This paper presents a study of oriental manuscripts. The study focuses on the life of famous scholar al-Zamaḫšarī and one of his most important writings, Atwāq al-ḏahab, or Golden Necklaces of Exhortations and Sermons.

Al-Zamaḫšarī’s work is analyzed from the point of view of style and grammar. Three different copies of the manuscript are compared, two of which come from the collection of the Oriental Department of Gorky Research Library of St Petersburg State University and one from the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Refs 8. Figs 12.

Keywords: codicology, Arabic manuscript, manuscript copies, Arabic language, didactic literature.

Currently, research of written artifacts in oriental languages is increasingly timely and important. This has to do with the fact that scholars recognized the importance of knowledge contained in centuries old treatises on philosophy, history, philology, medicine and other human and natural sciences. Over the centuries, the number of written pieces...
has experienced a steady increase filling private and public collections. The spread of writings prompts their proper storage and systematization.

Russian scholars had already studied al-Zamaḥṣari’s writings, e.g. B. Z. Khalidov, Al-Zamaḥṣari (zhizn i tvorchestvo) (Al-Zamaḥṣari: His Life and Writings) and B. Z. Khalidov & A. B. Khalidov, Biografia al-Zamaḥṣari, sostavlennaya ego sovremennikom al-’Andarasbānī (Al-Zamaḥṣari’s Biography Compiled by His Contemporary al-’Andarasbānī). This study will go beyond the famous scholar’s personality and also focus on one of his most important pieces, ʿAwāq ʿal-dḥahab, or Golden Necklaces of Exhortations and Sermons.

Maḥmūd al-Zamaḥṣari was the author of seventy works. He was born in 467 AH/1075 AD, and died in 538AH/1144 AD. The future scholar was born in a small place called Zamakhshar in Khwarezmia, which is now part of Turkmenistan, and grew in a poor but educated and religious family [1, p. 210]. ‘Abd al-Tawāb ‘Auḍ mentions these facts attributing them to al-Zamaḥṣari himself [2, p. 10]. Adventurer and scholar al-Muqaddasi noted that Khwarezm attracted a lot of scholars and literary figures of the time [3, p. 284–285]. Initially, al-Zamaḥṣari’s father taught him. Later, he went to school and traveled a lot when he grew up to increase his knowledge. Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī mentions ‘Abū al-Ḥasan al-Muẓaffar al-Nisābūrī and Ibn Ǧarīr al-Ḍabbī — among al-Zamaḥṣari’s teachers. The latter not only taught al-Zamaḥṣari but supported him financially. Later, al-Zamaḥṣari had a lot of disciples too [4, p. 1142].

Al-Zamaḥṣari traveled to Bukhara, Khorasan, Isfahan, Baghdad, and Mecca, where he met outstanding people of his time. Some researchers noted that al-Zamaḥṣari continued to study all his life. His good handwriting helped the young scholar to make his living.

Al-Zamaḥṣari was married but had no children. He divorced his wife to dedicate his life to scholarly activities. ‘Abd al-Tawāb ‘Auḍ says that the failure in his personal life made a great impact on his beliefs [2, p. 31]. He even made this the subject of some of his beits:

tazawwaḵtu lam ‘a’lam wa ‘aḥta’tu lam ‘uṣib
fa yā laytani qad muttu qabla al-tazwīg

I married, not knowing what marriage was.
I wish I could have died before the wedding!

The scholar had two nicknames: Faḥr Ḥawārizm the Pride of Khwarezm and Ğār Allāh God’s Neighbor. Arab scholar and writer al-Ziriklī suggested that the latter name was given to al-Zamaḥṣari, because he lived in Mecca for quite some time [5, p. 76-77].

Al-Zamaḥṣari had a physical impairment that he received as a child, he had lost his foot and used a wooden artificial leg. Several explanations are know of this impairment. Some historians believe that he lost one of his feet to a frostbite. B. Z. Khalidov points out that al-Zamaḥṣari’s disability was the result of him falling off the roof and breaking his leg, which had to be amputated [6, p. 548]. However, Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī referred to an explanation allegedly given to him by al-Zamaḥṣari himself that stated that the disability was his mother’s curse who saw al-Zamaḥṣari’s cruel treatment of the bird he had caught and wished that he would suffer the same. According to contemporaries al-Zamaḥṣari always carried a document as legal proof of his impairment [4, p. 2688].

As a young man, al-Zamaḥṣari wrote several works that brought him fame. He sent his scholarly pieces and praising poems to various rulers including high-ranked officials with the court of Seljuq Sultans, to receive remuneration and a government position.
While he received money for his writings he never reached a high position protesting that the road to power was open to the ignorant but closed to scholars.

Al-Zamaḥšāri was the author of geographic and Arabic-Persian dictionaries, a collection of maqamas, a collection of proverbs and sayings as well as numerous theological writings. Al-Zamaḥšāri’s Qur’ān commentary, al-Kašāfī al-Qurān, which he completed in 1134, is the most debated of this works. Al-Zamaḥšāri followed the Hanafi Madhab and subscribed to the Muʿtazilite theological doctrine. This work fully reflected his ideas. Despite the fact that al-Kašāfī has often been called heretical, it remains one of the most serious scholarly works of this kind as the first example of scholarly textual analysis.

‘Ibn Ḥallikān and al-Suyūṭī noted al-Zamaḥšāri’s breadth of knowledge and talked of him as a specialist in many fields.

In 1130, the scholar went on his second hajj to Mecca despite his physical disability going around Kaaba one hundred times [7, p. 66]. According to contemporaries, after each circle al-Zamaḥšāri writes a chapter or, as he called them, maqāla (article) of his piece Aṭwāq al-ḏahab. The work was written in the traditional Arab style of sağ (rhymed prose). We should remind our readers of al-Zamaḥšāri’s mastery of Arabic. His works are characterized by high style, imagery and rich language. Aṭwāq al-ḏahab is written in the style not accessible to every scholar. This is another evidence of his command of the language. In Aṭwāq al-ḏahab, the author describes positive and negative aspects of society as a whole and of some of its members.

Al-Zamaḥšāri died in his home town of Khwarezm and was buried in Gurganj. Famous traveler ‘Ibn Baṭṭūṭa wrote that he had visited that place and personally seen the scholar’s grave.

How important was al-Zamaḥšāri’s Aṭwāq al-ḏahab is manifested by the fact that a number of pieces have since come out that imitated this work. Al-‘Iṣfahānī wrote a piece with the similar name of Aṭbāq al-ḏahab (Golden Dishes). The piece is written in a similar style on a similar subject. It also describes public morals but is longer than al-Zamaḥšāri’s work. Despite the fact that both writings were complete pieces, they complement each other in some parts [7, p. 67]. Famous Egyptian poet ‘Aḥmad Šawqī wrote a piece in 1951 that had reference points with al-Zamaḥšāri’s work both in content and in form called Aswāq al-ḏahab (Golden Markets).

We studied three copies of al-Zamaḥšāri’s, Aṭwāq al-ḏahab, or Golden Necklaces of Exhortations and Sermons: No.834 and No.797 from the Oriental Department of Gorky Research Library of St Petersburg State University and A-584 from the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St Petersburg.

First of all, it must be noted that the title of Aṭwāq al-ḏahab was not given by the piece’s author. Al-Zamaḥšāri wrote two pieces with similar titles: the collection of maqam, Kitāb al-naṣāʿiḥ al-ḵibār (The Book of Important Exhortations) and Kitāb al-naṣāʿiḥ al-ṣiğār (The Book of Small Exhortations). Later, the latter became known as Aṭwāq al-ḏahab.

Both copies from the collection of the Oriental Department of St Petersburg State University belonged to Sheik al-Ṭanṭawi’s collection [8, c.28]. There is an inscription on page 2 in No.834 made by the copy owner:

تعا’ haqihī al-risāla mālikuhā Muḥammad al-Ṭanṭawī wa huwa fi bitrbūrg fī yaum al-sabt 3 ǧumādī aḥar sanat 1256

Its owner Muhammad al-Ṭanṭawī read this treatise, St Petersburg, Saturday, 3 Jumādī, end of the year 1256.
Copy No. 834 (sheets 1–13) is in a convolute; it is in good condition. The copy size is 22 cm × 14 cm. The paper is European, with water marks. The text is written in black ink, with headings highlighted in red ink. There comments on the margins in Arabic. The text includes carry-over words and an introductory basmalah. Neither the date nor the copyist’s name are mentioned. Part of the text is vowelled.

The size of Copy No. 797 is 21,5 cm × 15 cm. The copy is in good condition despite the yellowed paper. The paper is European, with water marks. The text is written in black ink, with headings highlighted in red ink. The text is inside a box drawn in red ink. Some sheets have comments in Arabic; the text has carry-over words. Neither the date nor the copyist’s name are mentioned. The text is fully vowelled.

Copy A-584 from the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St Petersburg has the following size: 17,5 cm × 13 cm. The cover is made of cardboard. The text is written in black ink, with headings highlighted in red ink. There are grammatical and lexical comments in Arabic with corrected mistakes on the margins. The text of the piece starts with the back side of sheet 2. Articles, or chapters, are numbered till sheet 5. The text is fully vowelled.

*Fig. 1. Fragment of Copy No. 834 with the inscription indicating that the copy was part of al-Ṭanṭawi’s collection*
The three copies start with the author’s words:


God, I thank you for giving (me) of Your mercies; (for) removing Your wrath from me, although I did not deserve the former (i.e., Your mercy) but deserved the latter (i.e. Your wrath).

The word ‘anzalta is replaced by its synonym ‘azlalta in Copy A-584. Meanwhile the text is rhymed, e.g.: ‘anzalta — ‘azalta; min ni’matika — min niqmatika.

The back of sheet 2 says:

‘innaka mawlā kull ḥayr wa muwlīh wa ḥāfiḍ kull šay’ wa mu’līh

You have all goodness, You give goodness. You elevate and bring down.
Copy No. 797 has a colophon on sheet 1, which is generally found at the end of a piece. There is a verse by scholar ‘ Abd al-Raḥmān al-Marḥūmī in the colophon:

1 Maqālāt Maḥmūd Ḥakīm niẓāmuhā
lahā manṭaq ‘aḍb wa ma’nā bādī’
’iḍā ‘iqlīw‘ mat‘awmat ‘ilayh bi-ṭarfihā
tayammamhā wa huwa al-samī’ al-muṭṭī
da laḥa dalīl šāhīd li-muṣḥiḥihā
bi-maḍhab ḥaqq lā ‘i’tīlāl šanī’
‘afā allāh ‘an ḍāk al-ḡanāb fa-kam ’atā

1 Died in 1712.
The rhymes in Mahmud’s articles are wonderful,
They have sweet language and marvelous meaning.
If these articles are given to a reasonable man,
He immediately washes himself with sand. He is obedient and humble.²
These articles have obvious proof that the man, who has written them,

² It means “obedient to and humble before” God, since some chapters have religious content.
Adheres to the right religious doctrine,
Not to the horrible Mu’tazilite teaching.
May God forgive this man. How many times God has protected him!
He is the best protector in the world!
He is given countless blessings.

Reference to al-Zamaḥṣari

Fig. 5. Beginning of Copy A-584
We can derive from the above fragment that despite many sources some scholars, including al-Marḫūmī, believed that al-Zamaḥṣāri was not *Muʿāzilite*. 
The colophon on sheet 21 of Copy No.797 reads:

tamma Atwaq al-dahab li-qud wav al-fadil fi al-aqim wa al-arab
‘Abi al-Qasim Mahmud ibn ‘Umar al-Zamahsari tayyab Allah mastwa

The piece Golden Necklaces is completed to become an example for worthy (people) from Arabs and non-Arabs. (Written by) ‘Abi al-Qasim Mahmud ibn ‘Umar al-Zamahsari. May he rest in peace!
Fig. 8. Last sheet of Copy No. 834

Copy No.834 has the following text on sheet 13:

wa al-ḥamd li-Allāh rabb al-ʿālamīn wa ṣalla Allāh ʿalā ʿafdal al-ʿanbiyāʿ wa al-mursilīn wa al-malāʾikat al-muqarrabīn Muḥammad al-nabī al-muṣṭafā wa ṣallahu 'alā ʿaḥl biḥ al-ẓayyibīn al-ṭāhirīn wa sallam taslimān kāṭirān kāṭirān

Praise God, the Lord of the Worlds! May God bless the best of prophets and (God’s) messengers, angels close to Muhammad — the chosen prophet — his noble family and kin. He (God) blessed him immensely.
The text of the last sheet number 16 of Copy A-584 is different from that of the other copies:

tammat al-risālat al-mawsūmat bi-ʿAṭwāq al-ḍahab li-al-Zamaḥṣarī

Al-Zamaḥṣarī’s treatise entitled Golden Necklaces is completed

Besides, there is the copy owner’s seal on sheet 2, the back of sheet 7, the back of sheet 12, and the last sheet 16 that says:
This is the property of al-Rāğī Fayd al-Ṣamdi al-Ṣayh 'Ahmad Ḫiyā' al-Dīn Muṣṭafā al-Ḥālidī. Sin will be on those who will change it after hearing of it.4

It is worth noting that al-Zamaḥṣari’s work is not free from contradictions or statements we could hardly agree with.

Article number 23 in Copy No.797 has the following text on the back of sheet 7:

‘ihḏar min al-ḥusūf wa al-kusūf wa lā tastami’ li-qawl al-faylasūf lā ya'lū ’an yataḥammaq wa ’an yağlū wa yata’ammaq

Fear a sun or moon eclipse and do not listen to the philosopher’s speeches, for he behaves like a fool.

In other instance, al-Zamaḥṣari urges to refrain from treatment and totally rely on God instead who can cure any ailment. For example, the author of the treatise writes in article 48 on the back of sheet 13 and on sheet 14:

ṯiqatuk bi-qawl al-ṭabīb maraḍ ʿaʃadd min maraḍik
Your belief in the doctor is more serious an illness than you own illness...

And later:

fa-ʿakṭaruhum ʾimmā ʿabd al-ṭabīʿat wa ʾimmā ʿābid al-ṣalīb fī al-bayʿat
Most doctors are slaves of nature or Christians that worship the cross in the church.

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4 Then whoever changes the bequest after hearing it, the sin shall be on those who make the change. Truly, Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower. (Surah Al-Baqarah (The Cow), ayat 181).
At the same time, al-Zamaḥšarī calls on people to act in a thought-through and weighted way, e.g. in article 21:

\[
\text{halumma 'ilā īštārāt 'aqlīk fa-tabaṣṣar wa 'ilā īstilāhārat ḍaḥnik fa-tadābbar}
\]

*Use your reason, think, act consciously...*

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Al-Zamaḥšarī’s *Aṯwāq al-ḏahab* continues to interest scholars not only from the point of view of content but as a brilliant literary piece. This gives us reason to state that al-Zamaḥšarī is rightly considered to be a talented and unique scholar of his time.
References


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