

Project Name: Editing Al-Sakhawī's Autobiography: *Irshād Al-Ghawī, bil Is'ād al-Tālib wa al-Rāwī lil 'I'lām bi Tarjamat Al-Sakhawī*

By Prof. Ahmed Al-Hasso

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In 2008, I began my project to edit the autobiography of Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Abdurrahman al-Sakhawī (d. 902AH/ 1496CE), relying on two microfilm copies which I had obtained a long time ago from the Leiden library in Amsterdam and from the Aya Sofia library in Istanbul, who both own the original manuscripts. Although I copied considerable parts of the text, the two microfilms showed several vital technical errors, which obliged me to postpone the task. Since then, I planned to make a visit to both Amsterdam and Istanbul in which I would be able to consult the original copies of Sakhawī's autobiography and fulfil the project by relying on them

My new plan was assisted by the Islamic Manuscript Association (Grant Scheme 2010/2011) who kindly granted the project the sum of £4,600.

This sum covered the expenses of the trip to Amsterdam then to Istanbul and of the cost of my stay for the time needed. It also covered the expenses of ordering a complete photocopy of the Aya Sofia manuscript and of typing the draft of the text (four volumes). In addition, some other matters were covered i.e. transportation, buying a camera suitable for obtaining micro pictures of the manuscripts.

On 14th of July 2011, I visited Leiden library and consulted a manuscript under the title *Irshād Al-Ghawī, bil Is'ād al-Tālib wa al-Rāwī lil 'I'lām bi Tarjamat Al-Sakhawī*, which is supposed to be the autobiography of al-Sakhawī according to the library index (published 1980).

Critical study of this manuscript and a comparison between the structures of the literary style, with other known works of al-Sakhawī, gives a strong impression that it might be compiled by him, although such a decision can be affected by the conclusion of the study of the second copy of this work in Aya Sofia.

On 26/12/2011, I visited Al-Sulaymaniyah Library in Istanbul in which a second manuscript is kept under the title of *Irshād Al-Ghawī, bil Is'ād al-Tālib wa al-Rāwī lil 'I'lām bi Tarjamat Al-Sakhawī*. According to Aya Sofia index, this manuscript is written by this author. In order to evaluate such a claim, I studied the text in which I noticed anonymous notes handwritten in its margins on seventy five pages. My investigation shows that they were part of the work written by al-Sakhawī himself and this leaves no doubt that the work was compiled by him.

A word by word comparison has been made between this copy and the one in Leiden. It proves that it was completely derived from the Aya Sofia copy.

Consequently, I considered the Aya Sofia manuscript as the 'parent text' for editing Sakhawi's autobiography. As for the Leiden copy; it represents the second important source of the work. I copied the text of the Aya Sofia manuscript myself by hand, and compared it with the text of Leiden manuscript. The final draft version comprises of more than one thousand pages. I have divided the work into four volumes according to the subject matter dealt with by the author himself.

The first volume, which includes an analytical introduction and annotations, will be ready to be published within one month of today (10 September 2012). The other three volumes will take about five to seven months to be ready for publishing, because of the need to complete the annotations and to correct the mistakes found in the draft of the written text.

By this stage of the work, the original aims of the grant scheme application have been completed. I would like to express my deep gratitude to The Islamic Manuscript Association for supporting this project. Without this grant it would have been impossible to come out with the results I have achieved so far. I will be most grateful to get further support that enables me to print the four volumes of Al Sakhawi's autobiography in the near future, as this would certainly benefit researchers in the field.

Prof. Ahmed Al-Hasso
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