

Mechanisms of Organization and Criteria of Selection in the Classical Arabic Poetic Heritage

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Abstract:

Arabic poetry stands as the complete archive of Arab wisdom which documents their actual life events while showcasing their mental brilliance and their gathered knowledge. The system allowed people to judge others while enabling them to ask for help but the system represented the highest source of knowledge according to their perspective. Their lively social events together with their book trade made poetry their most important cultural tradition because they shared these verses through memory and spoken word and through group learning during their annual festivals.

The first poetic anthologies stand among the most important collections which maintain pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry in existence. The creators based their selection process on different rules because they needed to achieve their desired results through the work. The Mu‘allaqāt represent the highest point of early poetic creation while the Mufaḍḍaliyyāt focus on identifying the most excellent and well-known literary works and the Aṣma‘iyyāt concentrate on maintaining the exactness of speech and poetic beauty and the Jamharat Ash‘ār al-‘Arab seeks to establish the most extensive collection of various poetic works from different time periods. The collection shows that people recognized poetry value from the beginning while different editors used their own goals to select poems and the first literary scholars worked hard to protect poetic works which they passed down to future readers.

Keywords: Poetic Composition; Organization; Selection; *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*; *Jamharat Ash‘ār Al-‘Arab*.

1. Introduction

The status of poetry did not diminish with the advent of Islam; rather, it assumed an even more central role. The concept emerged as a vital element which affected both political systems and literary works while becoming a fundamental component of educational programs and intellectual development and it stood as a leading force which shaped both moral values and cultural traditions. The Prophetic tradition states that Arabs will continue to recite poetry until camels stop making their longing sound. ‘Umar al-Fārūq is said to have advised one of his sons: “Commit poetry to memory, for it ennobles your character.” (Fakhouri, 1996, p. 13).

The testimonies demonstrate how deeply Arabs respected poetry as an art form. The pre-Islamic era had a large amount of poetic works which kept growing throughout the following centuries.

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The collection of poems together with their short poetic snippets exists in such large numbers that no person could count them all; someone dedicating their entire life to finding these works and their writers would still fail to determine the complete number of these literary pieces (Fakhouri, 1996, pp. 13-14).

The Arabs preserved poetry through oral traditions which involved direct memory recall of its original creators and multiple stages of poetic transmission. Poetic works achieved wide distribution during the first Islamic era and the Umayyad period while learning and literary and poetic meetings spread throughout all social classes including rulers and common citizens. The recording process together with poetry collection began during the mid-second century AH because of Abbasid state formation and scientists and humanists started their scientific and literary categorization work. Multiple academic fields together with various cultural groups have used poetry as their main point of focus. The collection of poetry existed beyond its oral transmission because various transmitters developed their own methods to arrange and fully record the poems. The process of recording Arabic poetry and collecting its scattered works took different paths after scholars received these works from tribal storytellers and Bedouin populations who lived in desert areas. The Bedouins traveled to urban centers which served as the source for transmitters and scholars to obtain poetry and linguistic resources and historical records. The transmission of knowledge passed through al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī and Abū 'Amr al-Shaybānī and al-Aṣma'ī and Abū Sa'īd al-Sukkarī and Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī and other scholars (Fakhouri, 1996, pp. 14-15).

Multiple transmitters focused their work on creating individual collections of poetical works known as dīwāns. Abū 'Amr al-Shaybānī gathered the dīwāns of Imru' al-Qays and Labīd ibn Rabī'a and Tamīm ibn Abī ibn Muqbil and Durayd ibn al-Ṣimmah and al-A'shā and al-Ḥuṭay'a. Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb compiled the poetry of Dhū al-Rumma and al-Farazdaq. The collected works of a single poet usually appear under different collections which contain different numbers of poems because various scholars gathered these texts from different sources (Fakhouri, 1996, p. 15).

The process of collecting poetry involved various transmitters who focused on particular tribal groups to build separate dīwāns for each tribe. Abū Sa'īd al-Sukkarī gathered the poetry of twenty-five tribes which included Banū Hudhayl and Shaybān and Yarbū' and Ṭayyī' and Kinānah and Ḍabbah and Makhzūm and Muzaynah. Abū 'Amr al-Shaybānī collected the poetry of more than eighty tribes. The tribal poetic collections have survived through time but only one dīwān remains which consists of the Dīwān of the Hudhalī poets that Abū Sa'īd al-Sukkarī compiled and annotated with poetry from about forty Hudhayl tribe poets.

The anthologies of poetic selections from various time periods and geographic locations became the focus of a different set of transmitters who worked to create what we now call books of selections or anthologies. The anthologies show differences because they contain different content while using unique editorial approaches and following specific organizational systems for poems and fragments. The collection of works includes al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt and al-Aṣma'īyyāt and Jamharat Ash'ār al-'Arab and the various Ḥamāsāt and al-Ashbāh wa al-Naẓā'ir and additional works (Fakhouri, 1996, p. 15).

The anthologies operate with different methods and serve different purposes than the *dīwāns* which contain works from individual poets and tribal collections. A poet who creates a *dīwān* collects all of his poetry but tribal *dīwāns* need every piece written by their poets yet chosen anthologies follow no requirement to include every work from a specific poet or tribal group. The compilers and selectors of these collections follow a basic rule which requires poems to show either perfect poetic structure or absolute excellence in their specific category (Ismail, 1975, p. 25). A poetic text reaches its highest quality through the perfect union of its language choices and its message and its rhythmic structure and its sound patterns and its first impression and final touch and its ability to keep meaning clear while using common words to deliver strong creative ideas and emotional content (Karbaa, 2011 - 2012, p. 25). The following list contains some of the most famous compilations:

2. The *Mu‘allaqāt*

2.1 The Origin of the Designation

The *Mu‘allaqāt* are collections of complete odes selected and compiled by Ḥammād al-Rāwiyah, who referred to them as *al-Sumūt* or *al-Mu‘allaqāt*. Through these two designations, Ḥammād intended to underscore the preciousness of his selections and to take pride in the excellence of his choice (Brockelmann, p. 67).

The term *al-Mu‘allaqāt* first appeared in *Jamharat Ash‘ār al-‘Arab* by Abū Zayd al-Qurashī around the middle of the third century AH. Approximately a century later, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih sought to explain this designation in his work *al-‘Iqd al-Farīd*, asserting that the Arabs “selected seven odes from the finest ancient poetry, inscribed them in gold upon folded Coptic garments, and suspended them between the curtains of the Ka‘bah.” (Rabbih, 1984, p. 66).

Many scholars concurred with Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih that the reason for the name *al-Mu‘allaqāt* was their suspension upon the curtains of the Ka‘bah. Among them was al-Baghdādī, who states in his *Khizānah*: “In the pre-Islamic period, a man might compose poetry in the remotest part of the land without receiving attention or having anyone recite it, until he came to Mecca during the pilgrimage season and presented it before the assemblies of Quraysh. If they deemed it excellent, it was transmitted and became a source of pride for its author, and it was hung upon one of the pillars of the Ka‘bah for public display; if they did not approve of it, it was discarded and disregarded.” (Al-Baghdadi, 1997, p. 89). This view was likewise adopted by Ibn Khaldūn in his *Muqaddimah* and by Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī in his *‘Umdah* (Atiyah, 2008, p. 87).

Some referred to them as *al-Mudhahhabāt*, in reference to their being written in gold ink, while Ja‘far al-Naḥḥās called them *al-Sab‘ al-Ṭiwāl* (“the Seven Long Odes”), as these poems constitute the longest compositions produced by the Arabs in the pre-Islamic period (Ismail, 1975, p. 66).

Many later scholars, however, rejected the explanation that the *Mu‘allaqāt* were so named because they were written in gold and suspended upon the curtains of the Ka‘bah. Instead, they maintained that the designation derives from their preciousness, based on the term *‘alaq*, which in Arabic lexicons signifies something of great value (Daif, p. 176). This position was also advanced by Carl Brockelmann, who stated: “Later scholars claimed that they were called *Mu‘allaqāt* because they were hung upon the Ka‘bah on account of their elevated worth; yet

this explanation arose merely from an apparent interpretation of the name and does not constitute its true origin.” (Brockelmann, p. 67).

Among those who designated them by another name are those who called them *al-Sumūt* (The Strings). In the Arabic language, *sumūt* refers to the thread that binds together the beads of a necklace, and it also denotes the necklace itself. The act of naming here is founded upon metaphorical analogy. Among those who adopted this designation are the author of *al-Jamhara*, the author of *Kitāb al-Umda*, and the author of *Kitāb al-Muzhir* (Atiyah, 2008, pp. 9-10).

In general, the multiplicity of titles attributed to these poems does not constitute a substantive disagreement, for most of these appellations were conferred as expressions of admiration and praise. In their broader semantic scope, all these names convey a sense of esteem, purposefulness, and attentive regard toward these poems. These are the most widely recognized designations. They have also been referred to by other, less common names, such as *al-Muntaqayāt* (The Selected Ones), *al-Ṭiwāl* (The Long Poems), and *al-Mashhūrāt* (The Celebrated Ones) (Atiyah, 2008, p. 10).

2.2 The Number of Poets of the Mu‘allaqāt:

The transmitted accounts do not entirely concur regarding the poems constituting the *Mu‘allaqāt*. Five poems are unanimously acknowledged: the *Mu‘allaqa* of Imru‘ al-Qays, the *Mu‘allaqa* of Ṭarafa ibn al-‘Abd, the *Mu‘allaqa* of Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā, the *Mu‘allaqa* of Labīd ibn Rabī‘a, and the *Mu‘allaqa* of ‘Amr ibn Kulthūm. In most narrations, the sixth and seventh are identified as the poems of ‘Antara ibn Shaddād and al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza. Al-Mufaḍḍal, however, substituted in their place the poems of al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī and al-A‘shā. All of these are counted among the most renowned poets of the pre-Islamic period, with the exception of al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza. Al-Tabrīzī added the poem of ‘Ubayd ibn al-Abraṣ so that the total number of the *Mu‘allaqāt* would reach ten (Brockelmann, pp. 56-57).

2.3 The Openings of the Mu‘allaqāt, Their Number of Verses, and Their Themes (Al-Zawzani):

- **The Mu‘allaqa of Imru‘ al-Qays:** Composed in the sixth century CE and written in the *ṭawīl* metre, it comprises seventy-seven verses according to one account, eighty-one according to another, and ninety-two according to yet another. Its verses encompass a range of thematic purposes, including love poetry and descriptive passages, and address multiple subjects such as the poet’s pause before the deserted campsite, narrative love episodes, descriptions of the horse and the night, the hunting expedition, and many of his adventures. Its opening reads:

“Stop, let us weep at the memory of a beloved and her dwelling
At Siqṭ al-Liwā, between al-Dakhūl and Ḥawmal.”

- **The Mu‘allaqa of Ṭarafa ibn al-‘Abd:** The poet composed it following the ill-treatment he suffered at the hands of his cousin and the oppression he endured from his relatives. It consists of 121 verses and is divided into three major sections: an amatory section, a descriptive section, and a narrative section. Its opening reads:

“For Khawla there remain ruins at Barqat Tuhmid,
Glimmering like the lingering traces of a tattoo upon the back of the hand.”

- **The Mu‘allaqa of al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza:** The principal impetus for the composition of this Mu‘allaqa was his defense of his tribe and his refutation of his adversary’s claims. He recited it before King ‘Amr ibn Hind in response to ‘Amr ibn Kulthūm. It comprises eighty-five verses and was composed between the years 554 and 559 CE. Its opening reads:

“Asmā’ has declared to us her separation;

How often does prolonged residence weary the one who abides.”

- **The Mu‘allaqa of Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā:** He composed it in praise of the peacemakers who reconciled the tribes of Banū ‘Abs and Banū Fazāra following a dispute that had arisen between members of the two tribes. It consists of sixty-two verses. Its opening reads:

“Are there any traces remaining of Umm Awfā that have not spoken,

At Ḥawmānat al-Darrāj and al-Mutathallim?”

- **The Mu‘allaqa of ‘Amr ibn Kulthūm:** It is among the richest examples of pre-Islamic poetry in epic elements, pride, and martial enthusiasm. It comprises one hundred verses. The poet composed part of it in the court of ‘Amr ibn Hind, King of al-Ḥīra, in order to resolve the dispute that had arisen between the tribes of Bakr and Taghlib. Its opening reads:

“Rise, and offer your companions the morning draught,

And leave none of the wines of al-Andarīn untouched.”

- **The Mu‘allaqa of ‘Antara ibn Shaddād:** Composed in the sixth century CE in the *kāmil* metre, it is primarily concerned with description and heroic valor. It comprises seventy-nine verses. Its opening reads:

“Have the poets left any patch for mending,

Or have you recognized the abodes after mere conjecture?”

- **The Mu‘allaqa of Labīd ibn Rabī‘a:** It consists of eighty-nine verses. It is fundamentally structured around the poet’s pause before the deserted abodes; its middle section turns to wine and the beloved, while its conclusion addresses generosity and pride. Its opening reads:

“The dwellings have been effaced—both their encampment and their site—

At Minā, where their wild creatures have become perpetual and their stones enduring.”

- **The Mu‘allaqa of al-A‘shā:** The poet composed it in the *basīṭ* metre. It comprises sixty-six verses, and its themes range across description, love poetry, satire, and pride. Its opening reads:

“Bid farewell to Hurayra, for the caravan is departing;

Can you endure a parting, O man?”

- **The Mu‘allaqa of al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī:** It consists of fifty verses. Its opening reads:

“O Dāramiyya at al-‘Ulyā and al-Sanad,

It has become desolate, and long ages have passed over it.”

- **The Mu‘allaqa of ‘Ubayd ibn al-Abrāṣ:** It comprises forty-eight verses. Its opening reads:

“Malhūb has become desolate of its people—
Qūṭaybāt, al-Dhunūb, and Ḥawmal.”

2.4 *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*

2.4.1 *al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī: A Biographical Overview*

He is al-Mufaḍḍal ibn Muḥammad ibn Ya‘lā ibn ‘Āmir ibn Sālim al-Ḍabbī al-Kūfī, a philologist from Kūfa. The date of his birth is unknown, though it is presumed that he was born during the first decade of the second century AH. The most probable date of his death is 178 AH (Al-Dabbi, pp. 24-25-26). He was a transmitter of poetry, historical reports, and accounts of the Days of the Arabs, and one of the eminent Qur’ānic readers, as well as a distinguished scholar of language and rare vocabulary. He was regarded as a reliable authority in transmission, known for his truthfulness and integrity in reporting, in contrast to other Kūfan transmitters such as Khalaf al-Aḥmar and Ḥammād al-Rāwīya (Fakhouri, 1996, p. 18). Ibn Sallām al-Jumāhī described him as the most knowledgeable among the people of Baṣra. Numerous scholars of the second generation studied under him, foremost among them al-Farrā’, al-Kisā’ī, and Ibn al-A‘rābī. Many chains of transmission for poetic corpora—whether individual dīwāns of poets or collective dīwāns of tribes—ultimately trace back to him (Ismail, 1975, p. 81).

Al-Mufaḍḍal has been the subject of both extensive and concise biographical entries in numerous works, including *al-Fihrist* by Ibn al-Nadīm, *Tārīkh Baghdād* by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Nuzhat al-Alibbā’* by Ibn al-Anbārī, *Tārīkh al-Islām* by al-Dhahabī, *Anbāh al-Ruwāt* by al-Qiftī, *Mu‘jam al-Udabā’* by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā’* by Ibn al-Jazarī, *Lisān al-Mīzān* by Ibn Ḥajar, and *Bughyat al-Wu‘āt* by al-Suyūṭī (Al-Dabbi, p. 26).

In addition to *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī authored several other works, including *Kitāb al-Amthāl*, *Kitāb al-‘Arūd*, *Kitāb Ma‘ānī al-Shi‘r*, and *Kitāb al-Alfāz* (Al-Nadim, 1971, p. 102).

2.4.2 *Method of Compilation and the Principles of Selection in al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt:*

Al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt constitutes the earliest poetic anthology devoted to selected exemplars of Arabic poetry. The circumstances under which al-Mufaḍḍal chose the poems included in this collection are related in an account cited by the editors of *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* in the book’s introduction and reiterated by ‘Izz al-Dīn Ismā‘īl in his work *al-Maṣādir al-Adabiyyah wa al-Lughawīyah*. He writes:

“Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib rose in rebellion in Basra against the ‘Abbāsīd caliph Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr. Many scholars joined him, among them al-Mufaḍḍal. Al-Manṣūr ultimately prevailed over Ibrāhīm and dealt harshly with him and his family. On one occasion, Ibrāhīm took refuge with al-Mufaḍḍal, who would leave him concealed and go out. At one point, al-Mufaḍḍal had to depart for an estate of his for several days. Ibrāhīm said to him: ‘When you leave, I feel constrained; bring me something from your books with which I may occupy myself.’ Al-Mufaḍḍal brought him books of poetry and historical reports said to have filled two large chests. Upon his return, he found that Ibrāhīm had marked seventy poems he had selected. Ibrāhīm possessed refined poetic taste, and it appears that al-Mufaḍḍal subsequently extracted these seventy poems and later added ten more. When al-Manṣūr captured Ibrāhīm, he also apprehended al-Mufaḍḍal, but he pardoned him and appointed him tutor to his son al-Mahdī. Al-Mufaḍḍal presented to his pupil the eighty poems he had compiled

and recited them to him. These poems were later read to al-Aṣmaʿī, who recited them, added further poems, supplemented some with additional verses, and selected other compositions. Those who came after al-Aṣmaʿī also inserted additional verses into the poems that had entered the transmissions of both al-Mufaḍḍal and al-Aṣmaʿī, until the material became intermixed, making it no longer possible to determine with certainty which elements were original and which were later additions.” (Ismail, 1975, p. 11)

It is most likely that al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī left his compilation without a formal title; those who came after him designated it *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* in order to distinguish it from other anthologies of selected poetry (Fakhouri, 1996, p. 17).

2.4.3 The Number of Its Odes

According to the transmitters and the extant manuscript traditions, the number of poems ranges between 128 and 130, with variations in the sequence of the odes from one recension to another (Fakhouri, 1996, p. 17).

Al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt comprises a collection of odes and shorter poetic pieces, the majority of whose authors belonged to Bedouin tribes of central and eastern Arabia. Chronologically, the corpus is generally situated between 550 CE and 650 CE (Bouguerba, p. 25).

The poems of *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* are distributed among sixty-seven poets, of whom forty-seven are pre-Islamic. Foremost among them are al-Muraqqish al-Akbar, al-Muraqqish al-Aṣghar, al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥillizah, ʿAlqamah ibn ʿAbadah, al-Shanfarā, Bishr ibn Abī Khāzim, Taʿabbata Sharran, ʿAwf ibn ʿAṭiyyah Abū Qays ibn al-Aslat al-Anṣārī, and al-Musayyab. Among these poets are also a woman from Banū Ḥanīfah, an unidentified Jewish poet, and two Christian poets: ʿAbd al-Masīḥ ibn ʿAsalah al-Shaybānī and Jābir ibn Ḥayy al-Taghlibī. The anthology further includes fourteen *mukhaḍramūn*—poets born in the pre-Islamic period who lived to see the advent of Islam—and only six poets belonging fully to the Islamic era (Bouguerba, p. 25). The collection distributes its poems as follows: twenty-six poets are represented by a single ode each; twenty-eight poets have two odes each; nine poets are represented by three odes each; one poet, Rabīʿah ibn Maqrūm al-Ḍabbī, has four odes; one poet, al-Muraqqish al-Aṣghar, has five odes; and one poet, al-Muraqqish al-Akbar, is represented by twelve odes (Ismail, 1975, p. 73).

The anthology comprises forty short pieces not exceeding ten verses; forty-three odes ranging between eleven and twenty verses; twenty-one odes ranging between twenty-one and thirty verses; and ten odes ranging between thirty-one and forty verses.

The longest poem in the collection is that of Suwayd ibn Abī Kāhil, consisting of one hundred and eight verses, and it opens with:

“Rābiʿa extended the rope toward us, and we grasped from it whatever length was within reach.”

The shortest fragment in this collection consists of two verses and belongs to al-Muraqqish al-Akbar, in which he says:

“I spent the night at Thaʿlaba, among the inner clans
Of ʿAmr ibn ʿAwf; then confusion vanished.
Blood for blood, and the wounds festered—
Delay avails not those who came before.” (Ismail, 1975, p. 73).

Al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt contains the largest number of complete odes; indeed, the inclusion of complete poems appears to have been its primary objective. The fragments it includes were not necessarily the result of al-Mufaḍḍal excerpting portions from longer compositions; rather, the fragment itself may have constituted the entirety of what the poet composed on a given occasion, as is evident from the two verses of al-Muraqqish al-Akbar. Moreover, al-Mufaḍḍal rarely included more than three poems by a single poet. He did not bind himself to a fixed numerical limit in selecting from each poet; instead, he exercised freedom of choice, selecting what he deemed the finest of their poetry. Nor did he restrict himself to particular themes; rather, he maintained complete liberty in his selection (Ismail, 1975, p. 74).

As for the arrangement of these poems within the book, it cannot be asserted with certainty that they have reached us in the precise order established by al-Mufaḍḍal. After the hands of transmitters engaged with the eighty poems that al-Mufaḍḍal had selected—introducing additions to them—it has become difficult to determine definitively which were the original eighty poems chosen by him (Ismail, 1975, p. 74).

2.4.4 The Most Prominent of Its Poems (Fakhouri, 1996, pp. 18-19):

- The poem of the pre-Islamic poet ‘Abd Yaghūth al-Ḥārithī, who fell captive into the hands of his enemies. When they prepared him for execution, he recited this poem, whose opening reads:

“Indeed, do not reproach me; what afflicts me suffices of blame,
And in your reproach there is neither benefit for you nor for me.
Do you not know that the profit of blame is slight,
And my reproach of my brother does not come from miserliness?”

- The elegy of the *mukhaḍram* poet Abū Dhu‘ayb al-Hudhalī, which he composed mourning his five sons who perished in the plague within a single year. Among its verses are:

“Do you grieve because of death and its vicissitudes,
While Time does not grant reprieve to one who laments?
Umayma said: ‘Why is your body so pale
Since you have worn it down, though one such as you possesses wealth that should
suffice?’”

2.4.5 The Significance of al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt

Al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt possesses considerable historical and literary value, and its wide circulation during the lifetime of al-Mufaḍḍal and in subsequent periods may be attributed to a recognition of this significance:

- From a historical perspective: it represents the earliest substantial compilation of selected masterpieces from early Arabic poetry, encompassing pre-Islamic, *mukhaḍram*, and Islamic verse transmitted through reliable chains of narration (Ismail, 1975, p. 85).
- With regard to its content: it serves as a mirror of Arab life, reflecting their customs, moral values, social relations, historical events, wars, noble qualities, and dwellings (Fakhouri, 1996, p. 18).
- From a literary standpoint: it contains complete odes that rank among the finest compositions of early Arabic poetry; as such, it embodies the highest poetic ideals in

imagery and Arab aesthetic sensibility (Fakhouri, 1996, p. 85). It also preserves a significant number of archaic expressions that are recorded in lexical dictionaries (Daif, p. 178).

- The compiler of this work commanded widespread respect. He was a transmitter above suspicion, unlike Ḥammād al-Rāwīya and Khalaf al-Aḥmar. Neither his contemporaries nor later scholars impugned his scholarly integrity; on the contrary, he was the first to draw attention to the spurious practices of certain unreliable transmitters (Bouguerba, pp. 26-27).
- During the period of commentarial activity, *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* received considerable attention from numerous commentators. The earliest to compose a commentary was Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Bashshār al-Anbārī. This commentary was critically edited and published by the orientalist Charles Lyall and issued by the Jesuit Fathers' Press in Beirut in 1920 at the expense of the University of Oxford. Other commentaries include those of Abū Ja'far ibn al-Naḥḥās, Abū 'Alī al-Marzūqī, Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā al-Tabrīzī, and Abū al-Faḍl al-Maydanī (Bouguerba, pp. 75-76). The earliest extant commentary is that of Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim ibn Bashshār, transmitted by his son Abū Bakr (Al-Dabbi, p. 23).

3. The Method of Compilation and Principles of Selection in *al-Aṣma' iyyāt*

3.1 *Al-Aṣma' ī: A Biographical Overview*

He is Abū Sa'īd 'Abd al-Malik ibn Qurayb ibn 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Alī ibn Aṣma' ibn Muḥzir ibn Rabāḥ ibn 'Amr ibn 'Abd Shams, whose lineage traces back to Sa'd ibn Qays ibn 'Aylān. A distinguished authority in philology, grammar, rare vocabulary, and historical reports, al-Aṣma'ī was originally from Basra and later came to Baghdad during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd. He was regarded as a preeminent master of the Arabic language, unparalleled in both his linguistic expertise and the breadth of his transmissions.

He was born in 122 or 123 AH and died in Ṣafar 216 AH—according to differing reports, either in 214 or 217 AH—in Basra, though it is also said that he died in Marw (Al-Asma'ī, pp. 11-12).

Al-Aṣma'ī authored numerous works, several of which have been printed, including *Kitāb Khalq al-Insān*, *Khalq al-Ibīl*, *Kitāb al-Khayl*, *Kitāb al-Thanā'*, *Kitāb al-Wuḥūsh*, *Kitāb al-Aḍḍād*, *Kitāb al-Qalb wa al-Ibdāl*, *Kitāb al-Nabāt*, *Kitāb al-Dārāt*, *Kitāb al-Naḥl wa al-Karm*, and *Kitāb Fuḥūlat al-Shu'arā'*. Among the works that remain unpublished are *Kitāb al-Anwā'*, *Kitāb al-Ṣifāt*, *Kitāb al-Maysir wa al-Qidāh*, *Kitāb al-Amthāl*, *Kitāb Miyāh al-'Arab*, *Kitāb Jazīrat al-'Arab*, *Kitāb al-Raḥl*, and *Kitāb Nawādir al-A'rāb* (Al-Asma'ī, p. 12).

Biographical notices on al-Aṣma'ī appear in numerous sources, including *al-Tārīkh al-Ṣaghīr* by al-Bukhārī, *Inbāḥ al-Ruwāḥ* by al-Qifṭī, *Jamharat al-Ansāb* by Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Ma'ārif* by Ibn Qutaybah, *Tārīkh al-Islām* by al-Dhahabī, *Tahdhīb al-Lughah* by al-Azharī, and *Shadharāt al-Dhahab* by Ibn al-'Imād (Al-Asma'ī, pp. 13-14).

3.2 *The Method of Compilation and Principles of Selection in *al-Aṣma' iyyāt**

Al-Aṣma' iyyāt is the collection of poems selected by 'Abd al-Malik ibn Qurayb al-Aṣma'ī, following the model established by his teacher al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī. Just as the collection compiled by al-Mufaḍḍal came to be known as *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, the anthology assembled by

‘Abd al-Malik al-Aṣma‘ī was designated *al-Aṣma‘iyyāt*, in recognition of the compiler’s renown by his epithet rather than his given name (Al-Shak‘a, 2004, p. 91).

The collection was first published by Wilhelm Ahlwardt on the basis of an imperfect manuscript in Berlin in 1902. It was subsequently republished by ‘Abd al-Salām Hārūn and Aḥmad Shākīr from a manuscript belonging to al-Shinqīṭī, which had been copied from an ancient original. The anthology was initially known through manuscripts that contained both *al-Aṣma‘iyyāt* and *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* together (Abbas, 2018 - 2019, pp. 220-221).

Composed by al-Aṣma‘ī following the model of al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt, this anthology comprises selections from pre-Islamic, *mukhaḍram*, and Islamic poetry. It contains ninety-two odes and fragments attributed to seventy-one poets, of whom forty-four are pre-Islamic—constituting the majority—fourteen are *mukhaḍramūn*, six are Islamic poets, and seven are of unknown attribution. Of this total number of poets, fifty-four are represented by two selections each; two poets—‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Anmah and ‘Amr ibn Ma‘dī Karīb—are represented by three odes each; and one poet, Khuffāf ibn Nudbah, is represented by four odes (Ismail, 1975, p. 78).

Of the ninety-two odes and fragments included in al-Aṣma‘iyyāt, forty-two are short pieces ranging between two and ten verses; twenty odes range between eleven and twenty verses; eighteen odes range between twenty-one and thirty verses; ten odes range between thirty-one and forty verses; and two odes consist of forty-three and forty-four verses respectively. The total number of verses in al-Aṣma‘iyyāt amounts to 1,442, slightly more than half the total number of verses in al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt (Ismail, 1975, pp. 78-79).

Among its most renowned poets are Imru’ al-Qays, Ṭarafah ibn al-‘Abd, and ‘Amr ibn Ma‘dī Karīb, alongside lesser-known figures such as Uḥayḥah ibn al-Ḥallāj and Ḍābi’ ibn al-Ḥārith (Fakhouri, 1996, p. 20).

In his selections, al-Aṣma‘ī followed the approach of al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī in terms of classification, arrangement, and criteria of selection. The anthology differs, however, in the number of poems it contains, the relative length or brevity of its pieces, the proportion of selections allotted to each poet, and the nature of the poets represented (Abbas, 2018 - 2019, p. 221). It did not assume the role played by al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt, nor did it attract extensive exegetical commentary. This may be attributed to the relative scarcity of rare vocabulary within it, as well as to the fact that al-Aṣma‘ī transmitted comparatively few complete odes, contenting himself instead with selected excerpts (Daif, p. 178).

Nevertheless, it constitutes an excellent complement to al-Mufaḍḍal’s collection in its portrayal of the realities of early Arabic poetry, its intellectual and stylistic dimensions, and its representation of Arab life in its various aspects. The anthology is devoid of a prefatory introduction, and al-Aṣma‘ī begins it directly with the poem of Suḥaym ibn Watīl al-Riyāhī, which opens with:

“I am the son of renown and the ascender of lofty heights;

When I set down my turban, you will recognize me.” (Abbas, 2018 - 2019, p. 20).

3.3 The Significance of al-Aṣma‘iyyāt and Its Value among Classical and Modern Scholars (Abbas, 2018 - 2019, pp. 222-223):

The poems of *al-Aṣma‘iyyāt* were distinguished by the elevation of their language and by the esteem they commanded among transmitters, critics, and philologists, owing to the rare

expressions and the finest specimens of poetry they contain. Numerous linguists cited the poetry and poets of *al-Aṣma 'iyyāt* as authoritative linguistic evidence. Among the lexicons that drew upon it is *al-Jamhara* by Ibn Durayd. Among the poets whose verses were cited, for example, are:

- The poet ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Anama al-Ḍabbī, from *Aṣma 'iyya* no. (86), verse no. (4), under the lexical entries (l-w-k; b-r-k).
- The poet Durayd ibn al-Ṣimma, cited in *Aṣma 'iyya* no. 29, verse no. 12, under the entries (j-n-n; jinān).

Among other lexicons for which *al-Aṣma 'iyyāt* constituted a linguistic source is *Maqāyīs al-Lughā* by Ibn Fāris. Among the poets whose verses were cited therein are:

- The poet Ḥājib ibn Ḥabīb al-Asadī, from *Aṣma 'iyya* no. (81), verse no. (1), under the entry (t-d-q).
- The poet ‘Abd Qays ibn Khafāf al-Barjamī, cited in *Aṣma 'iyya* no. (87), verse no. (16), under the entry (l-h-sh).

Many of the poets included in *al-Aṣma 'iyyāt* were treated in numerous classical sources devoted to poets and their works, among them *al-Mu'taliḥ wa al-Mukhtaliḥ* by al-Āmidī, which provides biographical notices for the majority of the poets represented in *al-Aṣma 'iyyāt*.

As for modern scholars, scarcely any contemporary Arab literary figure who has written on pre-Islamic poetry has failed to address the anthological compilations, including *al-Aṣma 'iyyāt*. Among these are Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, Hārūn ‘Abd al-Salām, and Dr. Muḥammad Nabīl Ṭarīfī, all of whom have sought to underscore the significance of this enduring poetry within the authentic Arab literary heritage.

4. The Methodology of Compilation and Principles of Selection in *Jamharat Ash 'ār al-'Arab* by al-Qurashī

4.1 A Biographical Overview of al-Qurashī

Jamharat Ash 'ār al-'Arab is attributed to Abū Zayd Muḥammad ibn al-Khaṭṭāb al-Qurashī, a figure about whom, as the editor of the work notes, very little is known (Al-Qurashī, p. 08). None of the classical biographical dictionaries devoted to scholarly generations or transmitters provides an entry for him. The earliest reference to him appears in *al-Jamhara* by Abū Rishīq al-Qayrawānī. He is also mentioned by al-Suyūṭī in *al-Muzhir* and by al-Baghdādī in *al-Khizāna* (Daif, p. 178).

It is most probable that he lived during the first half of the fifth century AH, or at the latest belonged to the fourth century (Fakhouri, 1996, p. 23). ‘Izz al-Dīn Ismā‘īl, however, maintains that he lived in the second half of the third century and witnessed the early part of the fourth century (Ismail, 1975, p. 81). This chronological disagreement might have been resolved through an examination of the chains of transmitters from whom al-Qurashī received his material; yet this proves difficult, as he frequently writes, “‘Ubayda said ...,” or “al-Mufaḍḍal said ...,” or reports, “It was mentioned on the authority of Abū ‘Ubayda ...,” or “Ibn Dā‘b stated that ...,” thereby omitting intermediate links in the chain of transmission and attributing statements directly to their original authorities (Ismail, 1975, p. 81).

The likelihood that al-Qurashī lived in the latter half of the third century AH is further strengthened by the fact that the designation *jamhara* gained currency during the third century

and thereafter. Among the works bearing this title are *Jamharat al-Lughah* by Ibn Durayd, *Jamharat al-Amthāl* by Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī, *Jamharat al-Ansāb* by Ibn Ḥazm, and *Jamharat Ansāb al-‘Arab* by Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (Bouguerba, p. 29).

4.2 Method of Compilation

Abū Zayd entitled his work *al-Jamharah*. In the lexicons, the term *jamharah* denotes abundance, assemblage, diffusion, and accumulation. It is most probable that al-Qurashī compiled a poetic collection drawn from the vast reservoir of Arabic verse, selecting from it what he deemed distinguished and mature, seeking thereby to embody what had taken shape in his mind and what was widely circulated and recognized among the Arabs of his time. The designation *al-Jamharah* was not, however, an innovation on the part of al-Qurashī; rather, the title was already current among a number of authors, such as *Jamharat al-Ansāb* by Abū al-Mundhir Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī and *Jamharat al-Lughah* by Ibn Durayd, among others. In adopting this title, al-Qurashī thus followed the precedent of earlier scholars (Karbaa, 2011 - 2012, p. 50).

The book comprises a substantial literary introduction and forty-nine poems selected from the finest specimens of pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry, not extending beyond the Umayyad period. These are distributed across five chapters and eight sections.

4.2.1 The Introduction:

The introduction is exceptionally extensive, occupying more than eighty pages. It opens with the following statement:

“This is the book *Jamharat Ash‘ār al-‘Arab* in the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods—those in whose tongues the Qur’ān was revealed, from whose expressions the Arabic language was derived, from whose poetry illustrative evidence for the meanings of ḥadīth was drawn, and to whom wisdom and refined conduct were ascribed—composed by Abū Zayd Muḥammad ibn Abī al-Khaṭṭāb al-Qurashī. For no poet after them has been free from the necessity of appropriating something from the excellence of their expressions, whereas they themselves were independent of others by virtue of their own mastery. They are counted among the eminent master poets who plunged into the depths of poetry, attained its furthest reaches, and established for it a corpus abounding in benefits transmitted from them. Were speech not a shared human faculty, they would have possessed it exclusively. Accordingly, we have drawn from their poetry and taken hold of the reins of their dīwān. In this book we shall record what has been transmitted concerning them in reliable reports and preserved poems, what of their expressions accords with the Qur’ān, what has been related from the Messenger of God—peace and blessings be upon him—regarding poetry and poets, what has come from his Companions and the Successors after them, the characteristics attributed to each, who first composed poetry, and what has been preserved from the jinn. My success is only through God; upon Him I rely and to Him I turn.” (Al-Qurashi, p. 11)

The introduction is distinguished by its critical character and has no parallel in comparable early anthologies such as *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* and *al-Aṣma‘iyyāt*. Six principal ideas emerge within it (Fakhouri, 1996, p. 24).

First, Abū Zayd states that he confined himself to the eloquent poets of the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods whose poetry serves as authoritative evidence in elucidating the meanings of the Qurʾān and the ḥadīth.

Second, he draws a comparison between the language of poetry and that of the Qurʾān, demonstrating that the Qurʾān did not introduce a new linguistic register; rather, all the figurative expressions and rare vocabulary it contains had already been employed by the Arabs in their poetry, conveying the same meanings intended in the Qurʾānic text.

He then turns to the question of the earliest origins of poetry, transmitting verses attributed to the angels, to Adam, to Iblīs, and to the tribes of the ʿAmāliqah, ʿĀd, and Thamūd—reports which he relates without firm confidence in their authenticity.

He further records the view of the Prophet—peace and blessings be upon him—and his Companions regarding poetry and their attitude toward it. The Prophet listened to poetry and approved of its finest expressions, declaring: “Indeed, some poetry embodies wisdom, and some eloquence possesses the power of enchantment.”

The introduction also addresses the devils of the poets and certain accounts concerning them, such as Lāfīz ibn Lāḥiz, the devil of Imruʿ al-Qays; Hādir, the devil of al-Nābighah al-Dhubayānī; Hubayd ibn al-Ṣalādim, the devil of ʿUbayd ibn al-Abras; and Mudrik ibn Rāghim, the devil of al-Kumayt.

Finally, it offers an extensive classification of the early poets into hierarchical strata, listing their names, drawing comparisons among them, recounting selected anecdotes, and citing the opinions of scholars concerning them. Among these poets are Imruʿ al-Qays, Zuhayr, al-Nābighah al-Dhubayānī, al-Aʿshā, Labīd, ʿAmr ibn Kulthūm, Ṭarafah ibn al-ʿAbd, Durayd ibn al-Ṣimmah, and ʿUrwah ibn al-Ward (from the pre-Islamic period); Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr, al-Ḥuṭayʿah, and al-Shammākh ibn Ḍirār (from the *mukhaḍramūn*); and Jarīr, al-Farazdaq, al-Akḥṭal, and Dhū al-Rummaḥ (from the Umayyad period).

4.2.2 The Second Section

This section comprises the selected poems. Abū Zayd arranged it into seven balanced divisions, each containing seven odes by seven poets, for a total of forty-nine poems.

In explaining this arrangement, he states: “The *Jamharat Ashʿār al-ʿArab* is a sevenfold compilation comprising seven divisions. The first consists of the Seven Muʿallaqāt, while the remaining six divisions bear selected titles: al-Mujamharāt, al-Muntaqayāt, al-Mudhahhabāt, al-Marāthī, al-Mushawwbāt, and al-Mulḥamāt. The final division includes poems exclusively by poets of the Umayyad period, whereas the other divisions are predominantly composed of poems by pre-Islamic poets.” (Al-Qurashi, p. 03).

Accordingly, the classification is as follows:

- **First Section: The Authors of the Muʿallaqāt / al-Sumūt:** Imruʿ al-Qays, Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā, al-Nābighah al-Dhubayānī, al-Aʿshā, Labīd, ʿAmr ibn Kulthūm, and Ṭarafa ibn al-ʿAbd.
- **Second Section: The Authors of al-Mujamharāt:** ʿUbayd ibn al-Abras, ʿAntara, ʿAdī ibn Zayd, Bishr ibn Abī Khāzim, Umayya ibn Abī al-Ṣalt, Khināsh ibn Zuhayr, and al-Nimr ibn Tawlab.

- **Third Section: The Authors of al-Muntaqayāt:** al-Musayyib ibn ‘Alas, al-Muraqqish al-Aṣghar, al-Mutalammis, ‘Urwa ibn al-Ward, al-Muhalhil ibn Rabī‘a, Durayd ibn al-Ṣimma, and al-Muntakhil ibn ‘Uwaymir.
- **Fourth Section: The Authors of al-Mudhahhabāt:** Ḥassān ibn Thābit, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa, Mālik ibn al-‘Ajlān, Qays ibn al-Khaṭīm, Uḥayḥa ibn al-Jallāḥ, Abū Qays ibn al-Aslat, and ‘Amr ibn Imru’ al-Qays.
- **Fifth Section: The Authors of the Elegies (al-Marāthī):** Abū Dhu‘ayb al-Hudhalī, Muḥammad ibn Ka‘b, A‘shā Bāhila, ‘Alqama al-Khumayrī, Abū Zayd al-Ṭā‘ī, Mutammim ibn Nuwayra al-Yarbu‘ī, and Mālik ibn al-Rayb.
- **Sixth Section: The Authors of al-Mashūbāt:** those whose lives encompassed both unbelief and Islam, a category specific to the *mukhaḍramūn*. They are: Nābiga Banī Ju‘da, Ka‘b ibn Zuhayr, al-Qaṭāmī, al-Ḥuṭay‘a, al-Shammākh ibn Ḍirār, ‘Amr ibn Aḥmad, and Tamīm ibn Muqbil.
- **Seventh Section: The Authors of the Epic Poems (al-Malḥamāt):** al-Farazdaq, Jarīr, al-Akḥṭal, ‘Ubayd al-Rā‘ī, Dhū al-Rumma, al-Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadī, and al-Ṭirimmaḥ ibn Ḥakīm al-Ṭā‘ī (Karbaa, 2011 - 2012, pp. 51-52; Fakhouri, 1996, pp. 24-25).

This sevenfold classification was not an innovation devised independently by Abū Zayd al-Qurashī; rather, it was already recognized among scholars and transmitters prior to the appearance of his book. It is evident that the seven designations he selected for the classes or sections are descriptive of the poems themselves and do not constitute sharply differentiated categories (Fakhouri, 1996, p. 26). He also took into consideration the chronological factor in his classification, assigning the first section to the authors of al-Sumūt, who belong to the pre-Islamic period, and the final section, the Epic Poems, to Islamic poets. The intermediate sections include both *mukhaḍram* and Islamic poets. He limited himself to a single poem for each poet, thereby differing from al-Mufaḍḍal and al-Aṣma‘ī, who selected more than one poem from the same poet (Fakhouri, 1996, p. 54).

4.2.3 Criticisms Directed at the Work and Its Method of Classification (Fakhouri, 1996, p. 54)

The principal criticisms leveled against the book and its system of classification may be summarized as follows:

- The designations assigned to the various groupings were not based on thematic purposes, with the exception of the elegiac category, within which a specific classificatory principle was applied.
- The work is devoid of commentary, critical judgments, or explicit aesthetic criteria by which the poems were evaluated.
- Al-Qurashī did not undertake any comparative analysis among the poems within each of his seven categories.
- He did not consistently verify chains of transmission or authenticity when citing certain poems attributed to Adam, the angels, Iblīs, the jinn, and similar narratives that scholars have identified and questioned with regard to their reliability.

Notwithstanding these observations, the merit of *al-Jamhara* remains considerable and undisputed. It occupies a distinguished place within the literary heritage and constitutes a valuable repository of Arabic poetry. The work comprises forty-nine odes characterized by structural coherence, internal harmony, and compositional unity, arranged according to a remarkably refined architectural design.

The prestige of *al-Jamhara* is further enhanced by its inclusion of poems not previously recorded, among them the odes of Khināsh ibn Zuhayr, ‘Amr ibn al-Aḥmar, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa, Mālik ibn al-‘Ajlān, Uḥayḥa ibn al-Jallāḥ, al-Musayyab ibn ‘Alas, al-Rā‘ī, ‘Alqama, and al-Kumayt.

Moreover, *al-Jamhara* revitalized the discipline of literary criticism among the Arabs, owing to the significant critical issues it addressed and its documentation of the development of literature and language. Scholars of the Arabic critical tradition have reached a consensus that al-Qurashī should be regarded as the first compiler to assume the role of a critical theorist and the first to provide his work with a critical introduction. This distinction granted him precedence in laying the foundations of early Arabic literary criticism, as the ideas advanced in his book reflect the discerning taste of a perceptive critic who evaluates according to standards of quality and reliability (Karbaa, 2011 - 2012, pp. 54-55).

5. Conclusion:

Following this examination of the modes of organization and selection in early poetic compilations, the following conclusions may be drawn:

- The methodology of the *Mu‘allaqāt* is founded upon a qualitative selection of the most outstanding odes, representing the highest artistic achievement and the exemplary model in terms of language, imagery, and structure, without subject-based or tribal classification of pre-Islamic poetry.
- *Al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* combines artistic excellence with the historical significance of the texts, encompassing a diversity of themes and subjects in order to present a comprehensive portrayal of poetry in the early periods.
- *Al-Aṣma‘iyyāt* reflects a rigorous linguistic and scholarly approach through its selection of eloquent poetry that exemplifies correct Arabic usage, thereby serving the study of language and grammar and safeguarding the purity of the Arabic language.
- *Jamharat Ash‘ār al-‘Arab* by Abū Zayd al-Qurashī represents a comprehensive and systematic endeavor, bringing together poems distinguished by quality, renown, and tribal representation in order to delineate an overall portrait of early Arabic poetry and to highlight its artistic and tribal diversity.

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