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History, piety and factional politics in the Arabic chronicle of the Maldives: Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's *Ta'rikh* and its continuations

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Abstract: The Arabic chronicle (*Ta'rikh*) of the Maldives composed by the qadi Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn (d. 1139/1727) and continued by his nephew Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn (1118/1706-1199/1785) and his grandson Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn (d. after 1243/1827) is major but unexploited source for not just Maldivian but also Indian Ocean history more broadly. Covering Maldivian history from the purported date of the islands' conversion to Islam in 548/1143, the *Ta'rikh* is also imbued with a specific pious and ethical agenda. It seeks to situate the Maldives in the broader context of Islamic history stretching back to the Rāshidūn Caliphs, while using the past to impart ethical lessons to its audience, ostensibly the Maldivian sultans. However, its authors were also deeply involved in the Maldives' tumultuous political life, and their presentation of events is also influenced by their own personal experiences and factional affiliations. This article explores the pious, ethical and political agenda of the *Ta'rikh*.

Keywords: Maldives, Arabic chronicles, Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn, *Ta'rikh Islām Dībā Maḥal*, history of Indian Ocean, Muslim commercial and religious networks

The history of the Indian Ocean world in the early modern period is usually written on the basis of European sources.¹ Even in areas where there is a strong indigenous tradition of historiography such as India or Java, these chronicles seem to look to the courts of the interior rather than outwards to the maritime world and its interregional connections, although doubtless more could be done to exploit them

¹ See for example the classic studies of Das Gupta 1979, Reid 1988, Reid 1993, Barendse 2002.

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to the full.² An important exception to this is the Arabic-language history of the Maldivian islands, entitled by its modern editor the *Ta'riḫ Islām Dībā Maḥal*,³ composed in the eighteenth century by a local religious scholar, Qadi Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn, who died in 1139/1727. Although a critical edition of the text was published by Hikoichi Yajima in Tokyo in 1982, it is more commonly cited on the basis of the brief English summary by H.C.P. Bell, the eminent historian of the Maldives, first published posthumously in 1940.⁴ As such, it is usually treated, by the rather few scholars who have used it, as a mine for dates and “facts”,⁵ perhaps inevitably given the absence of other narrative sources for much of Maldivian history. The text certainly deserves to be better known, for the *Ta'riḫ* has a broader significance as it frequently mentions the archipelago's links to India, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East, providing insights into the ways in which Muslim commercial and religious networks connected the Indian Ocean world.

Yet any reader of the *Ta'riḫ* must take account of the author's agenda, which has not yet been subjected to study. The *Ta'riḫ* is a highly complex document, despite literary activity in Arabic otherwise being largely unattested in the Maldives (although, as we shall see, this may reflect modern research rather than the historical reality). It is profoundly influenced by its author's own religious proclivities, and by his vision of the Maldives not just as part of a wider contemporary Islamic world stretching across the Indian Ocean, but as taking its place in a broader narrative of Islamic history. It is at least equally a work of advice literature, aimed at showing the rulers of the Maldives how to act as a Muslim king should, and this ethico-religious agenda permeates the text. Finally, the author's own career as a senior member of the Maldivian political establishment also shaped the text in fundamental, if sometimes obscure, ways. These aspects form the subject of this study, which aims to provide a more sophisticated basis for the interpretation of this crucial document for Maldivian and Indian Ocean history.

² Thus few chronicles of the Deccan or Gujarat, for example, have much to say about the broader maritime world to which these regions belonged. Indeed, even the indigenous historiography of a predominantly maritime people such as the Makassarese focuses more upon internal politics than their oceanic connections. See Cummings 2010. One partial exception is the Arabic chronicle tradition of Hadramawt, in which works like the *Ta'riḫ al-Shiḥr* do present an important perspective on Portuguese activities in the sixteenth century but remain surprisingly under-used despite their availability in abridged English translation; see Serjeant 1963.

³ This is properly the title of only one section of the text; see further the discussion of the structure of the *Ta'riḫ* below.

⁴ Bell 2002: 18–42, 201–204.

⁵ See for example its treatment by Maloney 2013.

1 The *Ta'rikh* in context

As far as we know, no tradition of Arabic historical writing existed in the Maldives before Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn composed his chronicle at the request of Sultan Muḥammad 'Imād al-Dīn (r. 1116/1701–1133/1720). The work comprises two main sections, the first covering the history of the Muslim community from the time of the Prophet to down to the conversion of the Maldives to Islam in 548/1153 in the reign of the Caliph al-Muqtafī, and a second one focussing on Maldivian history up to Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's own time. After the author's death in 1139/1727, it was continued by his nephew Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn and his grandson Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn. Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn's contribution brings the chronicle from 1138/1726 to 1171/1758, and covers some ten pages in the manuscript, while the substantial section written by Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn deals with the period from the death of Sultan Ibrāhīm Iskandar in 1163/1750 down to 1243/1827. The reason for the overlap between 1163/1750 and 1171/1758, as we shall see, is related to the contentious role of Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's descendants in Maldivian history.

Four manuscripts of the Arabic text have been identified, although one of these, originally consulted by Bell in his classic work on Maldivian history, was reported lost by Yajima and other scholars in the second half of the twentieth century who sought it out.⁶ Moreover, the whereabouts of the three Arabic copies seen in Malé by Yajima in 1981 is currently unclear.⁷ In addition to these Arabic manuscripts, Yajima refers to two manuscripts of a Dhivehi version of the chronicle in Thaana script.⁸ The relationship of the Dhivehi and Arabic texts must be a subject for future research, although it is clear that the Arabic *Ta'rikh* was originally composed in that language and is not a translation. It seems likely that in fact the Dhivehi version mentioned by Yajima is the same historical chronicle referred to as *Radavali* by Bell. The latter saw copies written in the modern Thaana and older Dives Akuru script, remarking somewhat delphically that they “confirm, and here and therefore usefully supplement the accepted narrative of ‘the State Chronicle,’ the Arabic *Tarikh*, to which they occupy the same relationship as the Sinhalese *Rājāwali* to the ‘*Mahāvāṇsa*’ or Great History of Ceylon.”⁹ In fact, the relationship between the various Sinhalese chronicles of the seventeenth century, which were later entitled *Rajawali*, and the Pali *Mahavamsa*, which was composed in the fifth century AD, is by no means straightforward. They were aimed at distinct

⁶ Apparently this manuscript was presented to the Ceylon Government and taken to Colombo; see Bell 2002: 201; two pages from this lost manuscript are reproduced in Bell 2002, Plate P.

⁷ Pers. comm. Michael Feener.

⁸ Yajima 1988: 72.

⁹ Bell 2002: 198.

audiences, and written in very different periods, even if the Sinhalese texts may draw in places on the Pali ones, while at the same time on occasion deliberately ignoring information in the latter for political reasons.¹⁰

Thus Bell's comparison with Lankan historiography, which is doubtless inspired by the existence of two parallel chronicle traditions in a "classical" or supranational language on the one hand and a local vernacular on the other, sheds little light on the Maldivian texts. Yet it is likely that information on early Muslim rulers in the *Ta'rikh*, which is highly schematic, derives from king-lists in Dhivehi such as the *Radavali*. The keeping of such records may stretch back to a pre-Islamic tradition of historical writing, possibly supported by Buddhist rulers and monks, given the well attested promotion of historical writing in Buddhist monasteries in Sri Lanka, which has numerous affinities with the Maldives.¹¹ Maldivian copper plate inscriptions (*lomāfānu*) from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries sometimes contain historical narratives. However, neither Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn nor his continuators mention any written sources at their disposal for information on Maldivian history. On the rare occasions where we can check the *Ta'rikh* against an independent source, there are clear discrepancies in chronology. As Yajima noted, the hajj of sultan Ḥasan b. Abī Bakr, dated by Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn to c. 871–2/1467, is also mentioned in an Arabic source by al-Jazīrī (d. 977/1569–70) as having occurred in 838/1434–5.¹² There are even discrepancies between dates given in the *Ta'rikh* and the epigraphic record for events to which Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn was an eyewitness.¹³ Perhaps most seriously, the Islamisation of the Maldives, dated by the *Ta'rikh* to 548/1143 and the reign of Sultan Muḥammad, is put by the near contemporary evidence of *lomāfānu* to some 50 years later, to the reign of a king Gada-naadheethiya (Gaghanādītya) who does not appear in either the *Ta'rikh* or those *Radavali* summarised by Bell.¹⁴ While the onomastic difference might be interpreted as one being the ruler's Muslim name and the other his earlier Sanskrit one, the discrepancy in chronology is harder to explain. However, the date of 548 for the conversion also appears on a restoration inscription on the Friday mosque of Malé (Hukuru Miskit) which is itself dated 738/1337.¹⁵ This indicates that Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn was following an established local historical tradition, even if its accuracy may be questionable.

¹⁰ Obeyesekere 2019: 249–263, 275–285.

¹¹ Obeyesekere 2019, and Thapar 2013: 414–441.

¹² Yajima 1988: 76; Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 11; al-Jazīrī 2002, vol. I, 451.

¹³ Bell 2002: 176; also Bell 2002: 41 (notes) for a similar discrepancy in Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn's section.

¹⁴ Feener 2020; Gippert 2003; Bell 2002: 19.

¹⁵ Kalus/Guillot 2005: 27–40.

While neither these chronological difficulties nor the thorny question of the Islamisation of the Maldives can be resolved here, Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's choice of Arabic for his historical work deserves some comment. The principal language of administration in the Maldives after the coming of Islam remained Dhivehi, in which almost all surviving waqf documents are made (although many have Arabic exordia),¹⁶ but inscriptions on mosques were sometimes in Arabic.¹⁷ Moreover, the choice of Arabic for a historical text was an unusual one in the broader Indian Ocean context, despite its status as a transregional language of both religion and commerce. There are only a handful of parallels outside of Arabic-speaking parts of the Ocean littoral. The closest is sixteenth century Malabar, a region with which the Maldives had close links, where five brief texts documenting the jihad against the Portuguese were composed, three of them in verse.¹⁸ However, this did not lead to any more general attempt to write the history of the region in Arabic, and although these texts do contain historical information, they are very different in character to the Maldivian *Ta'riḫ* with its continuous narrative stretching from the coming of Islam to the nineteenth century. Otherwise, the only substantial Arabic historical text composed in India that has been uncovered to date is Ulughkhānī's sixteenth century history of Gujarat, *Ẓafar al-Wāliḥ*.¹⁹ Further afield, there was some tradition of writing Arabic city chronicles on the East African littoral, which later was supplemented and supplanted by a Swahili one. In the mid-nineteenth century, an Arabic history of the Comoros was composed, also by a qadi with eminent political connections.²⁰ Yet Arabic was never used for historiography in Southeast Asia, where, after the penetration of Islam, local chronicles employed Malay or other regional languages such as Javanese. There was of course a vigorous tradition of historical writing, including both dynastic and local histories, in Arabia, and especially in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, but also in Yemen, including Hadramawt.²¹ While the *Ta'riḫ*'s choice of Arabic makes it somewhat anomalous in the context of Indian Ocean historiographical production, its authors were

16 For examples of these documents see Bell 2002; Gippert 2003; and the two waqf documents reproduced at R. Michael Feener (ed.). 2018–2020. *Maldives Heritage Survey*, <https://maldivesheritage.oxcis.ac.uk/index.php/manuscript-viewer/waqf-endowments/mle-arc-ms9-f0-111/> and at <https://maldivesheritage.oxcis.ac.uk/index.php/manuscript-viewer/waqf-endowments/gni-mad-ms1-karayye-waqfiyya/> (last accessed 17 May 2020).

17 Kalus/Guillot 2005.

18 Kouria 2017: 31–41; Prange 2018: 139–154; more generally on Arabic in Malabar see Prange 2018: 107–120.

19 See Ahmad 1946 for an overview of Arabic in India.

20 Rotter 1976.

21 Al-Hayla 1994; Serjeant 1963.

doubtless influenced by this Arabian tradition, given their close ties to the Hijaz and Hadramawt.²²

If Arabic historical works were rarely composed in the Indian Ocean world outside its Arabophone littoral, the evidence of the *Ta'rikh* suggests the existence of a flourishing Arabic literary culture in the eighteenth century Maldives of which few traces remain.²³ Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn informs us that Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn wrote “numerous compositions (*taṣānīf*) on hadith, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl*), biography (*siyar*), history (*ta'rikh*) and the esoteric (*daqā'iq*)”,²⁴ although none of these seems to have survived. Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn also cites two Arabic poems of his own composition, a verse chronogram giving the date of death of Sultan Muḥammad 'Imād al-Dīn in 1133/1720 which was inscribed on the dome over his tomb, and some verses from a panegyric qasida in praise of that sultan's successor, Sultan Ibrāhīm Iskandar II.²⁵ It seems that as well as his continuation of the *Ta'rikh*, Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn wrote a work entitled *al-Maṭāli'* which he directs the reader to consult for further details of Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's biography (*tarjama*).²⁶ Possibly, then, this was some sort of biographical dictionary. Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn's father, Ḥusayn Jamāl al-Dīn, was also the author of three different *mawliids*, works celebrating the Prophet's birthday, entitled *Tanwīr al-Qulūb*, *al-Mi'rāj* and *Badī' al-Anwār*,²⁷ while Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn cites 16 lines of an Arabic *marthiyya* of his own composition lamenting his father's death.²⁸ How wide the audience for such works was may be debated; on occasion Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn

22 See Forbes 1981.

23 The Maldives Heritage Survey has brought to light a number of manuscripts from across the archipelago; however, most of these are in Dhivehi. The most significant Arabic manuscripts published by them at the time of writing are a 30-volume Qur'an from Hirigalu Miskiyy in Ihavandhoo (Haa Alif Atoll) and two large-format *Mi'rāj* manuscripts from Utheemu Palace (Haa Alif Atoll). The comparative paucity of evidence of such texts may be related to the changing religious environment of the Maldives in the late twentieth century, with practices such as the celebration of the Prophet's birthday increasingly abandoned. However, further discoveries are expected to be published by the project website in due course, and they may well revise the picture painted here. See R.M. Feener 2018–2020 (ed.), *Maldives Heritage Survey* <https://maldivesheritage.oxcis.ac.uk/>, last accessed 17 May 2020.

24 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 74. The term *daqā'iq* is ambiguous, as it can mean “minutes”, but also “minutiae” or “subtelties” and is in the latter sense applied to works on a vast range of topics, from *fiqh* to the occult. On its own, however, it seems most likely to suggest in some sense esoteric knowledge, although this is very much a provisional translation.

25 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 70, 71.

26 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 74.

27 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 81.

28 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 81–82.

impugns the abilities at Arabic of even members of the ulama,²⁹ although this may reflect his personal enmities more than the reality. On the other hand, a European visitor to the Maldives in 1682 claimed that the “gentry” spoke Arabic and Hindustani, suggesting a much broader diffusion of the language beyond circles of religious specialists.³⁰ At any rate, it is evident that Arabic literary culture in the eighteenth century Maldives covered a variety of genres, including history and poetry, and was thus not exclusively restricted to religious purposes.

2 The chronicler Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn and Maldivian history

Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn provides a brief biography of his uncle, the author of the *Ta'riḫ*, at the start of his continuation (*dhayl*). He writes that Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn was born in Gan (Gamm) island in Haddhunmathi (Laamu) Atoll in 1072/1661-2, son of the *faqīh* Maḥmūd b. Mūsā al-Qammawī (the nisba al-Qammawī refers to Gan), dying in Rajab 1139/February 1727 aged sixty seven.³¹ Apart from this he gives details of Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's shaykhs, who comprised both local scholars such as a certain shaykh 'Īsā who died in Gan, and several Meccan shaykhs, including Sālim, son of the noted hadith transmitter 'Abdallāh al-Baṣrī. Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn was also a devotee of the Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn b. 'Abd al-Razzāq, an itinerant Syrian holy man of the Qadiri Sufi order who preached an austere form of Islam and briefly ruled as sultan of the Maldives in 1103/1692.³²

Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn also frequently refers to himself in the third person in his work, which allows us to fill out some details of his career, including these sojourns in the Hijaz. He was student of the *khaṭīb* Muḥammad Sirāj al-Dīn,³³ the position of *khaṭīb*, being, alongside qadi, of the two chief religious posts in the Maldives, appointed by the Sultan. Both *khaṭībs* and qadis were intimately involved in political life, which was dominated by intense factional rivalry between various aristocratic clans (*bodun*), who competed for power and the office of sultan (Dhivehi *raḍun*).³⁴ Similarly, the *khaṭībs* and qadis seem to have been drawn from a limited number of families who formed effectively hereditary

²⁹ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 52.

³⁰ Maloney 2013: 118.

³¹ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 73–74.

³² See Peacock 2018 for a detailed discussion of this episode.

³³ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 39.

³⁴ Nasheed 2003.

dynasties,³⁵ and Muḥammad Sirāj al-Dīn's father had held the post of qadi during the reign of Sultan Ibrāhīm Iskandar (1058/1648–1098/1687).³⁶ On the latter's demise, his concubine (*umm walad*) Mariyam seized power, according to Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn persecuting men of learning as well as leading an immoral lifestyle. Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn and another of Muḥammad Sirāj al-Dīn's pupils fled to Calicut in Malabar, then to the Hijaz;³⁷ according to Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn, the Maldivian rulers routinely forbade their subjects from undertaking the hajj, meaning the route by Calicut, presumably under the pretence of trade, was regularly employed for this purpose.³⁸

In 1102/1691 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn returned from the Hijaz. At this point, we are told, the *umm walad* wished to let him reside with his shaykh, the *khaṭīb* Muḥammad Sirāj al-Dīn, but she was dissuaded by a rival of his at court, and instead sent him into exile in Gan, with instructions that he not be able to leave even to visit the next island – an unusually harsh sentence by local standards. However, Mariyam's death shortly afterwards as the result of a gunpowder explosion in a ship she was on changed the political scene. The *khaṭīb* Muḥammad Sirāj al-Dīn presided over an assembly that chose a new ruler, Muḥammad Muḥyi al-Dīn (r. 1102/1691–1103/1692), whom the chronicler lavishly praises as the most just sultan the Maldives had ever seen since its conversion to Islam. He restored Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn to favour, honouring him greatly.³⁹

There is much in this account that raises questions in the careful reader. If the *umm walad* hated ulama, why did she apparently allow the *khaṭīb* Muḥammad Sirāj al-Dīn to remain in post? Why, indeed, did Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn feel it safe to return in 1102/1691, and why did Mariyam initially wish to let him live with his shaykh in the capital, if her hatred of the ulama was such? We have no answers to these questions, but their existence underlines the fact that the *Ta'riḫ* cannot be taken at face value: its author was deeply implicated in events he reports, and his portrayal of the principal political figures is unquestionably influenced by his own experiences and relations with them.

Our first clear evidence of Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's role in public life comes during the brief five month reign of the sayyid-sultan Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn, who replaced Sultan Muḥyi al-Dīn, who had been one of his disciples. A member of the

³⁵ Nasheed 2003: 3–5 observes that the office of chief qadi offered the only possibility for outsiders to participate in the Maldivian power structures dominated by the *bodun*. However, if this was the case in the nineteenth century, in earlier times evidently the senior ulama formed a similarly closed and hereditary clan, although one which foreigners could sometimes join by virtue of prestigious descent and learning.

³⁶ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 33.

³⁷ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 39.

³⁸ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 43.

³⁹ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 42, 44.

Hama branch of the descendants of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn had been educated at the Azhar before travelling to Malabar, Coromandel, Aceh and then to the Maldives, preaching an agenda of religious reform. His activities constitute part of the broader spread of sharia-orientated Sufism in this period, but he had a major political impact on individual societies. In Aceh, numerous members of the elite were attracted to his cause, following the green banner of his saintly ancestor 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, and promoting his message of “commanding what is right and condemning what is wrong”, while in the Maldives he seems to have exercised a similar widespread appeal by calling for the stricter implementation of sharia and the abolition of “innovations”. His pious agenda met with both popular support and, ultimately, the anger of sultan Ibrāhīm Iskandar, who forced him into exile in India. However, Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn was able to return during the reign of his disciple Muḥyi al-Dīn, whom he succeeded as sultan.

Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn is styled a *khalīfa* by Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn. Certainly, he took the religious side of his office seriously. “He commanded what is right and forbade what is wrong, and abrogated everything that was contrary to sharia...He used to admonish the people every night between the dusk and evening prayers; and after evening prayers he used to teach fiqh, grammar and other sciences to Qadi Muḥammad, the *khaṭīb* Muḥammad Sirāj al-Dīn, and shaykh Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn.”⁴⁰ The exact title held by Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn is left ambiguous but he evidently played a prominent role in supporting Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn's regime (or at least, that is how he wished to be remembered). The sayyid-sultan appointed him to teach hadith in the congregational mosque in Malé, for which he received a salary in the form of a twice-monthly grant, but he was also given a rather more sinister role:

[Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn] sent [Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn] out every Friday along with the assistants of Qadi Muḥammad and a group of soldiers to patrol the streets of the town in order to command what is right and forbid what is wrong, to order people to congregate for the prescribed prayers at the beginning of its time [*awwal al-awqāt*],⁴¹ to punish anyone who resisted him, and to bring before [Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn] anyone who failed to attend the prescribed prayers to be killed by the sword of the brilliant sharia. After three Fridays of patrolling, he did not find anyone who failed to attend the prescribed prayers.⁴²

40 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 45.

41 Jurists recommended performing prayers at the beginning of their set times.

42 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 45.

On Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad's death, the Maldivian theocracy continued with the installation of Qadi Muḥammad al-Ḥājj 'Alī as sultan (r. 1103/1692–1112/1701), the *khaṭīb* Muḥammad Sirāj al-Dīn having refused the role and exiling himself to Haddhunmatthi Atoll where he died shortly afterwards.⁴³ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn presided at the oath ceremony on his accession, where the military and the viziers promised their allegiance to the new sultan, and in return he swore not to oppress the people or seize the estates of those who died with heirs. His role suggests Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn already held a senior position, and indeed he was formally appointed as qadi by the new sultan in Rabi' I 1104/November 1692, aged thirty two.⁴⁴ During his tenure as qadi, Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn continued to uphold stringently the requirements of sharia, with the sultan's full support. He claims to have been the first to ban the enslavement of free men and women in the Maldives, and the first to insist on upholding the right of females to inherit in accordance with sharia. More remarkably, he even succeeded in quelling the fights over women that seem to have bedevilled Maldivian society:

[The sultan] ordered them to be content with the qadi's judgement. Then when the qadi [Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn] judged that the divinely ordained punishments [*ḥudūd*], punishments and oaths should be upheld, they ceased their wickedness and wrongdoing [*al-fujūr wa'l-fasād*] out of shame at being punished in the court of judgement.⁴⁵

Another form of wrongdoing he prevented was the custom of women cutting each other's hair, for this apparently led to them "tearing each other's clothes so that their private parts were exposed to groups of men and women; but none had seen this as wrong before sultan Muḥyi al-Dīn came to power; during his reign, before taking office as qadi, Qadi Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn had prohibited this practice."⁴⁶ During a subsequent period as qadi, in 1117/1705, Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn banned the custom of eating sweets at performances of the praise poems on the Prophet's birthday, the *Mawlid*; later he forbade the distribution of a delicacy of sweetened rice at Ashura.⁴⁷ He seems to have taken particular pride in fixing the correct hours for dawn and evening prayers in the Maldives.⁴⁸ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn thus evidently wished to be remembered for upholding the austere form of Islam propagated by his shaykh, Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn.

When Sultan Muḥammad al-Ḥājj 'Alī died in 1112/1701, Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn presided at his funeral, but soon realised he needed to flee to the Hijaz as his arch

43 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 46.

44 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 48.

45 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 50.

46 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 50.

47 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 69.

48 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 68.

enemy 'Alī al-Kuredhivaruwī⁴⁹ was appointed qadi by the new sultan 'Alī b. Shāhbandar Ibrāhīm (r. 1112/1701–1113/1701). The *Ta'riḫ* at this point is filled with bitter invectives against the qadi and the sultan, who sought to persecute Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn even in exile, planning to send a message to the Sharif of Mecca informing him that the fugitive had stolen money from the public treasury. The sultan's death after a 10 month reign is depicted as divine retribution. The sultan was briefly replaced by his son Ḥasan, aged 13 or 14, but the latter was himself swiftly deposed by his cousin, who took the throne as sultan Ibrāhīm Muḥzir al-Dīn (r. 1113/1701–1116/1705). This latter restored Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn to favour, sending a ship to bring him back from exile in the Hijaz.⁵⁰

At this point, Ḥasan's involvement in Maldivian politics becomes even murkier. The new sultan is praised for building mosques and abolishing uncanonical taxes (*mukūs*), but Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn omits to tell us whether he was reappointed qadi. However, a reference elsewhere in the text to how the *adhān* times were fixed by the order of Qadi Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn in 1114/1702 confirms he did hold the office under Sultan Ibrāhīm Muḥzir al-Dīn.⁵¹ The reason for his reticence is clear, even if his precise involvement in subsequent events is not. In 1115/1704, Ibrāhīm Muḥzir al-Dīn set off to perform the pilgrimage to the Hijaz accompanied by a substantial retinue, including, according to one manuscript of the *Ta'riḫ*, Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn himself.⁵² Yet the party was beset by disaster on its return. Several members of the royal family fell ill and died in Jeddah, and the sultan himself contracted small-pox. Anxious to return home, they ignored the well-meaning warnings of the governor of Mocha that they had left it too late in the monsoon season to risk the voyage. Just off Socotra, the ship encountered a violent storm that produced "waves as high as mountains", and the party feared they would drown. Eventually, they were washed up in Sindh, where it seems their ship sank, leaving its passengers to save themselves by swimming to shore, only to be robbed by locals. Among the survivors were Sultan Ibrāhīm Muḥzir al-Dīn and Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn himself who "wandered barefoot, naked and hungry through the land of Sindh and India", until they reached the port of Surat, where they found a ship to take them back to the Maldives, eventually landing at Manadhoo in Miladhunmadulu Atoll.⁵³

⁴⁹ الكردوي. This is presumably this *nisba* for either Kuredhivaru or Kuredhdhoo, both in Miladhunmadulu Atoll.

⁵⁰ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 52–53.

⁵¹ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 68.

⁵² Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 54; and 1984: 56, note 3; the reference to Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's presence in the party is only present in Yajima's Manuscript C, described briefly in Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 3 (English introduction).

⁵³ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 55–56, 57.

In his absence the Maldivian people assumed that Ibrāhīm had died, and after a power struggle in Malé, the wazir was installed as ruler by the military with the title Muḥammad ‘Imād al-Dīn (r. 1116/1704–1133/1720). He thwarted an attempt by Ibrāhīm Muḥzir al-Dīn to enter Malé, and the deposed Sultan fled from the internal exile that was imposed on him to seek refuge first in Galle in Sri Lanka, then in India. In circumstances that are opaque, Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn somehow managed to switch sides, for two months after his accession Muḥammad ‘Imād al-Dīn reappointed him qadi.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, Ibrāhīm Muḥzir al-Dīn made his way to Calcutta, where he sought Mughal and English support to regain his throne. An English fleet was sent to restore Ibrāhīm to his throne, and Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn portrays the ensuing battle as one between Islam and unbelief, and emphasises his role in urging Muḥammad ‘Imād al-Dīn to do battle against the invaders.⁵⁵ The implication is clearly that by seeking infidel support, the former sultan has lost any shred of legitimacy. Doubtless his change of allegiance to Muḥammad ‘Imād al-Dīn lies behind Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn’s obfuscation of his role as qadi to Ibrāhīm Muḥzir al-Dīn.

As far as we can understand from the *Ta’rikh*, Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn remained in office as qadi for the rest of Muḥammad ‘Imād al-Dīn’s reign. However, his involvement in controversies was not over. He tells us of the plot around 1127/1715 between the treasurer (*al-khāzin al-kabīr*) and the sultan’s wife Āmina, who were enjoying an adulterous relationship. They tried to remove the sultan’s son by another wife, Ibrāhīm, from the line of succession in order to put the treasurer on the throne. They did this by attempting to convince the sultan that people were conspiring to depose him in favour of Ibrāhīm, and as part of their scheming, they tried to poison the sultan’s mind against Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn. At first the sultan was convinced, but later the truth came out, and the treasurer was exiled to Fuah Mulah Atoll (Fua Mulaku) in the far south of the archipelago. There he was subjected to appalling torture, until in the end Qadi Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn interceded for him with the sultan, and had his conditions of exile improved.⁵⁶ Yet no explanation is given for why Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn intervened.

The final sultan to be mentioned, albeit briefly, is Ibrāhīm Iskandar II, to whom Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn wrote an Arabic panegyric qasida. However, in the prose text of the *Ta’rikh*, the sultan is criticised for abandoning the company of ulama to devote himself to pleasure, before having a change of heart and returning to a pious lifestyle in the third year of his reign. The final two events recorded in the *Ta’rikh* authored by Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn are a fire in the vizier’s house in 1137/1724 and the

54 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 58.

55 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 60, 64

56 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 65.

birth of a daughter to the sultan in the same year.⁵⁷ It seems therefore, that Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn stopped writing at this point, two years before his death.

Bell's description of the *Ta'riḫ* as the "State chronicle" of the Maldives is thus somewhat misleading. It is true that Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn concentrates on high politics and the lives and deaths of sultans. Yet in many ways the *Ta'riḫ* is as much about Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn and his career as about the history of the Maldives as a whole. In addition, its representation of Maldivian history is strongly influenced by Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's ethical concerns.

3 The structure and agenda of the *Ta'riḫ*

The *Ta'riḫ* as composed by Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn is divided into three sections, which are given distinct titles in the original:

Introduction, entitled *al-Rutba al-Fākhira fi salṭanat al-dunyā wa'l-ākhira*, or the Lofty Degree on rulership in this world and the next (pp. 1–6 of Yajima's Manuscript A, the basis of his edition).⁵⁸

History of Prophets and Kings to the reign of the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtafi (*bāb fi ta'riḫ al-anbiyā' wa'l-mursalīn*) (pp. 8–33, which is preceded by an untitled discussion of the reasons for the work's composition on pp. 6–8)

Islamic history of the Maldives from conversion in al-Muqtafi's reign (548/1154) to the reign of Ibrāhīm Iskandar II (1137/1724) (*bāb Ta'riḫ Islām Dībā Maḥal*) (pp. 33–85)

These are followed by the two continuations by Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn and Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn.

Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's pious and political agenda is made quite explicit in the introductory chapter, *al-Rutba al-Fākhira fi salṭanat al-dunyā wa'l-ākhira*, which is almost a separate treatise, although as we will see, its concerns are reflected in the historical parts. This essentially constitutes a condensed mirror for princes, drawing on tropes familiar from classical authors such as al-Ghāzālī's (d. 505/1111) famed *Naṣiḥat al-Mulūk* – and indeed the chapter concludes by referring to itself by this title.⁵⁹ Although it is not entirely clear to what extent the chapter, like the subsequent one, may be largely lifted from earlier works, the several verses of Persian poetry quoted underline its indebtedness to Middle Eastern literary as well

⁵⁷ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 71–72.

⁵⁸ I refer here to the page numbers of facsimile of manuscript A presented in Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn, as the second chapter was omitted by Yajima from the printed text.

⁵⁹ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 7.

as religious sources. There is one couplet by the famous Sa'dī (d. 689/1291), and, perhaps more surprisingly, a quatrain attributed to the lesser known Bundār-i Rāzī (fourth/tenth century).⁶⁰ However, these verses are cited in the dictionary of poets, the *Tadhkirat al-Shu'arā'* of Dawlatshāh, composed in 892/1486, which circulated very widely and thus was most likely the source. The existence of these Persian verses may seem surprising, but the Maldives enjoyed very close connections with the Iranian world, with a substantial Persian substratum of vocabulary in the Dhivehi language. The saint who converted the islands to Islam, Yūsuf Shams al-Dīn, is said to have come from Tabriz, and the first coins minted in the Maldives from the sixteenth century onwards were known as Lari, emulating those of Lar in southern Iran. There may also have been a certain taste for Persian literature in the Maldives as late as the nineteenth century, for the English officers Young and Christopher who visited Malé in 1835 recorded that the Fanḍiyāru or chief justice “has many Persian manuscripts, but only one could be procured by us”.⁶¹ The pleasure-loving Sultan 'Imād al-Dīn IV (r. 1835–1882) sent Maldivians to Persia to be trained as poets and singers.⁶² However, Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn provides an Arabic translation for the verses, indicating he did not expect his audience necessarily to understand them.

Al-Rutba al-Fākhira opens by discussing the necessity of kings; *sunna*, says the author, decrees the existence of kings and if they did not exist, the world would fall to pieces. At the same time, they must be constantly aware of the next world (*ākhirā*). He describes four classes of sultans:

- Sultans of the next world and poor in this world (*salāṭīn al-ākhirā wa-fuqarā' al-dunyā*), who are “the poor Muslims who patiently endure their poverty”.
- Sultans of this world and poor in the next (*salāṭīn al-dunyā wa fuqarā' al-ākhirā*), who are “the sultans who followed the path of oppression and tyranny and turned away from the way of justice and equity”.
- Those who have no rulership in this world or the next (*lā salṭana lahum fī'l-dunyā wa'l-ākhirā*), who are “the poor who do not patiently endure their poverty, and deny the blessings of their lord (*kafarū bi-ni'mat rabbihim*)”.

⁶⁰ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 4; 6; cf. Sa'di 1375: 768. The quatrain by Bundār-i Rāzī is somewhat distorted, presumably as copyists could not understand it. It should read

از مرگ حذر کردن دو روز روا نیست
روزی که قضا باشد و روزی که قضا نیست
روزی که قضا باشد کوشش ندهد سود
روزی که قضا نیست درو مرگ روا نیست

I am very grateful to Saeed Talajooy for identifying the poet. On him see Safa 1989, and Dawlatshah 1901: 42–44.

⁶¹ Maloney 2013: 106.

⁶² Nasheed 2003: 75.

- Sultans of both this world and the next (*salāṭin al-dunyā wa'l-ākhirā*), who are “the [first] four Caliphs and the just kings who follow the former’s path and imitate them”.⁶³

Piety and just rulership are thus inextricably linked, and on these depend the sultan’s hopes of attaining the next world, which can be achieved by imitating the examples of the Rightly-guided Caliphs. At the same time, rulership has four practical supports: the treasury, the soldiers, the latter’s consent, and justice. Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn outlines how these can be obtained, before moving onto his main theme, the conduct of sultans (*ādāb al-salāṭin*). Sultans must be strong and courageous, but they must also be the most knowledgeable of men; they will achieve this if at night they spend their time with boon-companions (*nudamā*) who read for them “histories and biographies of just sultans (*al-tawārīḫ wa-siyar al-salāṭin al-‘ādilīn*)” which is the way to learn how to be a just king.⁶⁴ During the daytime the sultan should spend his time with ulama, from whom he will acquire knowledge (*‘ilm*). The study of history thus is a practical way of learning how to manage the kingdom, and as Ḥasan later says, one of the main causes of the fall of kingdoms is the sultan’s ignorance of reports about it;⁶⁵ but at the same time, its study is also by implication a religious requirement, equal to consorting with ulama.

The second section of the *Ta'riḫ* explains the reasons for its writing. Ḥasan tells us that one of the kings of the Maldives requested that he compile for him a history of the islands from the coming of Islam.⁶⁶ He does not identify the ruler, but the information that it was Muḥammad ‘Imād al-Dīn is given by the continuator Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn.⁶⁷ Ḥasan adds that he decided to preface his work with “what I have read of the history of Prophets down to the time of our lord Muḥammad, the Seal of Prophets, so that it can be an indication of the approach of the Final Hour and the Resurrection of the Dead, and a reminder of death for those who think on it, and an example to whoever considers well.” He expands on this point

For knowledge of history (*‘ilm al-ta’riḫ*) comprises reading events that happened, reports of affairs and the circumstances of [our] predecessors which time has preserved, and the events that befell [humankind], in order that man might contemplate the state of the material world [*dunyā*], which may turn against him and his sons any moment.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 1.

⁶⁴ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 4.

⁶⁵ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 5.

⁶⁶ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 8.

⁶⁷ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 88. For reasons that are unclear, Yajima (1988: 4) states he composed the *Ta'riḫ* at the behest of this ruler’s son, Ibrāhīm Iskandar II (r. 1133/1720–1163/1750).

⁶⁸ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 9.

He should then contemplate all he has acquired in this world and consider how he should leave it behind, and Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn quotes the verse

Look at those who possessed the entire world, did anything from it accompany them apart from a cotton [burial sheet] and shroud?

Historiography, then, in Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's view, has a specific religious function to force men to contemplate the vanity of worldly existence.

The *Ta'rikh* then proceeds to the history of prophets and kings down to the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtafi, which is entirely omitted in the printed edition, although fortunately Yajima provides a facsimile of his main manuscript. Yet this chapter comprised a substantial section of the original work, some 24 pages out of 85 in Yajima's Manuscript A (excluding the later *dhayls*), or more than a quarter of the total, although the treatment of the two topics is highly uneven. The Prophets are given short shrift in the initial two pages which list the names and lifespans of those from Adam to Muḥammad, but the real focus is on the history of the *umma*, in particular its leaders the Caliphs. The only source mentioned is a rather confusing reference to the *Maghāzī* of Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), the well known Abbasid author; yet no such work can be found attributed to him. Further, Ibn Qutayba died some two centuries before the conclusion of this part of the text, so even if sections are drawn from a work by this author, he cannot be the source for much of it. In fact, a close comparison reveals that in fact Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's source for Caliphal history is the famous zoological encyclopaedia of the Mamluk author al-Damīrī (d. 808/1405), the *Ḥāyat al-Ḥayawān*. The use of such a source is less surprising than it may appear. The *Ḥāyat al-Ḥayawān* was a run-away best seller, and manuscripts of its text can be found as far away as Indonesia.⁶⁹ Its popularity derived in part from the fact that it contained many digressions, making it a convenient encyclopaedia of a wide variety of knowledge.⁷⁰ Al-Damīrī's entry for goose is the occasion for a substantial exposition of early Islamic history as the Caliph 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib encountered geese quaking in his face shortly before his assassination, to support al-Damīrī's idea that every sixth Caliph abdicated or was deposed.⁷¹ Al-Damīrī, who himself largely relied on Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), is largely copied verbatim by Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn, although with some omissions, so the *Ta'rikh*'s narrative gives the bare bones of Caliphal history.

⁶⁹ Two eighteenth-century copies formerly belonging to the sultans of Banten in Java are held in the National Library of Indonesia in Jakarta, MSS A 157 and A 158. See Friedrich and van den Berg 1873: 130.

⁷⁰ De Somogyi 1950.

⁷¹ De Somogyi 1950: 42.

This material is directly relevant to Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's purpose in a number of ways. Al-Damīrī's emphasis on the repeated abdication and deposition of later Caliphs would have certainly resonated in the Maldives, which saw numerous sultans unthroned. These parts of the text may thus have implicitly served to legitimise and normalise recent Maldivian political history. It is perhaps no coincidence that Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's own patron, Muḥammad 'Imād al-Dīn, who commissioned the *Ta'riḫ*, had deposed Ibrāhīm Muḥzir al-Dīn, and the chronicler himself had changed sides.

Secondly, in keeping with Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's ethical agenda as laid out in *al-Rutba al-Fākhira*, the Caliphs furnish examples of exemplary and condemnable behaviour. For example, while the pious 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz is held up as a model for his piety, and the text emphasises the public support he enjoyed,⁷² al-Walīd b. Yazīd (r. 125/743–126/744) is condemned for wine-drinking and obsession with frivolity, for which he was deposed by the people of Damascus.⁷³ Similarly, the 'Abbasid al-Mahdī (r. 158/775–169/785) “was generous, praiseworthy, loving towards his subjects, of fair morals and appearance ... he was noble, fair in appearance, courageous and loved the ulama. He used to summon the ulama and qadis to be brought before him, and had they not been present he would not have wished to hold the court of redress [*mazālim*] out of respect for them, and much good resulted from that.”⁷⁴ Al-Mahdī's behaviour thus reflects Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's recommendations in *al-Rutba al-Fākhira*, and is clearly intended to be exemplary.

Thirdly, the section on Caliphal history serves to place the Maldives in the broader sequence of Islamic history. The list of Caliphs comes to an end in the twelfth century with al-Muqtafī, in whose time the Maldives were converted to Islam. The third section of the text now has a much more local focus on the Maldivian rulers, but is extremely uneven in its coverage, focussing on three key episodes: the conversion of the Maldives by the itinerant preacher, Yūsuf Shams al-Dīn al-Tabrīzī, in 548/1143; the wars of the sixteenth century against the Portuguese; and the turbulent period of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century through which Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn himself lived. A constant theme is the relationship between the Maldivian sultans and the ulama from whom on some occasions the kings were themselves drawn, such as the Qadi Muḥammad b. al-Ḥājj 'Alī, who succeeded Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn as sultan in 1692 and appointed Ḥasan al-Dīn qadi for the first time. The qadi-sultan Muḥammad is depicted in uniformly positive terms, as “merciful to the weak, severe to

72 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: facsimile 19.

73 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: facsimile 21.

74 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: facsimile 22.

oppressors, and compassionate to the people”; among his achievements were building numerous mosques and restoring waqfs which had previously been confiscated.⁷⁵ There is a correlation between the sultan’s attitude towards ulama and how his reign is portrayed, including its commercial aspects. We are told that under Sultan Muḥammad b. al-Ḥājj ‘Alī prices were low and commerce from India, Aceh and Surat intensified.⁷⁶ Clearly this reflects at least as much an idealised situation as any economic reality.

Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn’s moralistic purpose occasionally is made quite explicit. For instance, when discussing the exile and torture of the treasurer who had betrayed Sultan Muḥammad ‘Imād al-Dīn by engaging in relations with his wife and plotting to take the throne for himself, Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn comments:

Oh you who are wise, look how the riches and servants he had acquired availed him not, but harmed him because he acquired riches. Thus all wealth which is taken in this wrongful way will not benefit the person who acquired it, but harms its owner and is destroyed with him. It is impossible that riches acquired through the moaning of the sorrowful, and violently seized and plundered from the poor oppressed should benefit the one who plunders them, nor should they profit their owners. How should someone enjoy what he has obtained in this way, which makes its owner weep? Verses:

Illicit riches one day will destroy his family and relatives.⁷⁷

Ḥasan then records the sickness and death of the treasurer’s co-conspirator, Āmina, after a violent illness which confounded the doctors. The story thus functions not just a record of the pair’s treachery, but as a morality tale warning against greed and love of material possessions, sins which are swiftly punished by God.

The individual cases of oppressive or praiseworthy sultans – and indeed ulama – have an exemplary function of exhorting the audience to justice and to following the precepts of Islam, while underlining the damage, both material and moral, that results from deviating from the straight path. The framing of the text within a context of salvation and Caliphal history serves to reinforce the Maldives’ place in this broader scheme, a point repeatedly reinforced by references to sultans’ and ulama’s ongoing connections with the sacred land of the Hijaz through the hajj. Throughout the text, at crucial moments, there reappears the figure of the patron saint to the Maldives, Yūsuf Shams al-Dīn al-Tabrīzī, by whose side only the holiest of rulers are buried, such as the exemplary sayyid-sultan Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn, and at whose grave people and rulers supplicate in times of acute trouble, such as infidel invasion.⁷⁸ In this way the patron

⁷⁵ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 47–48.

⁷⁶ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 48.

⁷⁷ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 67.

⁷⁸ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 22, 60.

saint of the Maldives and the story of the islands' Islamisation is brought into play in later periods. Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's pious agenda is as prominent as his historical one; indeed, it is clear that the author does not really distinguish between the two, ultimately seeing reading and writing historical texts as a religious task, providing moral examples for the reader while reminding him of the vanity of this world.

4 The descendants of Tāj al-Dīn: family politics and the continuations of the *Ta'rīkh*

In addition to their literary activities, the family of Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn were closely involved in politics. On Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's death, his son, Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn, who seems to have been named after his father's esteemed teacher, took his place as chief qadi, while a few years later in 1153/1740 Ḥasan's nephew Muḥammad [Muḥibb al-Dīn] was appointed *khaṭīb*.⁷⁹ Ḥasan's brother and disciple, Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn's father, Ḥusayn Jamāl al-Dīn, held the position of *nā'ib al-salṭana* from the time of Ibrāhīm Iskandar's father to his death in 1159/1746.⁸⁰ This position was then inherited by Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn.⁸¹ In other words, eighteenth century Maldivian religious and political life was dominated by this family of religious scholars from Gan. This might be reason enough to explain their interest in chronicling the history of the islands, and ensuring their own role was remembered positively. Yet the political role of some members of the dynasty was highly contentious; as Bell remarks, "Strange irony that the family to whom the Máldive Kingdom is indebted for its 'State Chronicle', should live in history under the stigma of perhaps the greatest act of treachery whichever sullied its not uneventful record".⁸²

Bell is referring to the involvement of Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's son and successor as qadi in the invasion of 1166/1753 launched by the Ali Raja dynasty of Cannanore.⁸³ In this traumatic event, the Malabar forces burned down the royal palace and took captive the sultan, Muḥammad 'Imād al-Dīn III, along with his nephew and viziers.⁸⁴ These were all taken back to Cannanore, but what happened next on the

⁷⁹ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 77, 79.

⁸⁰ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 74, 80.

⁸¹ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 82.

⁸² Bell 2002: 202.

⁸³ On the Ali Rajas see Prange 2018: 2002–2005; Mailaparambil 2011.

⁸⁴ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 83, 89; Bell 2002: 38 notes that these events are also covered in Dutch records, presumably those held in Colombo. These would repay investigation.

Maldives was a bone of contention even within Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's family. Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn records that,

When [the Malabaris] had exiled the sultan from his country and taken him to Cannanore, they swore a deceitful and treacherous oath of allegiance (*bay'at al-makr wa'l-khad'*) to Qadi Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn son of the Qadi Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn. They stayed loyal to him for some days. Then they took the qadi and his brother *khaṭīb* Aḥmad Muḥyi al-Dīn because they had the impression they were seeking kingship. They tied them up and utterly humiliated them even though both were virtuous scholars. Praise be to Him who makes mighty and contemptible, by God this humiliation only befell them owing to their inclination towards the adornments of this transitory world.

Subsequently, Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn reports, Shams al-Dīn and Muḥyi al-Dīn were killed by the Malabaris.⁸⁵ The details are reported in a quite different fashion by Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn, who writes that after exiling 'Imād al-Dīn and his ministers.

The Malabaris who were in the Maldives continued to obey Qadi Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn for some time. Then they felt envy towards him and his brother *khaṭīb* Aḥmad Muḥyi al-Dīn and killed them both by drowning ... I wished to avert my pen from the calumnies and slanders that have been said about these two, for they were lengthier and sharper the disasters [that befell us].⁸⁶

Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn then quotes the Qur'anic verses, 17:36, 49:6, 49:12, which warn against trusting false news. To this he adds Q. 3:21–22 "Those who disbelieve God's signs and kill the prophets for no cause and kill those men who order justice, inform them of a painful torment. Those are the ones whose works in this world and the next are frustrated, and they have no helpers." The slaughtered qadi and his brother are thus compared to the prophets and righteous doers against whom the Qur'anic pagans fought, and in case the point is missed, Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn then quotes hadith at length to similar effect.

Even if the basic record of facts is similar, the interpretation given by each author is quite different. Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn implies that Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn and Muḥyi al-Dīn had sought worldly power, receiving the *bay'a*, the oath of allegiance traditionally given to a ruler, and commenting that they met their fate owing to their predilection for worldly vanities (*zakhārif al-dunyā al-fāniyya*). In contrast, Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn mentions only that the Malabaris obeyed these two, but omits any reference to a *bay'a*. This could be interpreted simply as the obedience due to religious figures. Meanwhile, far from being men corrupted by this world, Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn goes to considerable lengths to portray Muḥammad Shams

⁸⁵ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 84.

⁸⁶ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 89.

al-Dīn and Aḥmad Muḥyi al-Dīn as martyrs comparable to the ancient prophets. Thus, different axes are being ground by each author. Doubtless we will never fully understand the evidently poisonous family politics at work here, but from Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn's account it becomes apparent that the direct beneficiary of the murder of Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn b. Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn was none other than the chronicler Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn, who was appointed to the position of chief qadi in his stead.⁸⁷ Although the identity of the person who appointed Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn is left ambiguous behind a third person plural verb “*wallow/they appointed*”, it is strongly implied that it was the Malabari occupiers, for we are then told that “Qadi Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn travelled to meet sultan Ali Raja of Cannanore.”⁸⁸ Meanwhile the Malabari forces plundered and oppressed the Maldivians, who plotted to revolt. The Ali Raja, however, sent reinforcements to the Maldives.

Despite his collaboration with the Ali Raja, Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn was appointed chief qadi by the new sultan Ḥasan 'Izz al-Dīn who acceded the throne in 1173/1759; he was, however, dismissed “for no just cause” (*bi-ghayr ḥaqq yujawwizu al-'azl bihi*) by the sultan while absent on the hajj and replaced with Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn b. Tāj al-Dīn's son Ibrāhīm.⁸⁹ On the latter's death in 1182/1768, Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn was again reappointed as chief qadi by sultan Ḥasan 'Izz al-Dīn's successor, Ghiyāth al-Dīn Iskandar.⁹⁰ Yet Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn tells us of rumours circulating that Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn had ordered the murder of Ghiyāth al-Dīn, although he claims not to believe them.⁹¹ Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn finally died in 1199/1785, and the sultan wanted to appoint Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn's father Muḥyi al-Dīn as qadi but was prevented by a palace faction who successfully insisted on the appointment of a pupil of Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn's, Najm al-Dīn Mūsā, who had cemented his links to his teacher by marrying the latter's daughter.⁹²

Thus the family of Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn was riven by disputes between two opposing factions (Figure 1). One was descended from his brother Ḥusayn Jamāl al-Dīn, of which Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn, the first continuator of the *Ta'riḫ* was the leading member; the other was represented by his two sons Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn and Aḥmad Muḥyi al-Dīn, who seem to have been allied, and their sons, including Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn b. Aḥmad Muḥyi al-Dīn, the author of the second continuation of the *Ta'riḫ*. The rivalry may have been financial as well as political,

⁸⁷ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 90.

⁸⁸ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 91.

⁸⁹ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 96.

⁹⁰ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 99.

⁹¹ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 105.

⁹² Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 107.

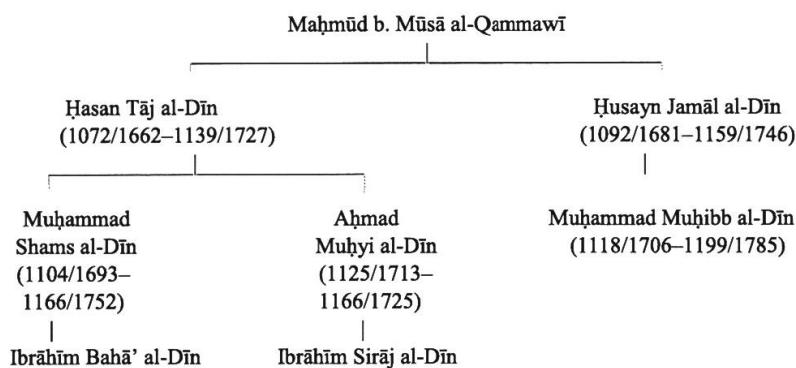


Figure 1: The family of Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn.

for İbrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn comments that when Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn died, his wealth was not distributed among his rightful heirs who included the author, İbrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn himself.⁹³

The continuations of the *Ta'riḫ* seem to voice the rivalry of these two factions, but we have no outside sources for the most part against which to balance it. There is much that is unclear to us but doubtless would have been evident to its audience. For example, the identity of the qadi during the reign of Sultan Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn is never made explicit, but there are certain hints. This is also suggested in İbrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn's account of Sultan Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn Iskandar's take-over in 1187/1773–4 in which the new sultan “seized the books of various praiseworthy sciences from seekers of knowledge and banned anyone other than his favourite (*muḥibbuhu*) from teaching in the Maldives.”⁹⁴ This may be a play on Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn's name, and gives rise to the suspicion that he remained in office. This supposition is strengthened by İbrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn's account of the persecution of other members of the family. The author was among those who was banned from teaching and had his books confiscated, while his cousins, the descendants of Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's grandson İbrāhīm Bahā' al-Dīn b. Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn had even their Qur'ans and books of fiqh taken from them.⁹⁵ Yet İbrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn is careful to avoid attacking his relative Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn directly, instead doing so by insinuation and suggestion. Thus while İbrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn's continuation may be seen in some respects as an attempt to counter the version of history propagated by Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn, especially as far as his own father's role in the Malabari invasion is concerned, Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn's chronicle is doubtless self-serving in its own ways. It concludes with the accession of Ḥasan 'Izz al-Dīn in 1173/1759 and an account of

⁹³ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 107.

⁹⁴ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 101.

⁹⁵ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 102–103.

his repelling of another Malabari attack in the second year of his reign.⁹⁶ Yet Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn survived for another 25 years after this, including periods when he was not employed as qadi, and certainly would have had leisure to continue his chronicle if he had wished.

There is ample reason to be suspicious of Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn's account of events too. He was evidently as closely implicated in the politics of his day as his ancestors, replacing his enemy Mūsā Najm al-Dīn as qadi in 1201/1787. In office, he accompanied sultan Ḥasan Nūr al-Dīn on the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. On his return he was deposed in favour of Mūsā Najm al-Dīn, and exiled by the Sultan to Huvadhu Atoll.⁹⁷ Under the next sultan, Muḥammad Mu'īn al-Dīn in 1221/1806, Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn was reappointed qadi.⁹⁸ Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn sheds little light on the reasons behind the vicissitudes of his career, but Bell notes, presumably drawing on oral sources, that the reason for his exile, “tradition confidently says [was] for dabbling in necromancy, rigidly tabooed by orthodox Muslims.”⁹⁹ That such rumours were still circulating a hundred years after Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn's lifetime suggests as much about the toxic nature of Maldivian factional politics as their veracity.

5 Conclusion

The *Ta'riḫ* composed by Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn is thus a highly complex document. On the one hand, it furnishes exemplary stories that are meant to guide its readers – purportedly the sultans – as to how to conduct themselves. This purpose is not merely moralistic but also practical, for such advice is meant to provide useful tools for governance of the sultanate. The practical agenda behind the *Ta'riḫ* is reflected in the fact that Yajima's manuscript A also contained, in addition to the histories, a collection of Maldivian “official letters”.¹⁰⁰ Regrettably Yajima's promised third volume of his edition where this was to be published never materialised, but it seems likely the correspondence was intended as handy reference point for the sultan in conducting foreign relations, for the two examples which were published by Yajima deal with relations with the Ali Rajas of Cannanore.¹⁰¹ Such letters also occupy the concluding parts of Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn's

⁹⁶ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 86–87.

⁹⁷ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 108–109, 111.

⁹⁸ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 117.

⁹⁹ Bell 2002: 41 (notes).

¹⁰⁰ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1984: 122.

¹⁰¹ Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 127–9.

continuation,¹⁰² suggesting they should not be seen as wholly separate from the historiographical tradition.

An equally if not more important purpose of the *Ta'rikh* was to affirm its authors' position by denigrating their rivals and casting their own careers in the best possible light. This may have partly been aimed at the sultans, to obtain their favour and ensure each author gained, recovered or retained the coveted position of qadi; but it is likely that the audience was also fellow members of their own family and class, the ulama. What is perhaps most puzzling is not the factionalism to which the *Ta'rikh* gives voice, for this is well attested in Islamic historiography from other times and periods,¹⁰³ but rather the fact that each of its constituent texts exists in apparent isolation, with the exception of the brief overlap between Muḥammad Muḥibb al-Dīn's and Ibrāhīm Sirāj al-Dīn's continuations. Did these evidently highly contentious texts really produce no reaction, at least in written form, or have these been lost along with the remainder of the Arabic literary production of the Maldives?

Such questions are ultimately unanswerable, unless new texts come to light, either in the Maldives or conceivably in the Hijaz, a place of study and exile for numerous Maldivians in pre-modern times. They do not detract from the importance of the *Ta'rikh* as a unique window into both the history of the Maldives and the broader Indian Ocean world, as well as the evidence it provides of an apparently thriving Arabic literary culture in the eighteenth century Maldives. They do, however, underline that as a source it must be treated with the utmost care, and every fragment of information it provides carefully evaluated in the context of what we know of its authors' lives and careers.

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102 Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn 1982: 124–6.

103 For example see Peacock 2014.

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