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**Falconry in Muslim Countries during the Tenth Century
in the Light of Murūğ ad-dahab by Al-Mas'ūdī***

The roots of the development of Arabian literary, religious, historical and scientific prose date back to the second half of the eighth century, i.e. the beginnings of the Umayyad dynasty. A significant intellectual revival, however, did not take place until the 'Abbāsīd dynasty and the impact of contacts between Arabian scholars with Hellenistic scientific centres in Syria, Iraq and Egypt. An essential influence was also exerted by growing familiarity with Persian scientific tradition. Initially, scientific and philosophical works were brought in from assorted countries and translated into Arabic, first with the intermediary of the Syrian language, and then directly from Greek. This procedure provided a base for the development of original Arabian scientific and philosophical accomplishments. The first centuries of the rule of the Abbasids witnessed a final emergence of all forms of Arabic prose.

One of the most original examples of medieval Arabic literature was the *adab* prose,¹ whose purpose was to educate and instruct the reader. The prime domain of its interests were the humanities, and its goal was to raise the general cultural level of Arabian-Muslim society by supplying it with a certain sum of information with which an educated person of the period should be acquainted.

The most outstanding and interesting *adibs* (popularizers of knowledge) and

* In this article I based myself on a Parisian edition of this work, prepared in 1861–1877 by outstanding French orientalist: C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille. I have also made use of the second edition of *Golden Meadows*, published in 1962–1965 by Ch. Pellat who limited himself to only correcting the text proposed by Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille.

¹ Bielawski, 1968, pp. 146–147.

excellent narrators included Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī Ibn al-Ḥusayn Ibn 'Alī Al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/956) whose works revealed traits similar to the trend represented in the ninth century by Al-Ġāḥiẓ. Al-Mas'ūdī was born at the end of the ninth century in Baghdad. He probably spent most of his life in Basra, if we do not take into consideration his numerous sea and land voyages which sometimes lasted for years and took him far away from his home town. After such lengthy sea voyages to the coast and islands of the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean and perhaps even the Pacific, Al-Mas'ūdī returned to Muslim countries where he became engaged in putting into order and supplementing scientific material collected in the course of his travels. The exact date of this undertaking remains unknown since he subsequently made numerous trips to the lands of the Caliphate and sailed on the Mediterranean.

Al-Mas'ūdī was a keen observer, interested in people and Nature, and a large part of the information gathered by him is the outcome of his own investigations. He declared (Maṣoudī, I, 5; Al-Mas'ūdī, I, 2-3) that since he wished to become personally acquainted with that what is worthy of attention among all the peoples, and to see with his own eyes that what is characteristic for each continent, he travelled to As-Sind, Az-Zang (i.e. the coast of East Africa, from the Somali Peninsula in the north to Northern Mozambique in the south). He also reached Aṣ-Ṣanf², China (Arabic Aṣ-Ṣīn) and Az-Zabağ, in other words. Western Indonesia. Describing his other journeys, Al-Mas'ūdī mentioned that travelling from east to west he crossed many countries, from Ḥūrāsān to Armenia and neighbouring countries of Southern Caucasus; he also travelled across Iraq and Syria.

Apart from observations made during his journeys, Al-Mas'ūdī also collected information along the way, possibly even from the rulers of the localities where he stayed for longer stretches of time.³ Some of the information was obtained in Basra, which at the time was an extremely lively port. The author admitted that he questioned sailors, merchants and travellers whom he met there.⁴ Rarely does he cite the names of his interlocutors, and almost as a rule gives only the place of their origin. His quotations of oral information are much more detailed than those of written sources, whose authors are mentioned only in rare instances.

The work on the great historical-geographic opus commenced in 332/943. The author enclosed in it his entire literary erudition, and noted down his own

² This is the Arabic name of the kingdom of Čampa in present-day Vietnam.

³ In an introduction to *Golden Meadows* Al-Mas'ūdī wrote that "during those voyages we associated with various kings who differed as regards their customs... and the geographic location of their countries". He retained a critical attitude, concluding that "there one can meet only immature scholars, content with superficial reflection". See: Maṣoudī, I, 6; Al-Mas'ūdī, I, 3.

⁴ Al-Mas'ūdī lists: the sources of his information in: Maṣoudī, I, 233, pp. 251-252, p. 273, pp. 282-283, p. 387, III, 19, 32, IV, 64, 65, 68.

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3. pp. 251-252, p. 273.

observations as well as the enormous amount of information gathered from other sources. The resultant work was composed of thirty volumes and entitled: *Ahbār az-zamān* (*Histories of Times*). Simultaneously, Al-Mas'ūdī wrote a second, slightly abbreviated version to which he gave the title of *Kitāb al-awsāṭ* (*Middle Book*). Unfortunately, the two have not survived with the exception of small fragments whose authenticity has not been determined. Only the third, briefest extant version *Murūḡ ad-dahab wa-ma'ādin al-ḡawāhir* (*Golden Meadows and Precious Stone Mines*) has survived. The other extant text, entitled *Kitāb at-tanbih wa'l-iṣrāf* (*Book of Notices and Control*), is Al-Mas'ūdī's last work, written during the last year of his life and containing, alongside corrections of his previous texts and a multitude of new historical and geographic material, a review of his other works whose manuscripts have been lost in past centuries.

Murūḡ ad-dahab (written in 332/943) was revised by Al-Mas'ūdī on two occasions, in about 336/947 and in 345/956 (i.e. the year of his death). Next to historical chapters which comprise the main core of the book (about four-fifths of its contents) it includes chapters of an entirely different nature, mainly on geography. Longer or shorter digressions delve into various topics, predominantly the natural sciences but also ethnography. The historical part of the book is based chiefly on sources written in the ninth and tenth centuries by ancient, mainly Greek authors, and probably read in Arabic translations, as well as on original Arabic sources. Only exceptionally does Al-Mas'ūdī cite them in his text although in the first chapter of *Golden Meadows* he added their copious list to a presentation of his historical reading matter (Maṣoudī, I, 10-18; Al-Mas'ūdī, I, 4-8). Chapters with larger amounts of information concerning cosmography, geography and Nature (I have in mind specially chapters VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIV, XV, XVII, XXVI, XXXI, XXXIII and XXXV) are based to a lesser degree on written sources and more on information obtained from travellers and traders as well as the authors's own observations.

The various digressions, found basically (albeit not exclusively) in the opening chapters of *Murūḡ ad-dahab*, contain descriptions or only brief notes about scores of animals and plants, or certain plant and animal products. This information, in many cases original, deserves to be examined in greater detail. Although the first chapters of *Golden Meadows* have already stirred the interest of numerous scholars, the latter were mainly concerned with information about the peoples of Eastern Europe, including Western Slavs, Rus' and the Khazars⁵; physical geography, geology or medicine have been examined less frequently⁶, and the botanical and zoological knowledge of Al-Mas'ūdī has been ignored completely.

⁵ I have in mind here such scholars as M. Charmoy, *Relation de Masoudy et d'autres musulmans sur les anciens Slaves*, Petersburg 1843; J. Marquart, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge*, Leipzig 1903, or the later Polish scholars T. Kowalski and T. Lewicki.

⁶ The exception being the pioneer work by A. Czapkiewicz, *Al-Mas'ūdī on Balneology and Balneotherapeutica*, "Folia Orientalia" III 1, Kraków 1961-1962.

The 128 animals and animal products which I have discovered in *Golden Meadows* include reptiles, birds, mammals and insects, domesticated and wild animals, animals familiar to the population of the Caliphate as well as exotic and fantastic creatures. To some of them Al-Mas'ūdī paid considerable attention, others he discussed only briefly while still others he merely mentioned by name upon the occasion of addressing other topics.

In his presentation of birds, the author devoted most space to various types of eagles, falcons and hawks as well as other birds of prey used for hunting field and woodland game. This selection appears to be obvious since the chase was one of the most highly valued forms of entertainment, and falconry or the practice of hunting with other birds of prey, was particularly suitable for vast, nonpopulated spaces, the steppe or the desert.

Falconry, or rather the art of hunting with assorted birds of prey, was indubitably well known among Arabs prior to Islam, although at the time the employment of hunting dogs dominated. Already in his *Ayyām aṣ-ṣayd* Imrū' l-Qays (d. about 550 A.D.) depicted hunting scenes and the use of birds of prey.⁷ Not until the extensive Muslim conquests which brought the Arabs closer to Persians, the Turkic peoples and Byzantium, did this sport gain importance and gradually turn into the object of enthusiasm or even passion, a process which occurred not only among the privileged classes, as was the case in Christian culture⁸, but also among the rural and nomadic population. Hunting with trained birds of prey became particularly popular in the later period of the Caliphate, and during the Crusades it had already attained extraordinary perfection and was avidly pursued.⁹

Apparently, the first bird of prey used for the purposes of hunting was the hawk. Its Persian name *bāz*, which had reached already pre-Islamic Arabia, was applied to describe, probably due to ignorance, all birds of prey; thus, in the countries of the Caliphate the term *bayzara* - 'hunting with a hawk' signified hunting with birds of prey in general.¹⁰ A similar phenomenon took place in Europe where, in turn, the use of a falcon was dominant, and the term 'falconry', denoted, and still does, also hawking and the employment of other birds of prey.¹¹

Quite early on, *bayzara* became the theme of numerous treatises, the majority of which have either not survived or are awaiting to be discovered in some public or private collections in the East or Europe. Ibn an-Nadīm, the tenth-century

⁷ Viré, EI 2, I, 1960, p. 1186.

⁸ This topic is mentioned in reference to the Slavs by K. Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa Słowian* I, 1929, p. 32.

⁹ I refer here to the turbulent life history of Usāma Ibn Munqid, nephew of the ruler of Ṣayzār (a small fortress in northern Syria), which he wrote down at the end of the eleventh century in *Kitāb al-i'tibār*, devoting much space to falconry, 'Usamah, 1929.

¹⁰ Viré, EI 2, I, 1960, p. 1186.

¹¹ Gloger, IV, 1972, pp. 263-264; cf. also *Encyklopedia Powszechna*, X, 1967, p. 653.

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Baghdad bibliographer, recalled in his *Kitāb al-fihrist* (377/987-8)¹² tens of such treatises.

The oldest known¹³ treatise about falconry — the *Kitāb al-maṣāyid wa 'l-maṭārid*¹⁴ written by the poet Kuṣāğim (d. 961 or 971 A.D.) — is one of the works most frequently exploited by later authors of Arabic sources. Another extremely valuable work is the *Kitāb al-bayzara* by an anonymous falconer of the Fāṭimid caliph Al-'Azīz bi-Allāh (975-996 A.D.). We owe the publication of these treatises in 1953 to the Syrian scholar Kurd^c Alī, and their translation into French to François Viré.¹⁵

The Persian treatise *Bāz-nāma* by Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Aḥmad Nasawī (died in 1000 A.D.), a student of Ibn Sīnā, comes from a slightly later period, and was composed upon the basis of numerous earlier works by authors of assorted nationalities, basically, however, Persians.¹⁶

Much information can be found in works by Arabian historians, biographers and chroniclers who often cited anecdotes about the hunting exploits and adventures of various princes. Even more valuable is the information about falconry contained in *adab* works, such as *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* by Al-Ġāḥiẓ and *Murūğ ad-dahab* by Al-Mas^cūdī.

The knowledge about birds of prey disclosed by Al-Mas^cūdī is by no means systematic. The author offers little information about the capture of the birds or their training, topics which usually greatly interested authors of studies devoted to this branch of sport. Al-Mas^cūdī also did not confirm his information with a bibliography or directives as regards his sources of information. A knowledge of the travel routes followed by the author and an outline of his historical, geographic and natural reading matter, enables us, however, to surmise the origin of the information quoted by him. The only attempt at a systematic presentation of birds of prey is their division into species and types. Quoting ancient Greek sages Al-Mas^cūdī wrote (Maṣoudī, II, 281; Al-Mas^cūdī, II, 264): "Ancient Greek sages claimed that birds of prey [are divided into] a number of species which God made and distinguished into various categories and classes. There are four types and fourteen species. The four types include: *bāz* [the hawk, *Accipiter gentilis*], *ṣāhin* (the peregrine falcon, *Falco peregrinus*).¹⁷ *ṣaqr* (the lanneret, *Falco cherrug*) and *uqāb* [the eagle, *Aquila*]" . At this point, Al-Mas^cūdī referred to his *Middle*

¹² An-Nadīm, *Al-Fihrist*, 1971.

¹³ To make matters simpler, I shall use the term "falconry" throughout the article.

¹⁴ This treatise was published in 1954 in Baghdad by As'ad Ṭalas; cf. Viré, *El* 2, 1, 1960, 1886.

¹⁵ Viré, "Arabica", XII/1-XIII/1, 1965-1966.

¹⁶ *History of Iran*, IV, 1975, 405.

¹⁷ The author understood *bāz* both as a falcon and a peregrine. It is not surprising, therefore, that the translators of *Golden Meadows* propose either 'faucon' or 'autour'. The same holds true for *ṣaqr*, translated as 'gerfaut', 'aigle noir' or 'faucon sacré'.

Book in which, he declared, he gave a detailed description and cited everything which has been said on this subject. Unfortunately, as I have mentioned before, this work is non-extant.

The most valued of all birds of prey, according to Al-Mas'ūdī, was the white falcon (*Falco rusticolus*)¹⁸, a species captured in the Caspian Sea land of Ġurgān [ancient Hyrcania on the south-eastern coast of the Caspian Sea] (Maçoudī, II, 27; Al-Mas'ūdī, I, 168): "This sea contains also other islands (or peninsulas), located opposite the Ġurgān coastline where a certain type of white falcon is captured. This is the swiftest of [all] birds of prey, the most obedient in responding [to the voice of the falconer] and the least resistant as regards training". "This species, however, has a certain fault", the author goes on to say. "Due to the fact that the hunters who capture them on these islands feed the birds only on fish, the moment the diet is altered, the birds grow weak [or become ill]". The reaction of falcons to a change in food was also described during the eleventh century by Usāma Ibn Munqid, ¹⁹ who mentioned a group of falcons brought by his father from Constantinople: "His [Usāma's father's] retainers brought back with them what they considered a sufficient number of pigeons to feed the falcons they had, but owing to the rough seas, the voyage was prolonged until all provisions for the falcons were exhausted. They were then forced to feed the falcons on the meat of the fish, which so affected their wings that it made their feathers brittle and easy to break".

Information about the capture of falcons on the coast of the Caspian Sea is confirmed by the author of *Ḥudūd al-'ālam*, an anonymous Persian geographic work from 982 A.D.: "In the Caspian Sea there are two islands [...] There is another island on the sea but one of its corners joined to the land of Dihistan; it is called Dihistānān-sur, and on it are found a few people: hunters of falcons and pelicans, and fishermen".²⁰

Falcons are also listed by Al-Muqaddasī²¹ among the numerous commodities imported from Volga-Bulḡār with the intermediary of Huwārizm, described in *Aḥsan at-taqāsīm*, written in 375/985–986. The fact that mention is made about imports from Volga-Bulḡār does not mean that they were products from the basin of the Middle Volga. The area penetrated by traders from Volga-Bulḡār, an enormous East European trade centre, was extremely vast — from the coast of the Arctic Ocean and the White Sea in the north to the land of Khazars and those populated by Turkic nomads — Oḡuz, Bashkirs and Pechenegs — in the

¹⁸ The Arabic *baz* 'falcon' is translated here as 'falcon' since the description presented by Al-Mas'ūdī corresponds rather to the Falconidae whose folded wings reach the tip of the tail, while the wings of the hawk reach barely to the middle of his length. Cf. Dudziński 1988, pp. 154 and 174.

¹⁹ 'Usamah, 1929, p. 228.

²⁰ *Ḥudūd*, 1937, 60.

²¹ Lewicki, *Żródła* I, 1956, pp. 266–267.

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south. The above described falcons, therefore, could have been brought in from the coast of the Caspian Sea.

The export of falcons from the land of the Turks to the Caliphate was also recorded by Al-Ğāhiz, Ibn Ḥawqal and Al-Iṣṭaḥrī.²²

As I have mentioned previously, Al-Mas'ūdī rarely quoted the sources which he used or the names of the persons who provided him with information. We know, however, that in the course of his journey he reached the southern coast of the Caspian Sea which he called Baḥr Ğurġān or Baḥr al-Ḥazar. At the time, he also visited the province of Ğurġān, Ṭabaristān and various "islands" (i.e. peninsulas) of the Caspian Sea (Maṣoudī, I, 234 and 274, II, 38-39; Al-Mas'ūdī, I, 94, 112, 171). In this manner, Al-Mas'ūdī could have obtained all the information about falcons in Armenia, the land of the Khazars, Ğurġān and the land of the Turks in Central Asia, directly from merchants sailing on the Caspian Sea.

The author devoted considerable space to the merits of the white falcon, its superiority over other falcons, and its strength and beauty (Maṣoudī II, 27-28; Al-Mas'ūdī, I, 168): "Numerous experts on predatory animals and assorted types of birds of prey, to be found among Persians, Turks, Byzantines, Hindus and Arabs, maintain that the falcon, whose colour is close to white is the swiftest, most beautiful, with the most magnificent build, most enterprising and physically the most resilient. It is also the strongest of all falcons [as regards flight] at high altitudes; it is capable of reaching the greatest heights and capturing the most distant target in the air. [This is so] because of its dominant zeal which other types of falcon lack. [It is also said] that the hue [of the feathers] of these falcons is connected with the place [in which they live]. This is why white falcons occur especially in Armenia, the land of the Khazars, Ğurġān and the surrounding lands of the Turks, due to the [existing] large amounts of snow". Further, the author declared (Maṣoudī, II, 31-32; Al-Mas'ūdī, I, 169): "Sages and monarchs gave exaggerated descriptions of falcons, praising them lavishly. A certain *hāqān*, the king of the Turks, said: 'The falcon is a companion which knows how to be patient and never loses an opportunity if such comes his way'. An emperor [of Byzantium] claimed: 'A falcon is a noble king; if it needs something, it takes [it], and if it does not require it — it leaves it'. Philosophers maintain: 'Suffice [to say] that falcons [possess] speed of attack and force [with which they attack] their quarry; [They can also ascend] up to great heights. The reason lies in long flight feathers and broad chest. As a result, the end [of their flight] is furthest, and their speed-greater'. The lanneret falcons [*ṣaqr*] are able to cross large distances with great speed, and attack [their prey] with great force owing to the length of their flight feathers and the bulkiness of their bodies".

Obviously, white falcons were held in high esteem owing to their beauty and their proportionately built bodies, with a powerful and broad chest ("[...] their

²² Miquel, 1975, p. 228.

breasts seem to be woven of tendons completely devoid of flesh", *Maṣoudī*, II, 33; *Al-Mas'ūdī*, I, 170) and long flight features which made possible rapid and tenacious flight at great altitudes. Another characteristic feature was the force and speed of attack. Much was written about the patience, resilience, nobility and boldness of these birds.

All experts, regardless whether they were Persians, Byzantines, Greeks, Turks, Hindus or Arabs shared the opinion that falcons were the easiest to train. It follows from another source²³ that the assorted birds of prey used for the purposes of hunting were trained in a different manner and required special treatment. Methods applied in the Muslim East varied from those used, for instance, in the Maghreb.

An interesting description of a falcon's nest was taken by *Al-Mas'ūdī* from two Greek scholars, *Galen* (*Ġālīnūs*) and *Aristogenes* (?) (*Aristuḡānis*).²⁴ Citing them (*Maṣoudī*, II, 33; *Al-Mas'ūdī*, I, 170), he wrote: "The falcon builds [its] nest [only] on trees with thick foliage, bound together with hard thorns curved in different directions. In this way, it seeks refuge and protection against the plagues of heat and cold. When it intends to breed, it builds a nest which it outfits with a root that neither rain or snow can penetrate, and [which] provides it and its brood with a retreat against cold and danger".

Similarly to many other Arabian authors, *Al-Mas'ūdī* relished in citing various anecdotes connected with the beginnings of the breeding and training of falcons, hawks and other birds of prey, careless of the fact that sometimes these stories contradicted each other. As a rule, such tales were a mere pretext for presenting a whole gamut of the birds' merits — the beauty of their build and feathers, and their physical stamina and temperament.

One of the traditions which *Al-Mas'ūdī* borrowed from the *Book* (*Kitāb*) by *Aristogenes* (?), sent by King of *Ar-Rūm* to caliph *al-Mahdī*, ascribes the training of the first falcon (*šāhin*) to a certain Byzantine ruler named *Fasyān* (?): "One day [he] sights a falcon which descended upon a water bird, struck him and then soared high into the air, repeating this manoeuvre time and time again. 'This bird' said [the king] 'is suitable for hunting. The force with which it dived upon the water bird proves that it is a bird of prey, and the swiftness with which it flew into the air demonstrates that it knows how to flee'. When he saw the beauty of the bird's return flight, he took delight in it and became the first to train falcons" (*Maṣoudī*, II, 35; *Al-Mas'ūdī*, I, 170).

Another tradition²⁵ noted down in *Murūḡ ad-dahab* attributed the beginnings of falcon breeding (*šāhin*) to emperor *Constantine the Great* (280 A.D.–337 A.D.),

²³ Viré, "Arabica" XII/1–XIII/1, 1965–1966.

²⁴ Perhaps this is the same scholar to whom elsewhere (*Maṣoudī*, II, 35; *Al-Mas'ūdī*, I, 170) the author gives the cognomen of *al-Ḥākīm* (Sage).

²⁵ *Al-Mas'ūdī* refers here to a treatise of falconry by one *Sa'īd Ibn 'Ubayy*, who cites yet another author — *Hāšim Ibn Hudayḡ* (*Maṣoudī*, II, 36; *Al-Mas'ūdī*, I, 170).

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son of empress Helena. This story is even more fascinating since it also refers to the foundation of Constantinople (Maçoudi, II, 36; Al-Mas'ūdī, I, 171).

"[One day] Constantine set forth from 'Ammūriyya²⁶ (Amorion in Asia Minor) to hunt falcons. Having reached the canal which joins the Bunṭus Sea [Black Sea] with the Rūmī Sea [the Mediterranean],²⁷ he crossed it and came to a vast meadow situated between the canal and the sea. [There] he saw a falcon which attacked a water bird with a hunter's speed, courage and avarice which astonished Constantine. He issued an order to seize [the falcon] and train it for the chase. Constantine was thus the first who used a falcon for pleasure. Looking upon the vast meadow, a carpet of all sorts of flowers, he said: 'Here is a fortified place between the sea and the river, sufficiently large and expansive to build a town', this is the manner in which Constantinople came into being".

The taming of the lanneret (*ṣaqr*) was connected with yet another tradition recorded by Al-Mas'ūdī (Maçoudi, II, 33-36; Al-Mas'ūdī, I, 170), and taken from Adham Ibn Muḥriz: "The first to employ the lanneret for the purposes of the chase was Al-Ḥārīt ibn Mu'āwiya ibn Tawr al-Kindī, who was the father of the Kinda [tribe]. One day, he notices a hunter engaged in setting up snares for sparrows; suddenly, the *akdar*, a bird of prey also known as *aḡmal*, which was actually a lanneret, circled above and swooped down onto the trapped sparrow, started to devour it and itself became entangled [in the trap]. The amazed king ordered to have it brought to him. The bird had a broken wing but did not cease devouring the sparrow. [The king] threw it into a corner of the tent but [some time later] noticed that [the lanneret] grew tame, remained there and did not flee. It ate the offered food, and when it saw meat it climbed onto the arm of its master. It reached the stage of responding when called and [approached] to take the food. Its manners became the object of admiration when, one day, having noticed a pigeon, it flew towards it from the fist upon which it sat, and seized it. It was precisely then that the king issued an order for these birds of prey to be employed for the chase". The taming of hawks (*bāz*)²⁸ was, in turn, ascribed by Al-Mas'ūdī (Maçoudi, II, 279-281; Al-Mas'ūdī, II, 263) in a reference to vaguely described "experts on royal history", to Ptolemy I Soter [ca. 360-283 BC], who became the satrap of Egypt after the death of Alexander the Great: "One day [Ptolemy] mounted his horse to make towards one of his recreation areas when he noticed a flying hawk. He looked at it closely and drew attention to the fact that at high altitude [the bird] beats its wings and glides when flying low; in order to sit, it descends abruptly. [Ptolemy] gazed after it until [it] suddenly dived into a thick tree [top] bristling with thorns. He

²⁶ Ch, Pellat (Al Mas'ūdī, I, 170, note 6) regards this lection as unacceptable.

²⁷ The Bosphorus, the Marmara Sea and the Dardanelles.

²⁸ Probably this time the bird in question was the hawk (*Accipiter gentilis*). This assumption is supported by a description of the bird's flight (cf. Dudziński, 1988, 154) and the "yellow colour of the eyes", absent among the Falconidae (cf. Viré, El 2, I, 1960, p. 1187).

observed it and admired the clarity of its gaze and the yellow colour of its eyes, its feathers and the perfection of its proportions, exclaiming: 'Here is a magnificent and well armed bird! Kings must decorate their audience halls with such a bird'. As a result, he issued an order to collect a certain number of the birds in his court". Here follows a description of the deeds of one of the hawks, testifying to its loyalty, pride and self-esteem. "From that time, Ptolemy used hawks for the chase. [This custom was adapted] from him by the monarchs of various nations: Greeks, the Rūmī, Arabs and Persians. Later, Byzantine emperors began hunting with falcons (*ṣāhin*). It is said, however, that the monarchs of Spain, the heirs of Ašbān from the Visigothic dynasty (Ladāriqa) were the first who took pleasure in hunting with falcons, while to the Greeks (Yūnāniyūn), and others maintain that the rulers of Byzantium were the first to hunt with eagles (*'uqāb*)".

In a separate fragment, devoted to Spain (Al-Andalus), Al-Mas'ūdī (Maṣoudī, II, 36-37; Al-Mas'ūdī, I, 171) cites information borrowed from the work of Ibn Ġafīr (or 'Ufayr) who, in turn, quoted Abū Zayd al-Fihri: "[...] In accordance with the [court] etiquette of the rulers of Spain [known as] Ladāriqa,²⁹ whenever [a certain monarch] rode horseback, falcons trained [for this purpose] flew in the air, [creating] a baldachim over his army and as if a tent over his retinue, rising or descending over it. They did not cease doing what we have described until [the king] dismounted; then they swooped all around him. [This took place] until one day one of [these kings] known as Azraq mounted with the falcons accompanying him, as we have already said. Suddenly, a bird appeared, and one of the falcons attacked and seized it. The king was overjoyed and trained [this falcon] to hunt; this ruler was the first to hunt with falcons in Maghreb and Spain".

Speaking of Maghreb, the author recalled that in the opinion of numerous experts on the issue, the first to train eagles (*'uqāb*) were not the Greeks or the Rūmī, as he maintained in another chapter, but precisely the residents of Maghreb. When the Byzantines saw the strength of the birds and the powerful weapons with which they were equipped by Nature, they declared that their harmfulness exceeded their usefulness.

In order to illustrate this fact, the author (Maṣoudī, II, 38; Al-Mas'ūdī, II, 171) recalled an anecdote about an eagle presented as a gift by a certain Byzantine emperor (whom the author simply calls *qayṣar*) to the Persian ruler Kistrā³⁰. Qayṣar was to write that the merits of this bird were superior to those of the lanneret whose hunting zeal Kistrā admired so much. The eagle, directed at a gazelle which had accidentally appeared, struck it with a great force which the ruler found to his liking. Unfortunately, one day, hungry eagle threw itself upon Kistrā's son and killed him. Without mentioning this tragedy, Kistrā sent *qayṣar* a leopard,

²⁹ This is the plural of 'Ludriq (Rodrig), a frequent name of the Visigothic monarchs.

³⁰ This term is a deformed version of the Persian *Husrō* (Khosroes), Arabic sources use it to denote rulers of the pre-Muslim Persia.

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praising its usefulness in hunting fallow deer. The emperor remained enchanted by this beautiful predator up to the day when the leopard, left unguarded for a moment, attacked his son and tore him to shreds. Such was the revenge of the Persian ruler.

Al-Mas'ūdī is a source of a multitude of valuable information concerning hunting with the assistance of the birds of prey, although he by no means exhausts the topic. Obviously, his work does not equal treatises devoted solely to this problem but the variety of information which, additionally, bears the stamp of authenticity, distinctly expands our knowledge. The numerous cited anecdotes make us aware of the importance ascribed at the time by the culture of the Mediterranean and the Near East (albeit not exclusively) to the chase and in particular to the employment of trained birds of prey.

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