



IBN ṬUFAYL

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I. Biographical Information

- full name:
Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ṭufayl al-Qaysī
- other names: al-Andalusī, Qurṭubī or al-Iṣbīlī, Abubacer (in the Latin West)
- born sometime between 1105 and 1115 north of Granada
- family and early education relatively unknown
- physician, later secretary of governor in Granada
- 1154: secretary of governor in Ceuta & Tanger
- later court physician for the Almohad Sultan Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf (Almohads: 1147–1269)
- great influence at court, also under Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf's son, Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb
- 1182: succeeded by Ibn Rušd (Averroes), who he got to know earlier
- 1185/6: death in Marrakesh

II. *Hayy Ibn Yaqzān* or „the First Robinson“

His only remaining philosophical work and at the same time „one of the most remarkable books of the Middle Ages“ (Carra de Vaux) is Ibn Ṭufayl's *Risāla Hayy Ibn Yaqzān fī asrār al-ḥikma al-mušriqiyya* (i.e. „Message about ‚The Living Son of the Vigilant‘ concerning the Secrets of the Oriental Wisdom“). Hence, Ibn Ṭufayl refers to Ibn Sīnā's *Qissa Hayy Ibn Yaqzān* (and his *Asrār al-ḥikma al-mušriqiyya*) though it should not be confused with it. It is known in the Latin West as *Philosophus Autodidactus* telling the story of Hayy, who grows up alone on an island and passes through different intellectual and spiritual stages. This he accomplishes without any help from some deity or even a prophet, but rather by his own reasoning. The narrative covers 50 years divided into sections of 7 or 14 years. The stages are as follows:

- 1) Age 0 - 7: fundamental feelings and thoughts
- 2) Age 7 - 21: practical inventions
- 3) Age 21 - 28: logics and physics
- 4) Age 28 - 35: discovery of God
- 5) Age 35 - 50: contemplative and spiritual exercise



The story does not end with this „Robinson“ staying alone - in the epilogue he meets a pious, i.e. „Muslim“, man from a neighboring island. In discussing the issues he was concerned with during his isolation, it is seen that the fundamentals are the same. Only after returning to the visitor's island and talking in detail with its king, differ the views. Ibn Rušd later interpreted the three characters as representing philosophy, theology and common faith, which needs to discover truth with the help of symbols.

Trivia: It could be that Ibn Ṭufayl's novel actually inspired Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719).

III. Influence on and of Ibn Ṭufayl

philosophical aspects

- stood in the tradition of the philosophers before him:
used the typical terms and a frame that belonged to the Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic views (transmitted through al-Fārābī, Ibn Bāğğa and Avicenna, rejects the former two, see below)
- sees himself inspired by Ibn Sīnā and al-Ġazālī (whose major work *Revival of the Religious Sciences* was not available to Ibn Ṭufayl)
- Avicennan influence: emanation of the soul, the soul ruling over the lower faculties etc.
- inspired in his Ṣufism through Al-Ġazālī (Siddiqi, p. 532)
- tries to show that both did not contradict each other but rather pursued the same goal
- „chief merit lies in its original literary form“ (Fakhry, p. 264; underestimation!?)
- first to consider question of the eternity of the universe as simply not crucial (Montada, p. 170)
- philosophy is not needed for a functioning state, in contrast to al-Fārābī (Watt, p. 117)

mystical aspects

- more Ṣufī, mystical approach, fanā' is the ultimate goal (Fakhry, p. 267)
- stresses the „illumination“ of Ḥayy, his immersion into the highest insights and his beatific vision (Rudolph)
- on the one hand succession of Ibn Bāğğa in solitude and contemplation
- on the other hand rejects purely speculative approach, expresses need of spiritual exercise, e.g. fasting or spinning around
- later integration of philosophy into Ṣufism „is thanks in no small part to“ him (Montada, p. 175)

IV. Resources

a) Sources

original Arabic text on the internet: http://ar.wikisource.org/wiki/ابن_الطفيل_-_حي_بن_يقظان

English following one of the first translations by Ockley (1708), also contains the pictures from this edition:
<http://www.erbzine.com/mag18/yaqzan.htm>

English by Ockley, revision and introduction by A.S. Fulton: <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/books/hayy.pdf>

Der Philosoph als Autodidakt, Hayy ibn Yaqzan. Translated and published by Patric O. Schaerer, Hamburg 2004

b) Secondary Literature

Carra de Vaux, B.: *Ibn Ṭufayl, celebrated philosopher, whose full name was Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ṭufayl al-Ḳaysī*, in: ²EI III (1971), p. 957/1-2.

Fakhry, M.: *A History of Islamic Philosophy*. New York ²1983, pp. 263-270.

Goichon, A.-M.: *Hayy b. Yaḳzan*, in: ²EI III (1971), p. 330/2-334/2.

Montada, J.P.: *Philosophy in Andalusia: Ibn Bājjā and Ibn Ṭufayl*, in: Adamson, P. and Taylor R.C. [edd.]: *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, Cambridge ¹2005, pp. 165-179.

Rudolph, U.: *Islamische Philosophie. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart (= bsr 2352)*, München ²2008, pp. 65-69.

Siddiqi, B.H.: *Ibn Ṭufayl* (Chapter XXVII), in: Sharif, M.M. [ed.]: *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, online <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/hmp/index.html>

Watt, W. M.: *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*. Edinburgh ²1985, pp. 116-117.

c) Pictures

portrait edited from

[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_ZvCGSCjzY_A/R7bIYPcAsmI/AAAAAAAAAFSA/pfTnmQ3XH0E/s320/Ibn_Tufayl\(1\).jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_ZvCGSCjzY_A/R7bIYPcAsmI/AAAAAAAAAFSA/pfTnmQ3XH0E/s320/Ibn_Tufayl(1).jpg)

picture from <http://www.erbzine.com/mag18/yaq104h6.jpg>