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ISMĀ'ĪL AḤMAD ADHAM (1911-1940), THE ATHEIST

In the following article we should like to give a concise account of the life and works of a Turk, Ismā'īl Aḥmad Adham, who lived part of his short life in Egypt and who had a certain influence on the literary men of his time. This influence should not be overestimated. Adham was full of pretensions to which he did not live up; for one thing, his academic background was entirely fictitious. It is our intention here to assess his position—if one can call it that—in literary circles of Egypt during the last four years before his suicide in the Mediterranean in 1940. However, we must first give a short biography in which we can deal at the same time with his pretensions.

Ismā'īl Aḥmad Adham was born on February 17, 1911, in Alexandria, his father being a Turkish army officer, Aḥmad Adham, and his mother a German lady. In the autobiographical accounts¹ he gave to his friends he claimed that she was the daughter of the scientist J. H. van 't Hoff, a member of the Prussian Academy of Sciences and at one time professor at the University of Berlin, whom Adham mistook for a German. It is unlikely that Van 't Hoff was his grandfather, as it can be established that his paternal grandfather, Ismā'īl Bey Adham, who, he claimed, was professor of Turkish literature in Berlin, was nothing of the sort. His great-grandfather, Ibrāhīm, may have been the person of that name who was a high government official under Muḥammad 'Alī.

The account of Adham's first twenty-five years which he gave himself is so improbable that it can be discarded as the fantasies of a pathological liar whose main object in life was to create for himself a reputation he was in no way able to earn through ordinary means. Thus Adham said of himself that, after having obtained a bachelor's degree in mathematics from Istanbul University², he went to Russia to study mathematics and theoretical physics at the University of Moscow. In 1933 he received there one doctorate in physics and one in philosophy³. After that he alleged that he had been professor

¹ The most extensive biography of Adham, based upon notes he provided himself, can be found in Sāmī al-Kayyālī, *Ar-rāḥilūn*, Cairo n.d. (± 1941), p. 75-119, which is the same text as published as an obituary in the periodical *al-Ḥadīth*, XIV, 1940, p. 541-564.

² Sāmī al-Kayyālī, *Ar-rāḥilūn*, p. 78, in the following abbreviated as *Rāḥ.*

³ *Rāḥ.*, p. 78, 82 f.

of physics for one year at Leningrad University (which inadvertently he called Petersburg¹). Then he went back to Turkey where he was offered a professorial chair in physics by an Institute of higher learning in Ankara, which did not exist.

Through his study of the history of sciences he developed an interest, he said², in the cultural history of the Middle East. He claimed that he had published numerous articles in Russian, German and Turkish orientalist periodicals, none of which could be traced. Furthermore, he alleged that he had written by this time (1935) in German some studies on mathematics and physics, published by the non-existing publishing house of Gustav Fischer in Leipzig, entitled *Die Grundlagen der Relativitätstheorie*, and *Mathematik und Physik*. His doctoral thesis, he said, was on a new type of mechanics based on the movement of gases and the science of probability calculation. He also claimed that he had been commissioned by the University of Freiburg to re-edit Sprenger's three-volume biography of the Prophet. This new edition "with numerous footnotes and remarks added", as Adham said³, does not exist. On top of all this he pretended to have received an honorary doctorate from the University of Moscow and to have become a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences⁴. It could be established that Adham never got any doctorate, never became a member of the Academy of Sciences, never published one book or article in either Russian, French or German, never wrote his two-volume work in Turkish, entitled *Islam Tarihi*, never made friends with the Russian Orientalist Barthold, who had already died in 1930, one year before Adham claims to have gone to Russia, and never met with favourable criticism from the Russian Orientalist Kazimirsky, because there was no such person.

In 1935 Adham went to live on the small estate near Alexandria that his father had left him, and the periodical *ar-Risāla* started publishing in instalments the first of his writings whose existence can be established. The article bore the title *Naẓariyat an-nisbiya al-khuṣūṣiyya* (On the special theory of Relativity). From then onwards he wrote a great number of articles which he published in various literary periodicals such as

¹ *Rāḥ.*, p. 84.

² *Rāḥ.*, p. 85.

³ *Rāḥ.*, p. 85.

⁴ *Rāḥ.*, p. 86; cf. *Adabi*, I, 1936, p. 459, where a list is drawn up of all the references to Adham in Russian, French and English sources, a list which he himself (see *Adabi*, II, p. 26) gave to Abū Shādī. None of these references could be confirmed.

the above-mentioned *ar-Risāla*, editor Aḥmad Ḥasan az-Zayyāt, *al-Muqtaṭaf*, editor Fu'ād Ṣarrūf, *al-Mağalla al-ğadida*, editor Salāma Mūsā, *al-Imām* (of Alexandria), editor Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Laṭīf as-Saḥartī, *Adabī*, editor Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī, *al-Ḥadīth* (of Aleppo), editor Sāmī al-Kayyālī, *Mağallat aṭ-Ṭalī'a* (of Damascus), editor Rishwān 'Isā, *al-Makshūf* (of Beirut), editor Fu'ād Ḥubaish, and some daily papers such as *al-Baṣīr* and *al-Abrām*. Quite a few of these articles¹ dealt with science, as some of the titles clearly show, for example *The electrical structure of the atom*, *Principles of classical relativity*, *Classical mechanics*, etc. These articles suggest a basic knowledge of the sciences which Adham may have acquired in Istanbul. Whether they have any scientific value remains to be seen. We sincerely doubt it. They are probably the result of more or less skilful copying from popularizing books on these subjects.

Having settled in Egypt, Adham wrote a treatise which immediately caused heated discussions. His *Min maṣādir at-tārīkh al-islāmī* (of 1936) dealt with the position of the tradition literature among the sources of early Islamic historiography. He sent one hundred free copies to the Azhar to be distributed among the *shaiḫs*. The treatise contained such a number of odious statements concerning the authenticity and the historical reliability of the *ḥadīth* that the Azharites induced the Rector of al-Azhar, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī (died in 1945), to file a complaint against the author with the Ministry of the Interior². The Ministry complied with the wishes of the Azhar, and a few days after its publication the book was banned from the market³. When one reads it, one is impressed by the liberal spirit it breathes. It is riddled with footnotes referring to Goldziher's *Muḥammedanische Studien* and Caetani's *Annali dell' Islam*, to name but two sources. Adham does not offer any new ideas. The only element that puzzles one is: from where did he get his information? He could read neither German nor Italian, in contradiction to his own statement as to his proficiency in those languages⁴. The solution of this question can be sought in the possibility that Goldziher's views on the *ḥadīth* literature may have been made available to Adham

¹ For references to Adham's writings, see Appendix II.

² Cf. the newspaper *al-Balāgh* of April 17, 1936.

³ It is astonishing that, although this book has a perfectly ordinary entry in the catalogue of the Dār al-Kutub, the compiler of *Al-kutub al-'arabiya 'llati nushirat fi 'l-Gumbūriya 'l-'arabiya al-muttaḥida*, Cairo 1969, has refrained from mentioning it.

⁴ Cf. *Rāḥ.*, p. 76.

through W. H. T. Gairdner's adaptation of Goldziher's work in an article published in the periodical *Muslim World* of 1915¹, and subsequently translated into Arabic, in the missionary periodical *ash-Sharq wa'l-gharb* in April 1916². As for Caetani's *Annali*, that work was translated into Turkish by Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın³. There is no doubt that Adham quoted from this translation, although he pretends to have used the Italian original.

The outcome of Adham's controversial treatise was a negative one. Nevertheless, it placed him directly in the limelight. He acquired a certain reputation for his outspokenness which endeared him to many intellectuals and artists of these days, who sought to shake off the shackles of traditionalism.

Of the friends who believed or professed to believe in Adham, his academic career and his scholarly integrity, mention must be made in the first place of the editors of periodicals, a list of which was given above, who accepted his articles at face value after having made extensive corrections to his Arabic style. They often introduced the author of the article by means of a short notice on his life, graciously provided by Adham himself. The editor of the Aleppo periodical *al-Ḥadīth*, Sāmī al-Kayyālī, proved to be the most generous with his credulity. He wrote in his obituary of Adham that he had never seen Adham's Turkish book *Islam tarihi*, although the author had promised to send him a copy during his lifetime⁴. The idea that the book did not exist obviously never occurred to him. He also devoted a special issue⁵ of his periodical to the commemoration of the deceased. Eighteen literary men contributed to this issue *qaṣīdas* and prose. In this memorial volume one can find guarded appraisal from those that had become somewhat sceptical, but also unlimited glorification. The Syrian poetess Wadād Sakākīnī, for example, went as far as to compare Adham with Socrates⁶!

A second person who appeared to be taken in by Adham, but cannot have been, was the poet Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī. He was the editor of *Apollō*, the literary magazine in which so many young poets have experimented with new ways of writing poetry. After the

¹ V, p. 349-374.

² Cf. *al-Manār*, XIX, p. 27-37.

³ Istanbul 1924-26, 10 vol.

⁴ *Rāb.*, p. 94.

⁵ *Al-Ḥadīth*, 1940, XIV, p. 541-625.

⁶ *Al-Ḥadīth*, 1940, XIV, p. 596.

publication of *Apollo* had stopped, Abū Shādī started editing another periodical called *Adabī* (My literature), in which he published everything concerning himself, in addition to numerous poems of his own and the texts of papers he read at certain literary clubs. Abū Shādī had a doctorate in medicine from London and was a confirmed anglophile. In Abū Shādī's *Adabī* Adham published an article on the poetry of Abū Shādī to which the editor added a lengthy postscript. A short time afterwards a booklet appeared on the market, published by "Gustav Fischer" in Leipzig in 1936, with forty pages of English text and fifty pages of Arabic. It bore the title *Abushady the poet*, by I. A. Edham. One glance inside suffices to arouse one's interest in a publishing company, situated in the Mecca of oriental bookprinting, Leipzig, that puts out such miserable work. Von Grünebaum, in his review of this book in the *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*¹, remarked: "Bedauerlich ist einzig die unbeschreibliche Sorglosigkeit, mit der beim Druck vorgegangen wurde." In fact, it will become clear that it was printed in Egypt.

Adham's book caused quite a stir. Some doubt as to whether he really was the author was spread in articles in various periodicals². But nobody launched an attack as vicious as that of Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Baṭṭāḥ, an attack which he published in his collection of essays entitled *Wahy al-ayyām*³.

Al-Baṭṭāḥ had obviously a great dislike for Abū Shādī. He hinted that what was written in newspapers and literary magazines about the poet was invariably written by Abū Shādī himself—under a pseudonym—in order to enhance his status⁴. The same goes for Adham's book on Abū Shādī, al-Baṭṭāḥ asserted. He included a photocopy of a page of the manuscript and a copy of a proof studded with corrections, of which he claimed that it was in Abū Shādī's own handwriting. "And how can he still maintain", al-Baṭṭāḥ exclaimed, "that this book is the work of that dolt (i.e. Adham), who told me himself some time ago that his knowledge of English was hardly worth mentioning?" Al-Baṭṭāḥ added that he remembered having met Adham for the first time when the latter was approximately seventeen years old and—as he said himself—a pupil of the

¹ XLV, 1938, p. 297.

² Cf. *Adabī*, II, p. 22, and *al-Imām*, 1937, p. 72-76.

³ Vol. 2, Cairo 1937.

⁴ Cf. p. 273.

Secondary Commercial School in Alexandria¹! Whether this last bit of information can be proved or not, it certainly sheds a strange light upon Adham's information about his schooling in Turkey².

Abū Shādī responded to al-Baṭṭāḥ's insinuations in his periodical *Adabī*. He denied having written the book in question himself, but he admitted that it was not Gustav Fischer in Leipzig but the Maṭba'at at-Ta'āwun in Alexandria that had done the printing. Abū Shādī asserted that the "Fischer Verlag" only took care of the distribution of the book among the Orientalists of Europe. Astonishingly enough, Adham on one occasion forgot that his friend Abū Shādī had confessed to the book's having been printed in Egypt. For, some years later, he wrote a letter to Sāmī al-Kayyālī in which he told the latter that his book on Abū Shādī was sold out and was being reprinted by Gustav Fischer in Leipzig³!

More evidence for the theory that Abū Shādī himself wrote this book, granting the credit for it to Adham but singing his own praises at the same time, is adduced by Kamāl Nash'at in his doctoral thesis on Abū Shādī⁴. This author claims that Abū Shādī wrote another book about himself, which he then attributed to Ḥasan Ṣāliḥ al-Ġaddāwī⁵. Abū Shādī's motive for writing this book was not his desire to eulogize his own poetry but rather to emphasize his pro-English sentiments. After the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936 Abū Shādī deemed it necessary to shed light upon his position among Egyptian *hommes de lettres* and to put himself forward as the most appropriate ambassador of Anglo-Egyptian cooperation⁶. This evidence shows that he was not averse to practices of this sort. Nash'at concludes that the booklet attributed to Adham was likewise the work of Abū Shādī himself on the basis of the following evidence. Adham knew too little English to be capable of writing a book in that language, whereas Abū Shādī's knowledge was adequate. Further, Abū Shādī's poetry is dealt with in such swollen language that it is inconceivable that any man in his right mind, with scholarly pretensions, could write it down⁷.

¹ *Wahy al-ayyām*, II, p. 258 ff.

² *Rāḥ.*, p. 77-78, 82.

³ Cf. *al-Ḥadīth*, 1940, XIV, p. 607, where Sāmī al-Kayyālī published some of Adham's personal letters to him.

⁴ *Abū Shādī wa-ḥarakat at-taḡdīd fi 'sh-shi'r al-'arabī al-ḥadīth*, Cairo 1967. I thank Shmuel Moreh of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem for the reference to this book.

⁵ Under the title *Nazarāt naqdiyya fi shi'r Abī Shādī*, Cairo 1936.

⁶ Cf. Kamāl Nash'at, p. 209.

⁷ Kamāl Nash'at, p. 209 f.

Adham had more friends who believed in him or pretended to do so. Maḥmūd Taimūr praised his clarity, courage and sagacity¹. The poet Şiddīq Shaibūb especially favoured Adham's treatise on the poet Khalil Maṭrān published in instalments in *al-Muqtaṭaf*². Salāma Mūsā expressed his admiration for Adham's attack on the limitation of free speech, which the latter had made in his article *Ḥurriyat al-fikr*³. Furthermore, the poet Ḥasan Kāmil aṣ-Şairafī and the writer Muḥammad Amīn Ḥassūna always expressed unbounded admiration for Adham and his work⁴.

Adham also met with much criticism. The poet Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ghanī Ḥasan subjected Adham's Arabic style to a severe scrutiny and remarked that it abounded in mistakes. Not until a few months before his death did it begin to show distinct improvement. Especially in his earlier writings he introduced many English and French terms for notions that could be rendered perfectly well in Arabic. Furthermore, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ghanī Ḥasan discovered that Adham repeated his own words over and over again, something which suggested a paucity of ideas⁵. Adham usually defended himself by stressing his Turkish origin⁶.

Others have made derogatory remarks about Adham's numerous articles on literary men of his time. Among these the most convincing are those of Bishr Fāris. He accused Adham on the basis of satisfactory evidence of having 'borrowed' certain scholarly phrases from him without referring to their source; he exposed Adham's deficient knowledge of French, and he proved how Adham had tried to impress his readers with the extent of his reading which, in fact, was limited⁷.

It seems appropriate to give a short survey of Adham's writings, as no list in any bibliography is at all adequate⁸. Apart from the works already mentioned, he devoted lengthy articles to the lives and writings of the following authors: the Iraqi poet Ġamil Şidqī az-Zahāwī, Ṭaha Ḥusain, Khalil Maṭrān, Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm, Ismā'īl Maẓhar⁹,

¹ Cf. *al-Ḥadīth*, XV, 1941, p. 18.

² Cf. *al-Ḥadīth*, 1940, p. 565, 620-625.

³ See Appendix II. Cf. *al-Imām*, 1937, p. 290 ff.

⁴ Cf. *ar-Risāla*, VIII, p. 1395 f.; *al-Ḥadīth*, XII, 1938, p. 274.

⁵ Cf. *al-Ḥadīth*, XIV, 1940, p. 582 ff., 599-602, and *ar-Risāla*, VIII, p. 1515 ff. Others have made similar remarks, cf. *al-Ḥadīth*, XIII, 1939, p. 662.

⁶ Cf. *Rāḥ.*, p. 106.

⁷ Cf. *ar-Risāla*, 1939, p. 1176, 1271 f., 1380, 1663 f., 1880 f., 2067-2070, and *al-Muqtaṭaf*, 1939, p. 360-367.

⁸ For references, see Appendix II.

⁹ This author was accused of plagiarism, cf. *al-Makshūf*, 1938, IV, no. 169, p. 6.

and the Turkish poet Abdülhak Hamit Tarhan. He published some Arabic translations of literary work by Victor Hugo¹ and the Turks Refik Halid Karay, Abdülhak Hamit Tarhan and Tewfik Fikret. He wrote a few articles on Pharaonism, a treatise on genealogy, various articles on historical subjects, and many others. His best-known article is called *Limādhā ana mulhid* (Why am I an apostate?)², Adham's account of how his fiercely religious father compelled him to observe Islam in such a manner that he took a dislike to religion. He had already made the acquaintance of works by authors such as Darwin, Haeckel, Descartes, Kant, Büchner, Huxley and others³. In his article he declared himself an atheist for social, psychological and scientific reasons, the last of which he set out to expound. There then follows a shallow, quasi-scientific exposé in which he argues that the world is subject to the all-embracing law of chance (*qānūn aṣ-ṣudfa* or *at-taṣāduf aṣh-shāmīl*). That meant that the world could be compared with a printing-office with millions and millions of pieces of type. If one combines these pieces haphazardly for an infinite length of time, Adham argued, one can expect one day to see this article, or the Qur'ān for that matter. Einstein, Adham said, found only one element in a book that remained unclear to him, and that element he called the intellect of the author. But, Adham concluded, in this Einstein overlooks the law of chance which, in the end, can be held responsible for the coming into existence of everything.

The only value a pseudo-profound theory such as this may have had, in our opinion, is that it testified clearly to the courage of the author, a courage that was badly needed in the Egypt of his days. His friends were fortified by this study, although they hardly ever agreed with the contents. Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī wrote a so-called 'refutation' with the title *Limādhā ana mu'min*, in which he gave an exposé of his religious feelings. These appeared, *within* a religious framework, to be just as liberal as Adham's⁴. Another refutation was published in the *Mağallat al-Aḥbar* by its editor Muḥammad Farīd Wağdī. He needed only a few arguments to invalidate Adham's

¹ Cf. Appendix I.

² *Al-Imām*, 1937, p. 236-246.

³ Probably through the translations of a.o. Ismā‘īl Maḥzar and Shiblī Shumayyil.

⁴ *Limādhā ana mu'min* by Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī, Maṭba‘at at-ta‘āwun, Alexandria 1937. The present writer has not been able to lay hands on a copy of this book, as it does not seem to be available in any Egyptian library. The above-mentioned sentences form a reconstruction of Abū Shādī's ideas on the basis of evidence provided by other sources.

theories entirely and, strangely enough, he did not adduce one single Islamic tenet. He merely pointed out Adham's inconsistent way of thinking. He said that he would not even have gone to the trouble of refuting Adham's article, had it not been for his fear that simple, ignorant minds might be taken in by this pretentious rubbish¹.

After the publication of his *Limādhā ana mulhid* Adham became known as the "atheist who spoke his mind candidly". Also his article *Ḥurriyat al-fikr* shows him in all his frankness. Adham's outspokenness is, in our opinion, his most important feature.

Summing up, we can safely state that Adham's literary influence on the *hommes de lettres* of his days was minute. Some of these, for example Bishr Fāris, found out that at most Adham could be called a clumsy plagiarist. Others refrained from mentioning his plagiarism, because they may not have wanted to criticize the 'music', the 'tone' of which they admired so much. Nowhere do we find an explicit appraisal of Adham's literary writings. Only on a few occasions do we find that some contemporaries extol the manner in which he wrote. Criticism of the content of Adham's articles comprises qualifications such as 'shallow' and 'rickety'.

Briefly surveying Adham's articles—the parenthesized numbers correspond with those given in Appendix II—we find that his writings on religion and history (nos. 1, 37, 16, 23) caused some stir but were either quickly forgotten or more or less severely criticized. His articles on literary subjects (nos. 19, 20, 24, 25, 32, 35, 40, 52) met with some non-committal appraisal as well as some unfavourable criticism. Neither Adham's articles on Pharaonism (nos. 42 and 43), nor his scientific studies (nos. 3, 11, 17, 28, 30, 49, 50, 51), nor his social studies (nos. 4, 41, 45, 48) evoked any comment of importance.

In connection with this it might be interesting to mention a remark of the poet Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ghani Ḥasan in his obituary of Adham in *al-Ḥadīth*. "Strangely enough", Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ghani Ḥasan said, "there is doubt with some people as to whether Adham is indeed the author of the writings that bear his name. Even stranger", the poet went on, "is the opinion of a professor of a certain institute (sic) who claimed that Adham was nothing else but an imaginary figure, invented by some people in order to vent those ideas that were too liberal for conservative ears. I do not believe this to be true²."

¹ *Maḡallat al-Azhar*, VIII, p. 457-475.

² Cf. *al-Ḥadīth*, XIV, 1940, p. 583.

When, on July 23 of 1940, Adham had committed suicide by drowning himself in the Mediterranean, his friends lost themselves in conjectures as to the motives that brought this twenty-nine year old youth to do this. It was well-known, some said, that he suffered from tuberculosis. Others adduced as reason that he was soon to be evacuated from that part of Alexandria near the harbour where he lived, because of war danger ¹. The present writer believes, however, that Adham took his own life for fear of being found out as an impostor, an idea that must have been a nightmare to him.

In Adham's raincoat a note was found on which he had written that he was disgusted with life. He asked the authorities to cremate his body and to crush his skull. For some months after his death his friends and his enemies carried on trivial discussions concerning his merits and shortcomings ².

¹ Cf. *Rāḥ.*, p. 117 f.

² Cf. *ar-Risāla*, VIII, no. 370 and subsequent issues.

APPENDIX I

It might be interesting to show how Adham made translations. In the following passages the original text of some verses by Victor Hugo is given in which those lines that are printed in *italics* can be traced in Adham's Arabic translation. Moreover, references in parentheses [] are given to the corresponding lines.

Under the transliterated Arabic translation our English version of the Arabic is reproduced. The way in which Adham selected from the French original only those ideas that fitted into his 'creed' does not require comment. It should however be pointed out that, in offering a translation such as this, he did not make it easy for his readers to compare the translation with the original!

From: Victor Hugo, *Dieu (le seuil du gouffre)*, édition critique de René Journet et Guy Robert, Paris 1961, p. 18 f:

35. — *Ton nom?* [1] — dis-je. Il reprit: *Pour toi qui, loin des causes,* [2]
Vas flottant, et ne peux voir qu'un côté des choses, [3]
Je suis l'Esprit Humain. Mon nom est Légion. [4]
Je suis l'essaim des bruits [7] *et la contagion* [6]
Des mots vivants allant et venant d'âme en âme. [6]
40. Je suis souffle. Je suis cendre, fumée et flamme.
 Tantôt l'instinct brutal, tantôt l'élan divin.
 Je suis ce grand passant, vaste, invincible et vain,
 Qu'on nomme vent; et j'ai l'étoile et l'étincelle
 Dans ma parole, étant l'haleine universelle;
45. L'haleine et non la bouche; un zéphir me grandit
 Et m'abat; et quand j'ai respiré, j'ai tout dit.
 Je suis géant et nain, faux, vrai, sourd et sonore,
 Populace dans l'ombre et peuple dans l'aurore;
 Je dis moi, je dis nous; j'affirme, nous nions.
50. Je suis le flux des voix et des opinions,
 Le fantôme de l'an, du mois, de la semaine,
 Fait du groupe fuyant de la nuée humaine.
 Homme, *toujours en moi la contradiction* [8]
Tourne sa roue obscure et j'en suis l'Ixion. [9]
55. *Démos, c'est moi. C'est moi ce qui marche, attend, roule,* [10]
Pleure et rit [11], *nie et croit* [12]; *je suis le démon Foule.* [13]
 Je suis, comme la trombe, ouragan et pilier.
 En même temps je vis dans l'âtre familial.
 Oui, j'arrache au tison la soudaine étincelle

From: *al-Muqtaṭaf*, XCIII, p. 72 (also in *al-Ḥadīth*, XIII, p. 432 f):

1. *Man anta?*
2. *Anta yā man tasāmaita 'an 'ālamī 'l-ahdāthi*
3. *Ṭā'ifan hunā wa-hunāka, wa-lā yataḡallā laka siwā manḥan wāhidin mina 'l-kā'ināti*
4. *Inna rūḥi 'l-munbaththata fī tadā'ifi 'l-kā'ināti biya rūḥu 'l-insāniyati*
5. *Allatī ḡubūrubā fī kā'inin ma'nāhu 'rtifā'u mash'ali 'l-insāniyati fihī¹*
6. *Inna kalimāti 'l-ḥayyata 'llatī tataḡāwabu fī ḥanāyā 'n-nufūsi*
7. *Ashbabu mā yakūnu bi-sarayāni ṭanīni 'n-naḥli fī qafirihi*
8. *Innī multaḡā 'l-kā'ināti 'alā 'd-dawāmi*
9. *Wa-madāru 'aḡalati 'l-ḥayāti*
10. *Rūḥukum, huwa ana! Alladhī yuḡayyidu sakanātikum wa-ḥarakātikum*
11. *Wa-ana 'lladhī yaṭūfu 'alā tḡubūrikum bi 'l-ibtisāmi wa-yaḡri bi'd-dam'i fī ma'āḡikum*
12. *Wa-yulhimukumu 'l-īmāna wa-yuthīru 'sh-shakka wa'l-ḡubūda fikum*
13. *Ana . . . ana nafsu 'l-kulli*

1. WHO ARE YOU?
2. You who rise high over the created world
3. Roaming here and there, while only one side of the universe is clear to you, [listen:]
4. My spirit, which is spread in the folds of the universe, is the human spirit.
5. Its emergence in a creature means the raising of the torch of mankind in it.
6. My living words, echoing unceasingly in the deepest corners of the soul,
7. resemble the circulation of humming bees in the hive.
8. I am the eternal confluence of all created beings,
9. And I am the pivot of the wheel of life.
10. Your spirit, it is I. It is I who control your moments of immobility and motion.
11. It is I who linger in the smile on your face and who flow with the tears in your eyes.
12. It is I who inspire you with faith and who kindle doubt and unbelief in you.
13. I . . . I am the soul of all.

¹ This line could not be traced in the French original.

60. Qui heurte un germe obscur que le crâne recèle,
Et qui, des fronts courbés perçant les épaisseurs,
Fait faire explosion à l'esprit des penseurs.
Je vis près d'eux, veilleur intime; je combine
Le vieux houblon de Flandre et la vigne sabine,
65. La franche joie attique et le rire gaulois;
L'antique insouciance avec ses douces lois,
Paix, liberté, gaité, bon sens, est mon breuvage;
J'en grise Erasme et Sterne, et même mon sauvage,
Diderot; et j'en fais couler quelques filets
70. De l'amphore d'Horace au broc de Rabelais.—
Il poursuivit: — *Je crie à quiconque commence*: [14]
— *Assez. Finis. — Je suis le médiocre immense*. [15]
Toutes les fois qu'on parle et qu'on dit: mitoyen,
Mode, médiateur, méridien, moyen,
75. Par chacun de ces mots on m'évoque, on m'adjure,
Et tantôt c'est louange, et tantôt c'est injure.
Je suis l'esprit Milieu; l'être neutre qui va
Bas sans trouver Iblis, haut sans voir Jéhovah;
Dans le nombre, je suis Multitude; dans l'être,
80. Borne. Je m'oppose, homme, à l'excès de connaître,
De chercher, de trouver, d'errer, d'aller au bout;
Je suis Tous, l'ennemi mystérieux de Tout.
Je suis la loi d'arrêt, d'enceinte, de ceinture
Et d'horizon, qui sort de toute la nature;
85. L'éther irrespirable et bleu sur la hauteur,
Dans le gouffre implacable et sourd, la pesanteur.
C'est moi qui dis: — Voici ta sphère. Attends. Arrête.
Tout être a sa frontière, homme ou pierre, ange ou bête,
Et doit, sans dilater sa forme d'aujourd'hui,
90. Subir le nœud des lois qui se croisent en lui.
Je me nomme Limite et je me nomme Centre.
Je garde tous les seuils de tous les mondes. [16] Rentre. —
Tout est par moi saisi, pris, circonscrit, dompté. [16]
Je me défie, ayant peur de l'extrémité, [17]
95. *De la folie un peu, beaucoup de la sagesse*. [18]
Je tiens l'enthousiasme et l'appétit en laisse; [19]
Pour qu'il aille au réel sans s'écarter du bien, [20]
J'attelle au genre humain ce lion et ce chien; [21]
Et, comme je suis souffle et poids, nul ne m'évite,
100. Car tout, comme esprit, flotte, et, comme corps, gravite.

14. *Ana 'lladhī aṣīḥu fī kulli mutabaḥḥiẓin li 'l-'amali*
15. *Ḥasbuka mā fa'alta, ana 'db-dhātu al-mushtarakatu baina 'l-bashari*
16. *Inna maqālida 'l-umūri fī yadī, fa-ana 'lladhī aqūdu wa-udabbiru
wa-uḥarriku*
17. *Wa-in kāna hunālika shai'un tarta'idu labu farā'iṣi fa-hwa taḡāwuzu
haddi 'l-i'tidāli*
18. *Fa-hwa in badā lī fī shabāḥi 'l-ghabā'i massanī 'l-khawfu, wa-fī nūri
'l-ḥikmati tawallāni 'r-ru'bu*
19. *Innī aqbiḍu 'alā a'innati 'l-ghaḍabi wa 'sh-shahwati*
20. *Likai lā yanḥarifā 'an ṭariqi 'l-khairi*
21. *Wa-l-yaṣḥabi 'l-insāna idhan fī qāfilati 'l-ḥayāti asadu 'l-ghaḍabi
wa-kalbu 'sh-shahwati.*

14. To everyone embarking on a project it is I who shout:
15. —You have done enough!—I am the essence shared by all people.
16. The keys to all matters are in my hand, I am the one who leads, arranges, moves.
17. If there is anything that frightens me, it is the transgression of the limits of equanimity;
18. This rouses my fear when it looms before me in the blurred form of stupidity; and when it manifests itself in the light of wisdom, it terrifies me.
19. I hold the bridles of anger and passion
20. Lest they stray from the right path.
21. Let man be accompanied, then, in the caravan of life by the lion of anger and the dog of passion.

APPENDIX II

Bibliography of Ismā'īl Aḥmad Adham (1911-1940)

Although this bibliography makes no pretence of being exhaustive, it is almost complete. In any case, it is much more extensive than any compiled hitherto ¹. The present writer did not have the opportunity to consult the periodical *Mağallat al-ʿuṣba al-Barāzīliya* ² and the newspapers *al-Abrām* and *al-Baṣīr* ³.

1. *Min maṣādir at-tārīkh al-islāmī*, Alexandria 1936, Maṭbaʿat Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn al-kubrā.
2. *Abushady the poet*, Alexandria 1937, Maṭbaʿat at-taʿāwun. (Cf. the discussion about this book in the preceding article.)

Publications in *ar-Risāla*:

3. *Naẓariyat an-nisbiya al-khuṣūsiya*, III, 1935, p. 1976 ff, 2018 ff; IV, 1936, p. 12 f, 97 ff, 301 ff, 385 ff.
4. *Baina ʿl-gharb wa ʿsh-sharq*, VI, 1938, p. 1012 ff, 1054-1057, 1491, 1572, 1613 f, 2026 ff, 2107 ff.
5. Review of *Hākadhā takallama Zarādūsh*, translated from German by Félix Fāris, VI, 1938, p. 1797 ff, 1837-1840.
6. Review of *Faiḍ al-khāṭir*, by Aḥmad Amīn, VII, 1939, p. 43 f.
7. *Fi ʿl-adab al-ʿarabī al-ḥadīth*, VII, 1939, p. 1006 ff.
8. Replies to articles in which he was attacked by Bishr Fāris, VII, 1939, p. 1224 ff, 1330 f, 1524 ff, 1622, 1922 ff.
9. Review of *Mabāḥith ʿarabiya* by Bishr Fāris, VII, 1939, p. 1228 ff, 1274 f.
10. Obituary of Félix Fāris, VII, 1939, p. 1395 f.
11. *Qawānīn an-nishāt al-ḥarārī*, VII, 1939, p. 1562 ff.
12. Review of *Firʿawn aṣ-ṣagḥir* by Maḥmūd Taimūr, VII, 1939, p. 1621 f.
13. Review of *Fawẓī ʿl-Maʿlūf wa-āthārūhu* by F. H. ʿAwn, VII, 1939, p. 1667 f.

¹ The best one published till now is in Y. A. Dāghir, *Maṣādir ad-dirāsa al-adabiya*, vol. II, *Al-fikr al-ʿarabī al-ḥadīth fī siyar aʿlāmībi*, part 1, Beirut 1955, p. 92 ff.

² Probably Adham's reply to a review of his article *ʿIlm al-ansāb al-ʿarabiya* was published in it.

³ But cf. *ar-Risāla*, VIII, 1940, p. 1336, where a reference is given to an article in instalments under the title *Aṣ-ṣilāt baina ʿl-isrāʿīliyyīn wa ʿl-ʿarab mundhu aqdamī ʿl-ʿusūr hattā ʿl-ān*, which Adham, allegedly, published in several issues of August and September 1937 of this newspaper.

14. Reply to Zakī Mubārak's criticism of A. Amīn, VII, 1939, p. 2065.
15. *Hal fi 'l-imbkân ziyādat baḥr ḡadīd fi 'l-'arūd*, VIII, 1940, p. 238.
16. *'Ām al-fīl wa-mīlād ar-rasūl*, VIII, 1940, p. 450-454; reply to criticism of al-Muta'āl aṣ-Ṣa'īdi, p. 595 f.
17. *Adb-dharrā wa-binā'ubā al-kabrābā'i*, VIII, 1940, p. 1141-1144; also published in *al-Muqtaṭaf*, XCII, p. 307-312.

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18. Reply to an inquiry as to the realization of the *nahḍa*, XII, 1938, p. 19 ff.
19. *Ismā'il Maḡbar*, XII, 1938, p. 38-45, 158-165, 223-232.
20. *Ad-dukṭūr Ṭaba Ḥusain, dirāsa wa-taḥlīl*, XII, 1938, p. 275-313.
21. *Muṭāla'āt fi naẓariyat al-ma'rifa: al-'aql wa 'l-ḥads wa 't-taḡriba*, XII, 1938, p. 329 ff.
22. Translation of *Bint Yaḡīd* by the Turkish novelist Refiq Halid Karay (incomplete; cf. XIV, 1940, p. 606), XII, 1938 and XIII, 1939 passim.
23. *'Ilm al-ansāb al-'arabiya*, XII, 1938, p. 468-479, 581-584.
24. *'Abd al-Ḥaqq Ḥāmid Bey* (Abdūlhak Hamit Tarhan), *asb-shā'ir at-turkī al-a'ḡam*, XII, 1938, p. 628-653, 690-712.
25. *Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm, al-fannān al-ḥā'ir*, XIII, 1939, p. 298-407; also published separately Cairo 1941, with a contribution by Ibrāhim Nāḡī.
26. Translation of verse by Victor Hugo, XIII, 1939, p. 432 f; also published in *al-Muqtaṭaf*, XCIII, p. 72. (Cf. Appendix I.)
27. *Fann kitābat at-tārikh* (a preface to Sāmī al-Kayyālī's book *Saif ad-Dawla*), XIII, 1939, p. 573-587.
28. *Mabādi' al-fiziyā' an-naẓariya al-ḥadītha*, XIII, 1939, p. 630 ff, 674-681.
29. Translation of *Shahāmat al-mar'a al-'arabiya*, a play by Abdūlhak Hamit Tarhan, XIII, 1939, p. 769-779.
30. *Aṭhar ar-riyādiyāt fi 'l-ḥayāt al-bashariya*, XIV, 1940, p. 265-271, 341-347, 417-421.
31. Fragments from letters Adham wrote to Sāmī al-Kayyālī, XIV, 1940, p. 605 ff.
32. *Al-adab al-'arabi al-mu'āṣir baina 'l-qadīm wa 'l-ḥadīth, ar-Rāfi'i wa-aṣṣālatuhu al-fanniya, al-'Aqqād wa 'l-khubūṭ al-asāsiya li-adabibi*, XV, 1941, p. 77-80.
33. Review of *Sindibād 'aṣrī* by Ḥusain Fawzī, XV, 1941, p. 210 ff.

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34. Review of *Ḥayāt Muḥammad* by M. Ḥ. Haikal, 1936, p. 613-620.
35. *Aṣ-Zabāwī ash-shā'ir*, 1937, p. 81-132; published separately Alexandria 1937, Maṭba'at at-ta'āwun, and partly in *al-Mağalla al-ğadida*, VI, 2, p. 42-47.
36. Review of the Arabic translation of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1937, p. 217-222.
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38. *Shi'r Abī Shādī* (resumé of *Abushady the poet*), I, 1936, p. 292-314.
39. *Ḥurriyat al-fikr*, I, 1936, p. 474-498; partly published in *al-Mağalla al-ğadida*, VI, 1, p. 17-28, under the title *At-taṭawwur al-ḥadīth fī Miṣr wa-Turkiyā*.

Publications in *al-Makshūf*:

40. *Fir'awn Miṣr*, 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād, 1939, V, no. 186, p. 2 f.
41. *Ad-dam al-miṣrī wa 'd-dam al-'arabī*, 1939, V, no. 190, p. 4.
42. *Fir'awniyya Miṣr al-ḥadītha*, 1939, V, no. 193, p. 2; also published in *al-Mağalla al-ğadida*, 1939, VIII, 5, p. 17-21.
43. *Al-'aṣr al-fir'awnī fī Miṣr al-ḥadītha*, 1939, V, no. 202, p. 2 f.
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47. *Ra'y fī 'ṭ-Ṭalī'a*, V, 1939, p. 256 f.

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48. *Miṣr wa 'th-thaqāfa al-ūrūbiyya*, VI, 3, p. 17-31.

Publications in *al-Muqtataf* (see also the numbers 17 and 26):

49. *Handasat al-kawn bi-ḥasbi nāmūs an-nisbiyya*, XCII, p. 114-117 462-465.
50. *Al-mikānikā al-kilāsikiyya*, XCIII, p. 471-475.

51. *Mabda' an-nisbiya al-kilāsikiya*, XCIII, p. 570 ff.
 52. *Khalīl Maṭrān, shā'ir al-'arabiya al-ibdā'i*, XCIV, XCV and XCVI passim.

Publication in the Turkish periodical *Fikir hareketleri*, editor Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın (the existence of this article could not be ascertained):

53. *Misir hatiralari ve Aḫbar hayati*, 1934.

Adham is said to have written poetry which was published in *Mağallat al-ğāmi'a*, editor Maḥmūd Kāmil; some Arabic translations of verse by Schiller seem to have existed in manuscript (cf. *al-Ḥadīth*, XIV, 1940, p. 612, where it is also said that Adham, on one occasion, helped a lady to get a degree by writing some kind of thesis for her).

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