيّ وإن كان في منازل الأموات. عليك بإخوان الصدق فإنهم زينة في الرخا وعدّة في البلا.

لا تعادينّ أحداً، فإنك لن تخلو من عدوّ عاقل وجاهل، فاحذر حيلة العاقل وشرّ الجاهل. خصلتان تجمعان الكرم، إنصاف الناس من نفسك ومواساة الإخوان من مالك. عزّ المؤمن غناه عن الناس. القناعة مال لا ينفد. الناس أهل العلم ومن يقضي حوائج الناس، والملوك الزهّاد، والسفلة من يأكل بدينه.

05 · What can be done today · ff. 32v-33r

ما حمدت نفسي على ظفر ابتدأته بعجز، ولا لمتها في مكروه [ابتدأته بحزم]. لم يستقبل يوماً لا يجهله، ومنتظر غداً لا يبلغه [انتقم] من حرصك بالقنوع، كما تنتقم من عدوّك بالقصاص.

لا يستحقّ الرجل الثناء والمجد إلا بعد الإيثار على نفسه، ومغالبة الشهوة وكظم الغيظ بالحلم. اجعل عقلك أمينك على خصالك ليعرّفك ما تعمل به، ثم انظر ما تحمده من غيرك فأقبله، وما تذمّه من سواك فلا ترضه. ولا تأنس بمن لحق من عيوبك ولم ينتشر عنك [؟]، فإن آنسَك بذلك ضراوة على المعاودة.

إنّما يبقى الشرف الأوّل لمن بنا فوقه مثله وصفح صفحاً وجلاً [؟]. فيما للعاقل أن لا ترى الاحتقار لصواب كان منه، ولا المباهاة برأي رآه [؟]. ويوجب شكر من نبّهه على عيوبه إذا كان محقّاً، وكان يحبّ للتواضع ويأمر بالمشاشة [؟]، ويحضّ على الودّ للناس ولا لحضر عدد الأماحب [؟]، ويقول فعل الحسنات عادة.

من بالغ في الخصومة ظلم، ومن قصّر فيها ظُلم، ولا يستطيع أن يتّقي الله من خاصم. قد ضاقت بنا الأوقات وقرب انقطاع الأنفاس، وإنما أنتم في بقايا فبادروا فالأمر أسرع من طرف الجفن. من لم ينتهز الفرصة في وقت الإمكان قطعته الندم في وقت الوجود [؟]. من عدم الفهم عن الله تبارك وتعالى فيما وعظه لم يُجْدِه مستجلب موعظة حكيم. من لم يعرف حسن ما أوتي جهل موضع الشكر. من لم يفهم أن من عطايا الله عزّ وجلّ المنع فهو جاهل بعطائه.

06 · Two poems, an anecdote and a letter · f. 33r

إذا طالبتك النفس يوماً بشهوةٍ / وكان عليها للقبيح طريقُ، فدعها وخالف ما اشتهته فإنّما / هواها العدوّ والخلاف صديقُ.

كان لمحمد بن الحسن صديق نالته إضاقة، ثم ولّي عملاً فأثرى وانصرف منه، فقصده محمد مسلّماً عليه فرأى منه تغيّراً فكتب إليه: لئن كانت الدنيا أنالتك ثروةً / فأصبحت ذا أَيسرٍ وقد كنت ذا

أعسرِ، لقد كشف الإثراء منك خلائقاً / من اللؤم كانت تحت ستر من الفقرِ.

الصبر على أخ تعتب عليه خير من أخ تستأنف مودّته. منع الجميع أرضى للجميع، ولم يرد قائله به البخل وإنما أراد إن أُعدب عليه [؟] إن لم يحبّ أن يخصّ. ونحو هذا ما حُكي عن الأصمعي أنه كان يقول: لو قسمت في الناس ألف درهم كان أكثر للائمِي من لو أخذتها منهم.

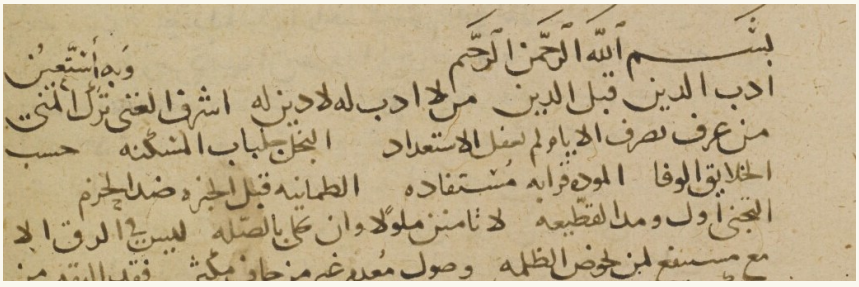
وكان سهل بن هارون بن راهبون الكاتب المأمونيّ. كاتباً شاعراً بليغاً، وله كتب تدلّ على بلاغته وحكمته، فيها كتاب سمّيه عفرة وثعلة يعارض به كتاب كليلة ودمنة. وله كتاب في وصف سيرة المأمون كثير المحاسن، وله شعر كثير. وعمل رسالة مدح فيها البخل وفضّله على السخا، وهو من غاية البلاغة أن يجعل الباطل حقّاً والحقّ باطلاً لحسن الألفاظ وتخيّر المعاني. وكان يقول: التهنئة على آجل الثواب أولى من التعزية على عاجل المصيبة.

كتب الفضل بن الربيع إلى الحسن ابن سهل: إنما يرغب في الدنيا الكرام للقدرة على اكتساب المكارم واتخاذ الصنائع، وأرجو أن يكون رغبتك في ذلك على قدر النعمة عليك.

تمّت المُلَح الأدابية ولواحقها بمعونة الله تعالى ولطفه. لا إله إلا هو فاتّخذه وكيلاً. يتلو ذلك مقالة الحسن بن سهل بن الشمخ بن غالب في أصناف الأخبار التي يخبر بها كثرة، أيّها يجب العدول عن

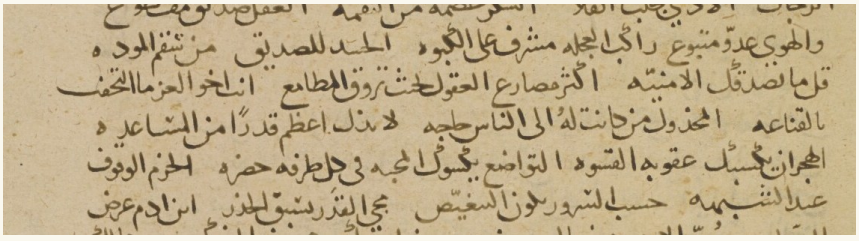
التصديق به، وأيّها يجب التصديق به، وأيّها يجب أن يتوقّف عن التصديق به.

The Epistle on Conduct and Wisdom



The opening invocation and first sayings. British Library, Add MS 7473, f. 31v, detail. Qatar Digital Library, public domain.

The Epistle on Conduct and Wisdom



Several sayings follow one another on a single line. British Library, Add MS 7473, f. 32r, detail. Qatar Digital Library, public domain.

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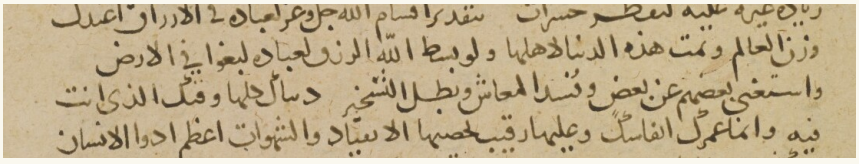

The verse on sustenance and its commentary. British Library, Add MS 7473, f. 32r, detail. Qatar Digital Library, public domain.

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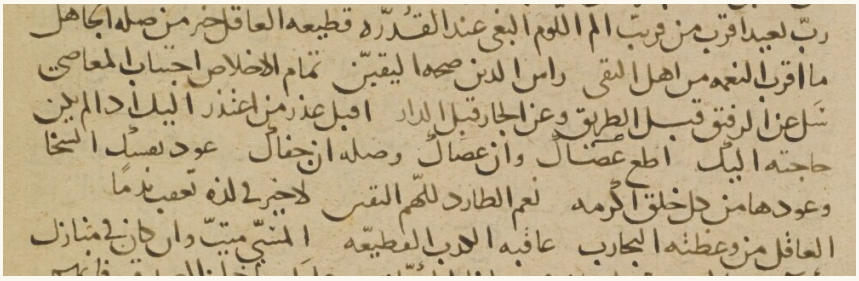

Advice on neighbours and forgiveness. British Library, Add MS 7473, f. 32v, detail. Qatar Digital Library, public domain.

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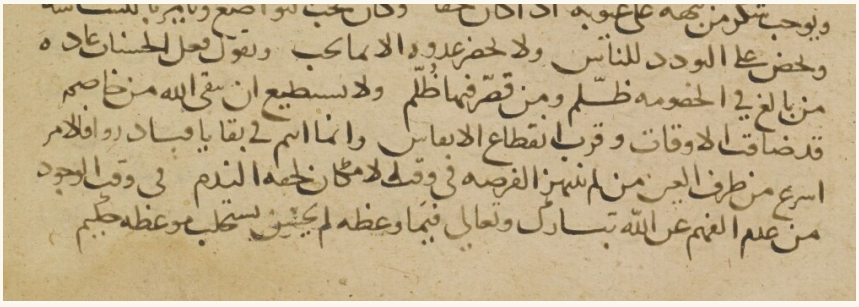
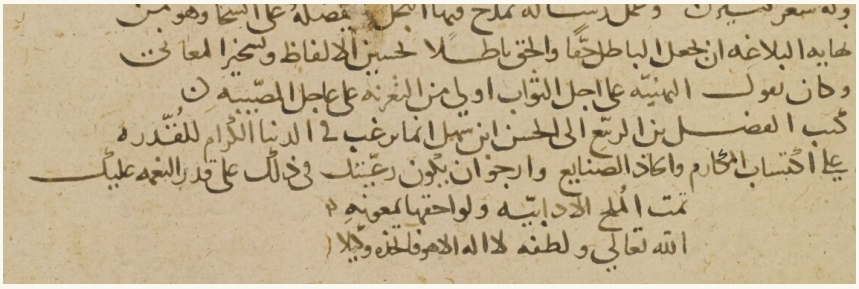


Sayings on disputes and passing time. British Library, Add MS 7473, f. 32v, detail. Qatar Digital Library, public domain.

The Epistle on Conduct and Wisdom



The letter's ending and closing formula. British Library, Add MS 7473, f. 33r, detail. Qatar Digital Library, public domain.