SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY POETIC AESTHETICS: IBN MAʿṢŪM AL-MADANIʾS
SULĀFAT AL-ʿAṢR ON CONTEMPORARY POETS

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Abstract

The 11th/17th-century Hijazi scholar Ibn Maʿṣūm al-Madanī (d. 1120/1709) wrote a significant later post-classical/pre-modern biographical anthology, *Sulāfat al-ʿāsr fī maḥāsin al-shuʿarāʾ bi-kulli miṣr* (Pressing of the Wine Grapes on the Excellence of Poets from Every Region). Written in India presumably while Ibn Maʿṣūm was under house arrest, the *Sulāfa*, along with another 11th/17th-century biographical anthology by Muḥammad Faḍl Allāh al-Muḥibbī (d. 1111/1699) followed a slightly earlier work by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī (d. 1069/1659). All three authors claim that what they have preserved of literary examples also compete with—if not surpass—their ancestors' literature. By taking the *Sulāfa* as an example, I argue that besides its merit of preserving a significant amount of prose and poetry in the 11th/17th century and defending contemporary literature, the work provides a set of poetic aesthetics that corresponds to what forms an excellent literary example. More importantly, I attempt to tackle the question of why it is crucial to read pre-modern/post-classical literature by those who recorded it, especially regarding their view of terms such as ‘literary eloquence’ and ‘creativity’ rather than relying on our own modern literary taste.
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله منشئ الفن، آدم الإنسان ما لم يعلمه، والشكر له على آلهة ونعماه ما غرد قمري
على الغصن وشدا وأتهم في سفارة طالب علم وأنجى، وكتب عالم في الطروس وجد،
والصلاة والسلام على أشرف المرسلين محمد الرسول الأمين، وعلى آل وصحبه أجمعين،

وبعد.

فإن في هذه الرسالة العلمية جهد سنتين ونيف قضيتها نظرا وتأملًا في أدب أغفل طوعاً
أو كرها فلم يعد يعرفه إلا الأقلون، ولا يقنع بجودته الفنية إلا الراسخون. وكنت في السنين
الأولى من برنامج الدكتوراه في جامعة جورج تاون أنعم النظرة في بعض المصادر الرئيسة
والثانيّة المختصّة بالأدب العربي في زمن ما بعد سقوط بغداد سنة ٦٥٧ للهجرة حتى
وقعت على كتاب فريد للأديب والمفكر العالم المستمد علي ابن أحمد بن مصصوص الحسني
المدني المتوفى سنة ١١٢٠ للهجرة، والموسوم بسلافة العصر في محاسن الشعراء بكل
مصر. ثم شرعت في قراءته مرة، ثم أرجعت البصر مرتين فوجدته فيه شعرًا رصيناً خليقا بالإعجاب، يطرب له القارئ والسامع طربا ينفي شبهة التكلف، والانهماك في
الزخارف اللغوية، والبعد عن روح الشعر الذي وصف بها شعر هذه الأزمنة. فقدت العزم
على دراسة هذا المؤلف دراسة عمقة، منطلقةً من دراسات سابقة اعتنت بعلم التراجم
وآخرها ناقشت شعر المؤلف، وكتب أخرون له كما سيتضح في تصعيف هذه الرسالة.
هذا وانت أشكر الله عز وجل أن بسر لي إتمامها مع الشاقة، وبعد الشقة بيني وبين عدد
من المصادر، ثم أشكر والدي اللذين بذرا في زُروعي حب الأدب والكتب مذ كنت صبياً،
فقطعتم من أطهاره ثمارا جنبا، كما أشكر زوجتي التي ساعدتني في هذه الرحلة الطويلة,
ورعتي ورعت طفلي سلاف وأخرى أبيان الذي خرج إلى الدنيا غرة هذا العام الميلادي
وأنا في خطري الحثيث نحو إنجاز الرسالة.
والله ولي التوفيق.
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Transliterations, Translations, Dates and Abbreviations

In this dissertation, I generally follow the *IJMES* (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*) system of transliteration. In indicating the tāʾ marbūṭa, I use it without a “ḥāʾ,” thus “marbūṭa” instead of “marbūṭah.” Also, I do not render the assimilation of the definite article, which is always transliterated as al-,” hence, I use “al-dīn” instead of “ad-dīn.” All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. Translations of the Qurʾan’s verses are by Arthur John Arberry unless otherwise noted. Dates follow the hijrī/Common Era format for dates except for references to modern authors and works, where the CE format is used. The Berlin manuscript,¹ that is used especially in chapter four is abbreviated as “Berlin MS.” The letter “a” indicates right page and “b” indicates the left page. To look for words either in Arabic (i.e., *Lisān al-ʿArab*)² or its translation in English, I rely not on a particular edition, rather I use the website with usual consultation with Lane and Hans Wehr’s seminal dictionaries: <https://ejtaal.net/aa/#hw4=734.1l=h2150,ls=h5,la=2969,sg=719,ha=488,br=649,pr=106,aan=419,mgf=606,vi=260,kz=1672,mr=433,mn=936,ujw=1090,umr=730,ums=610,umj=538,ulq=1222,uka=297,uoq=244,bdw=h599,amr=h436,asb=h654,auh=h1069,dhq=h376,mbt=h610,msb=h164,tlb=h7>.

¹ See Berlin MS Peternann I 630, 518 ff., copied in 1212/1798, available online at <http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0000F5E700000000>.

² I refer to the well-known Arabic dictionary *Lisān al-ʿArab* of Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1313) by its title and the root/radical.
Introduction

This dissertation deals with an under-valued literature. It examines an 11th/17th-century Arabic books on *tarājim al-shu‘arā‘* ‘biographical anthologies,’ focusing on its examples of poetry and the reasons for why there were chosen. In major books on the history of Arabic literature, namely since the middle of the 19th century, pre-modern or post-classical Arabic literature has been overlooked and disparaged as decadent, stagnant, contrived, and more. This reevaluation of the poetic heritage can be traced back to the beginnings of the 19th-20th century Arabic *Nahda*.

The first chapter specifically deals with the question of *inḥiṭāṭ* (decadence) by investigating scattered sources in both Arabic and Western scholarship. By bridging the gap between the two scholarships, this chapter investigates how this judgment originated and why it prevailed for decades. This chapter also explores why this question still prevails despite being revisited and rejected in almost every field pertaining to Arabic and Islamic studies.

The chapter begins by selecting three major books that write a literary history of Arabic literature, that despite coming from different backgrounds, foster the idea of *inḥiṭāṭ*. I argue that Arab scholars, who have been frequently ignored by Western scholars, were the first to question and reject the *inḥiṭāṭ* argument and convincingly provide counter arguments—for example, the case of Maḥmūd Rizq Salīm and Muḥammad Bahjat al-Bayṭār. After providing the Arab scholars’ counter-argument, I also consider recent Western studies that reject *inḥiṭāṭ*, not only in the field of literature, but in other fields such as intellectual history and Ottoman history.
Writing this first chapter serves an important step to arriving at the second chapter, which investigates books on *tarājim al-shuʿarāʾ* ‘biographical anthologies’ as evolving from a border genre that is *kutub al-ṭabaqāt wa al-tarājim* ‘books on biographies and classes.’ Drawn from different sources, this second chapter gives a brief story of this biographical genre, arguing that later works by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī (d. 1069/1659), Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī (d. 1111/1699) and Ibn Maʿṣūm al-Madanī (d. 1120/1709)—whose book *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsin al-shuʿarāʾ bi-kull miṣr* is the main subject of this dissertation—belong to the tradition of biographies and anthologies. I then move to explore how those authors structured their books. In this chapter, I argue that these scholars, as Ḥulw argues, represent a revived movement aiming at preserving Arabic literature in the 10th/16th to 18th century periods. In fact, much of what we know about Arabic poetry and prose in these periods is due to the work of these scholars. Additionally, I discuss the aims of these scholars to defend and document their literature, and their poetic aesthetics when they chose their literary examples, divided their books, and wrote in a distinctive style that to our modern taste is unpleasantly contrived.

The third chapter will closely discuss the *Sulāfa*, introducing its author Ibn Maʿṣūm al-Madanī and his place among Arab and Muslim scholars in the 11th/17th century. This chapter also discusses the importance of the *Sulāfa* as representing the 11th/17th-century biographical anthologies, its titles, sources, introduction, and structure. More importantly, this chapter discusses the *Sulāfa*’s poetic aesthetics by focusing on two major points: selection of poetic genres and the literary-criticism remarks. Not only do I rely on the *Sulāfa* as the main source of the author’s literary taste but also on other
available sources, such as his well-known work on Arabic science of eloquence
(balāgha) Anwār al-rabī‘ fī anwā‘al-badī‘, where the author comments on
his badī‘iyya poem. This work can provide detailed explanations of terms that are directly
related to poetry.

The fourth chapter, extending the points made in the third chapter, chooses two
poems by two different poets whom Ibn Ma‘ṣūm depicts as highly talented. This chapter
translates those poems and the entries of each poet, and concluding with analysis. The
first poem is Aḥmad ibn Mas‘ūd ibn Abī Numayy's (d. 1041/1631) panegyrical ode. The
poet composed it for the Ottoman sultan in an appeal for his help in the poet's attempt to
defeat his cousin and take over Mecca. The second poem is rather unconventional. The
poet Abū al-Baḥr Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭī al-Baḥrānī (d. 1028/1619) composed it
about a fish that had struck him during his trip to sea, an event that was cleverly
manipulated to help the poem become widely celebrated by the poet’s peers.
Chapter One: The Nahḍa Literary Canonization as a Rejection of Post Classical Literature

During the 19th and 20th century Nahḍa (Arab Awakening/renaissance), literary critics and historians (both in the Arab world and the West) largely dismissed the long post-classical or pre-modern period (8th to 12th/13th to 18th) as what was termed the “Age of Decline”\(^3\) that followed what they deemed the “Golden Age” of high Abbasid culture (the 8th to 11th centuries). Despite being widely accepted, the definition of the term the ḍasr al-inḥiṭāṭ (Age of Decline or decadence) varies in the works of Orientalists such as Carl Brockelmann, Reynold A. Nicholson and in the works of Arab scholars, such as Jūrjī Zaydān, Shawqī Ḍayf. Ḥusayn al-Wād suggests that the periodization of these works shows ubiquitous inconsistency that while al-Zayyāt, Zaydān and Brockelmann date the beginning of modern literature with the 1798 French invasion, Nicholson includes all periods after the Fall of Baghdad in one section.\(^4\) Tāhā Ḥusayn and al-Rāfiʿī turn away from this division by focusing on themes and literary genres.\(^5\)

A few decades later, with the advent of modernist Arabic literature, we see a different stance regarding the trajectory of Arabic literature. Though these scholars do not exhibit direct attention towards historical analysis, including the issue of periodization, they nevertheless internalized the dichotomy between classical literature and modern. For

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\(^{3}\) I use “Age of Decline,” inḥiṭāṭ and “decline” interchangeably.

\(^{4}\) Ḥusayn al-Wād, *Fī tārīkh al-adab: mafāḥīm wa manāḥij* (Beirut: al-Muʿassasa al-Arabiyya lil-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, 1992), 144; Nicholson hesitates to call the period following the 1798 French invasion or with the advent of print as “modern.” He concludes by arguing that “[hitherto] modern culture has only touched the surface of Islam.” See Reynold Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (New York: Scribners, 1907), 469.

example, the Lebanese-Syrian critic Adunīs (`Ālī Aḥmad Saʿīd) argues that it was the explosive aesthetics of Jubrān Khalīl Jubrān’s work at the beginning of the 20th century, not the revivalist movement and the so-called Arabic Nahḍa, that defined the real beginning of ‘modern’ Arabic literature.6 Similarly, the Iraqi poet Nāzik al-Malāʾika points out that with the pioneering movement of Iraqi poets in the late 1940s, Arabic literature entered a new phase.7

The notion of periodizing or, dividing Arabic literature into periods that include terms such as classical, golden, post-classical (or decadent) and neo-classical, first appeared in Western scholarship. According to Brockelmann, the first to undertake such a task in the West was J. von Hammer-Purgstall in his Literaturgeschichte der Araber von ihrem Beginne bis zu Ende des zwölften Jahrhunderts der Hidschret (published between 1850 and 1856).8 However, despite the book’s length, Brockelmann claims that his work—along with A Manual of Arabian History and Literature, by F. F. Arbuthnot—lacks many primary sources, not to mention the author’s lack of knowledge of Arabic.9

As this periodization began to settle in major works, many Arab literary historians adopted it when writing their own works on Arabic literary history. Of course, throughout Arab-Islamic history, there is a large body of historical accounts of poets, bellettrists, littérateurs and other notable figures, especially in biographical works.10 However,

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6 Adunīs, Muqaddima lil-shiʿr al-ʿArabī (Beirut:Dār al-ʿAwda,1983), 76.
9 Brockelmann, Tarīkh al-adab al-ʿarabī, 1: 32.
10 Zaydān indicates that books such as al-Fihrist of Ibn al-Naḍīm (d. 385/995), and Kashf al-zunūn of Ḥājjī Khalīfa (d. 1067/1657) and many biographical works are in fact historical accounts. Still, they cannot be categorized under “literary history” as understood in modern times.
modern Arab historians have been clear about distinguishing their works from the well-established historical accounts of *tabaqāt* (classes) and *tarājim* (biographical dictionaries) books. Moreover, historical terms as *jāhilī*, *islāmī*, *muhdath* and so on were coined and used by earlier Arabic philologists and scholars to classify poets in specific periods. It was not, however, until the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries that Arab scholars introduced the histories of Arabic literature.

The question of who was the first Arab scholar to write on the history of Arabic literature has different answers. Jūrjī Zaydān claims that he was the first to publish *Tārīkh ādāb al-lugha al-‘Arabiyya* in 1902, but Aḥmad H. al-Zayyāt (d. 1968) argues that Ḥasan Tawfīq al-‘Adal (d. 1904) was the first to write about this subject. Influenced by literary-historical accounts, number of books throughout the 20th century included historical information on a particular period in Arabic literature, Andalusian literature, Abbasid literature or *Jāhilī* (pre-Islamic) literature. Shawqī Ḍayf’s *Tārīkh al-adab al-‘Arabī* (ten volumes) and ʿUmar Farrūkh’s *Tārīkh al-adab al-‘Arabī* (six volumes) remain the most comprehensive. While Farrūkh covers Arabic literature in both Eastern and Western Islamic regions from the beginning until the Ottoman conquest of Egypt, Ḍayf’s moves further to include Arabic literature in the Ottoman period.


12 ʿAbd Allāh al-Rushayd, “al-Tahqīb al-siyāsī lil-ʿuṣūr al-adabiyya: naẓarāt wa-murājaʿāt,” 7-8. (I thank Dr. ʿAbd Allāh al-Rushayd for sharing this article with me.

None of the Arab writers or Orientalists have had a significant influence on the reception of pre-modern and post-classical Arabic literature more than Zaydān.14 His erudition, command of several European languages, clear-cut style of writing, multi-volume and school-designed works on a variety of subjects, along with his widely distributed journal *al-Hilāl*, have garnered him a reputation as one of the founding fathers of the Arab *Nahḍa*. As Albert Hourani asserts, Zaydān helped form “a consciousness of the Arab past by his histories and still more by his series of historical novels, modeled on those of Scott and creating a romantic image of the past as Scott’s had done.”15 Such awareness of history, periodization, and the romantic image of ‘Islamic civilization’ can be detected in his essential book *Tārīkh al-tamaddun al-islāmī*, as well as his major book on the history of Arabic literature, *Tārīkh ādāb al-lugha al-ʿArabiyya*.16 The notion that Arabic literature fell into stagnation after the fall of Baghdad in 656/1285 up until the modern period (after the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon in 1213/1798) was not novel to Zaydān as an Arab scholar. The Arabic revivalist (*iḥyāʾ*) movement from mid 19th


century fostered such an idea. For example, Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (d. 1290/1873), in his famous travelogue *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz*, and Buṭrus al-Bustānī in his *Khutba fī ādāb al-'Arab*, spoke of the ‘decline’ that the Arab and Muslims suffered, particularly during the Ottoman period. Especially relevant to revivalists discourse is the blind Azhar teacher Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Marṣafī (d. 1308/1890). Even though Zaydān and others ignored his influence, he stands alongside his peer and master Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1323/1905), who had the same effect in Islamic sciences as key figures of the literary revivalist school.

As suggested by Muḥammad Mandūr, al-Marṣafī's works can be divided into two categories. The first can be demonstrated in his epistles, in which he discussed the newly presented concepts of nationalism, community, politics and justice that emerged as a result of several factors, one of which was al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s return from his trip to Paris. His more specialized and nuanced works (such as his four-volume book *al-Wasīla al-adabiyya*, in which he dealt with language and literature-related aesthetics) reintroduced these concepts to encourage contemporary littérature to produce literature symptomatic of their time and place. In this book, “he presents both a synthetic, clear account of the disciplines of the Arabic language (*lugha*, *sarf nahw*, *balāgha*, *badīʿ*, ‘arūḍ [q.vv.]), stripped of the commentaries and glosses which until then almost always accompanied them, and also a choice of relatively numerous examples, referring especially to

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Umayyad and ʿAbbāsid prose.” Al-Marṣafī used al-Bārūdī’s poetry as an example of how revivalist poets embodied the revitalizing ‘eloquent/sublime’ classical poetry and recovered from the damage resulting from the antecedent literary tradition. But those revivalists did not only rely on the emerging discussion of decline. Ibn Khaldūn’s (d. 808/1406) remarks on the literature of his time served as evidence on which they relied to legitimize their own discourse of the Nahḍa. ʿAbd al-Ḥakim Rāḍī, in his book al-Naqd al-ʾihyāʾī fī ḍawʾ al-turāth (Revivalist Criticism In Light of [Arabic] Tradition) persuasively argues that al-Marṣafī was heavily influenced by Ibn Khaldūn, as well as almost all revivalist figures. One of the crucial points that Ibn Khaldūn made regarding literature (specifically poetry) up to his time was that it mostly showed signs of contrivance, thus it was assumed by modern Arabs that its value had faded. His writing was meant to challenge this, notably the dominant use of rhyme. Only oral poetry of


21 “By introducing al-Bārūdī’s poetry, al-Marṣafī introduced the literary work of a contemporary poet who succeeded in equaling and even transcending the classical [poets] through employing the same classical poetic structure, genres, themes, motifs, style, and diction for his own generation.” Abdulmueen Balfas “Al-Barudi’s Poetic Revival Project,” (PhD dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington, 2013), 14.


23 Ibn Khaldūn refers to Maghribi poets and prose composers as being enthusiastic and more concerned with the wording and the form of the expression (lafz/alfāz) than with the meaning, neglecting the subtleties of maʿānī and bayān. See, Ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muhammad Ibn Khaldūn, Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldūn, ed. ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Wāfī (Cairo: Dār Naḥdat Miṣr, 2003), 3: 1138; Regarding Ibn Khaldūn’s opinion on saj’ see İhsān ʿAbbās, Tārīkh al-naqd al-adabī ind al-ʿArab (Amman: Dār al-Shurūq, 1993), 624-25.
illiterate Bedouins reminded him of the ancient, eloquent and naturally-disposed poetry. Rāḍī goes further to claim that Ibn Khaldūn was a professor to the revivalists in Egypt and other Eastern countries not only in literature, but also in other fields such as politics, sociology, and education. Prior to that, Ottoman intellectuals in the 16th and 17th centuries celebrated Ibn Khaldūn and his Muqaddima.

In the early 20th century, major sources detailing the history of Arabic literature such as Ahmad al-Zayyāt's Tārīkh al-adab al-ʿArabī, Ḥannā Fākhūrī’s Tārīkh al-adab al-ʿArabī, Aḥmad Ḥusayn Haykal’s Taṭawwur al-adab al-ʿArabī al-ḥadīth fī Miṣr and many others have embraced the ‘Age-of-Decline’ conclusion in varied ways. While some took this conclusion for granted and applied it to Arabic literature, others were influenced by their hostility towards the Ottoman dynasty and portrayed it as reminiscent of Europe’s Dark Age. Even though such conclusions no longer seem compelling, Michael Cooperson maintains:

[T]he awkward fact that the Orientalist paradigm, though the ‘Orientalists’ themselves have largely abandoned it, remains the default position in Arabic-language literary histories and mass-culture

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24 Ibn Khaldūn, Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn, 3: 1180. He writes:

"وَالكَثِيرُ مِنَ المَنْتَلِحِينَ لِلْعَلَمِ لِهَذَا الْعَيْدِ وَخَصْوَصَ الْلَّسَآنَةِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ يَسْتَتَكُونُ هَذِهِ الْفَنُونَ الَّتِي لَهُمْ إِذَا سَمَعُوا وَبَيْحُ نَظُومِهِمْ إِذَا أَنْشُدُوهُمْ وَيَنْذِرُونَ أَنَّ ذُوقَهُمْ إِنْما نُباً عَنْهُمْ لِلْيَمِينِهِمْ وَفَقَدَنَّ الْإِلْيَابَةِ شَبِهَةٍ وَقَضَادُ أَيْنَاءُ مِنْ فِنْهُمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ أَيْنَاءُ مِنْ مَلَكَةٍ مِنْ مَلَكَةِهِمْ مُسْهُمَّةٌ لِلْبَلَاغَةِ حَكْمًا وَيَنْجُومُونَ مِنْ ذُوقَهُمْ وَفَقَدَنَّ الْإِلْيَابَةِ وَفَقَدَنَّ الْإِلْيَابَةِ لِلْبَلَاغَةِ..." See also Zaydān, Tārīkh ādāb al-lughā al-ʿArabiyya, 126-127.

25 The Arabic is stated as:

"أَنْ نَفَقَ عَلَى حَقَّيَةِ تَارِخِيَةٍ أَسَاسِيَّةٍ هَيْ: أَنَّ أَبَنَ خَلْدُونَ هُوَ أَسْتَاذهِ الإِلْحَابِيِّينَ فِي مُصْرٍ مِّنْ فِي بَلَادِهَا غَيْرِهَا مِنْ بَلَادِ الشَّرْقِ وَأَنَّ هَذِهِ الْأَسْتَنَادَاتِ يَنْجُوُ الْأَكْثَرُ مَنْ يَنْجُوُ فِي مِنْدَرَضِ الْسَّيَاسَةِ وَالْإِجْمَاعِ وَالْعَلَمَةِ وَالْأَدْبِ..." See Rāḍī, al-Naqd al-ʿiyā rī, 118.

26 Rāḍī, al-Naqd al-ʿiyā rī, 118 footnote 1; see also, Delanoue, “al-Marṣaﬁ.”

references to the Arab and Islamic past, even if it has had, and continues to have, its critics.

The different scholarly trajectories dealing with the question of ʾinḥiṭāṭ in both Arabic and Western discourses might have played a role in keeping it prevailed, especially given that fact that both are neither disconnected from nor intertwined with one another. Ottoman studies, modern Arabic studies, comparative studies and post-classical studies have treated the question of decline separately. Moreover, the various usages of the decline argument in different fields leave us baffled. In a recent article, Manfred Sing argues that the concept of decline as represented in Islamic studies has often been used as a mere imitation or rejection of the European readings of Islam. He demonstrates that it “has been so widely used by Turks, Arabs, and Persians as well as Muslims in India and Indonesia that it seems nearly impossible to imagine a historiography of Arab or Muslim societies and what their self-perception would look like without the very idea of decline and decadence.”

28 In Arabic scholarship, there has been scholarly attempts to critique the historical approach of major literary-historical works, including those written by Zaydān, al-Zayyāt, Aḥmad Haykal and others. These works investigate the problem of using polities to analyze literature. From among the recent works, see Fayṣal Aṣlān. “Ishkāliyyat al-taḥqīb al-adabī,” 157-195; Muḥammad Marīnī, “Naẓariyyāt al-taḥqīb al-siyāsī li-tārīkh al-adab; al-uṣūl wa al-imdādāt,” Jāmiʿat al-Kuwayt 27, no. 106 (2009): 179-199; al-Rushayd, “al-Taḥqīb al-siyāsī.”

29 For instance, Roger Owen’s article on Gibb and Bowen’s “Islamic Society and the West” deals with issues related to Ottoman studies; Stephen Sheehi’s essay “Towards a Critical Theory of al-Nahḍah: Epistemology, Ideology, and Capital” belongs to the Nahḍa studies; Mehmet Akif Kireçli offers a thoughtful remark on this issue. He argues that, “[i]t is this latter notion, the Sick Man of Europe, which parallels the notion of ʾinḥiṭāṭ in the Arabic-speaking Middle East. Although these two discourses emerged separately from each other and in different contexts in Europe, they later converge to form one single paradigm through which the history of the Middle East has been represented.” See, Mehmet Akif Kireçli “Decline Discourse and Self-Orientalization in the Writings of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Zia Gökalp: A Comparative Study of Modernization in Egypt and Turkey” (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2010).

To explain the complexity of the *inhīṭāṭ* discourse, he offers three points. First, it “was part of a transcultural communication process on cultural differences”\(^{31}\) such that even though it meant something different to Arabs, Muslims and Europeans, “its meaning blended into each other when trying to explain the gap between European strength and Muslim weakness.”\(^{32}\) Secondly, “understanding decline as a language game entails focusing on the manifoldness and similarity of different usages of decline and *inhīṭāṭ*, [and] their functions in different situations.”\(^{33}\) Thirdly, *inhīṭāṭ* discourse exhibits some cultural symbolism to Europeans that when “confronted with the Oriental other,” they also “met their own ambivalences towards the past and progress.”\(^{34}\) What is clear from Sing’s argument—whether one agrees with it or not—is that it reveals a significant problem when dealing with the decline paradigm: that, despite its ubiquity operating in different Arab-Islamic fields, it remains ambiguous.

1.1. **Pre-Modern Arabic Poetry in Major Modern Textbooks**

In this section, I will choose three major books on Arabic literature that portray Arabic literature in the Ottoman period as decadent. To contrast this paradigm of decline, I will select scholarly works that either disagree or speculate upon it. The following accounts are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather representative. These accounts were published around the same time, gained wide readership and their authors came from


\(^{34}\) Sing, “The Decline of Islam,” 14.
different backgrounds, including modern Arabic scholarship (Zaydān), traditional Arabic scholarship (al-Rāfiʿī), and Western scholarship (Nicholson).

1.1.1. Jūrjī Zaydān's Ṭārīkh ādāb al-lugha al-ʿArabiyya

In 1894, Zaydān began publishing several chapters in his renowned magazine, al-Ḥilāl.35 In 1909, he included the already-published chapters in in his four-volume book Ṭārīkh ādāb al-lugha al-ʿArabiyya (History of the Arabic Language’s Literatures). For Zaydān, literature signifies not only literary composition but literature in the Western sense, as encompassing the history of how knowledge is practiced and produced.36 In his first volume, Zaydān deals with Arabic literature from the pre-Islamic until the Umayyad period (132/750), in the second volume the Abbasid period (132/747 to 447/1055) and the modern period (1213/1798 until his time) in the fourth volume. The third volume, which concerns the post-classical or pre-modern period (447/1055 to 1213/1798), is devoted to what Zaydān calls Mongol and Ottoman literature. He notes that most of what was available to him can be attributed to the late Abbasid period, Mongol and Ottoman periods.37 However, during this period, poetry became focused on the wordings (alfāẓ) as opposed to the “natural” composition that characterizes Arabic poetry in early Islam.38 In the Ottoman period, Arabic literary production fell to its lowest level:39

35 Zaydān, Ṭārīkh ādāb al-lugha al-ʿArabiyya, 1: 8.
36 Zaydān, Ṭārīkh ādāb al-lugha al-ʿArabiyya, 1: 13. The Arabic is stated as "والمراد بتاريخ آداب العربية تاريخ علومها أو تاريخ شارع عقول أبنائها ونتائج قرائحهم، فهو تاريخ الأمة من الوجهة الأدبية والعلمية."
37 Zaydān, Ṭārīkh ādāb al-lugha al-ʿArabiyya, 3: 5.
38 Zaydān, Ṭārīkh ādāb al-lugha al-ʿArabiyya, 3: 126.
وأما الآداب العربية على الإجمال فأصبحت في أخط أدوارها، وندر نبوع العلماء المفكرين والمستنبطين فيها. وأكثر ما كتب في هذا العصر، إنما هو من قبيل الشروح والحواشي، والتعليقات وشرح الشروح و نحوها. ويصح أن يسمى هذا العصر: "عصر الشروح والحواشي"، كما سُمي العصر المغولي: عصر الموسوعات والجامعات. وشعاع في هذا العصر التصوف، وعددت الطرق الصوفية، وكثير التأليف بلا نظام مثل: الكشكول، وانحط أساليب الإنشاء، حتى أوشك أن يكون عامياً، كما في قصص: بني هلال، و نحوها مما وصل إلينا من القصص الموضوعة في عصور الانحطاط.

As for Arabic literature in general, it went down to the nadir. In this period, it was a rarity to find scholars, especially those equipped with thinking and analytical skills. Much of what had been written in the period was akin to glosses, commentaries, super-commentaries and [so forth]. Since we call the Mongol period “the era of cyclopedias and collections,” it is proper to call this era “the era of commentaries and super-commentaries.” Sufis orders increased. Random and unsystematic writings such as al-Kaskhūl spread widely in this era. [As a result] prose composition declined to the point of almost becoming ṣāmmī [colloquial or dialectical] as in the folk tale of Banū Hilāl, and similar [prose composition] that came down to us of fabricated stories from the Age of Decline.

In this passage, the spread of Sufi orders, writings such as commentaries, super-commentaries and colloquial writing became features of decadence. But was this true?

Did Sufi doctrines affect the way Arabic literature functions? Which Sufism? Do popular literary corpuses such as Banū Hilāl constitute debased literature? What about the innumerable literary works written in classical, grammatically accurate Arabic—major works, either in different fields or literary corpuses, such as Maqamāt? Zaydān offers no answer. Rather, he provides a more general evaluation of poetry as decadent, resulting from political weakness.40 He lists entries of figures in literature and other sciences cited

40 Zaydān, Tārīkh ādāb al-lugha al-ʿArabiyya, 3: 293.
from major bibliographical books, such as Ḥājjī Khalīfa’s *Kashf al-zunūn* and Brockelmann’s *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*. The pages devoted to Arabic literature in the Ottoman period are only 77 pages compared, for instance, to the modern period, which occupies 288 pages. The picture painted of Arabic literature in the Ottoman period, then, is rather weak, and the decline theory already presupposed and scattered throughout the book is provided with little to no evidence. One should bear in mind that however valuable and essential his book has been in supplying students of Arabic literature with historical and biographical materials, this kind of judgment was uncritically accepted.

1.1.2. **Al-Rafiʿī’s *Tārīkh ādāb al-ʿArab***

In his attempt to write a story of Arabic literature, Muṣṭafā Śādiq al-Rafiʿī (d. 1937) took another approach. Published in 1911, this book was considered his first scholarly book dealing with Arabic literature. He was previously concerned with writing analyses of poetry. Rather than relying on historical analysis that divides literature into periods—a method al-Rafiʿī constantly dismisses—he reads Arabic literature by looking closely into its genres and the degree to which they develop and influence each another.

In other words, instead of reading literature through history, al-Rafiʿī espouses that one

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"أصاب الشعر ما أصاب سائر الآداب العربية في هذا العصر. فاستولى الجمود على الفرانج لما توالى على الأمة من الذل في تلك الفترة المظلمة، على أن المجيدين منهم إنما كانت إجادتهم تقليدية [...] وأصبح الكاتب أو الشاعر إنما يهمه تنميق العبارة بالجناس والتورية والسجع [...] وأكثرها من الشعر الديني."

42 As cited by al-Wād, Zaydān stated that some of the major schools in Levant and Egypt decided to use his history of Arabic literature as curriculum. See al-Wād, *Fī tarīkh al-adab*, 29.

The child’s body changes and grows until it reaches full strength, but when his body grows and becomes bigger, and one of his senses begins to decline and decay, its growth—in general—cannot be a full development. Instead, it needs to be examined in details. The same applies to literary crafts; in that, considering the totality of language, they are not [to be viewed by] decadence nor growth/development. [Instead,] each genre needs to be explained by its own right and its

\textsuperscript{44} See Al-Rāfiʿī, \textit{Tārīkh ādāb al-ʿArab}, 1: 24.

\textsuperscript{45} Al-Rāfiʿī, \textit{Tārīkh ādāb al-ʿArab}, 1: 29.

\textsuperscript{46} Al-Rāfiʿī, \textit{Tārīkh ādāb al-ʿArab}, 3: 353.
influences [...] because language [as acted by] people has not yet reached its end. Instead, it is predisposed to change in every age in terms of capacity and material.

If language, the means through which literature is expressed, has not yet reached its full development (it changes over time and enters different stages) then it is implausible to speak of literature according to the inḥiṭāṭ paradigm without a thorough explanation. To better look at the continuation of Arabic literature, al-Rāfiʿī proposes to investigate which genre or literary type influences another. In doing so, one can develop a more comprehensive picture of literature. In the chapter in which al-Rāfiʿī deals with the artificiality (ṣināʿāt) evident in prose and poetry compositions of pre-modern or post-classical literature, he admits that the littérateurs (udabāʾ) of the 6th/11th to the 9th/14th century used literary artifice gracefully. He also argues that the littérateurs bequeathed it to unfaithful successors who:

To achieve it [artificiality], they turned their face away from the truth of meanings and worshipped words. Time was helping them. Whenever one of them wrote a poem or an epistle, [it is as if] a grave of language was opened by his pen. This was their condition until the middle of the thirteenth century [AH] when these germs began to weaken, decrease, and started to wane until the new renaissance, at which point it died except in some corners of mosques, which remained hidden.

Cooperson suggests that al-Rāfiʿī sees the development of Arabic literary tradition as “neither progressive nor cumulative; indeed its finest hour came near the beginning, with the revelation of the Qurʾan. Moreover, it is independent of events in other spheres, including religion, politics, and science.” See Cooperson, “The Abbasid ‘Golden,” 49 footnote 40.

Al-Rāfiʿī, Tārīkh ādāb al-ʿArab, 3: 356
After giving this general evaluation of how poetry was composed in the last centuries, al-Rāfiʿī demonstrates this artificiality with a summary and examples. Most of the cited examples come from 6th/11th to the 9th/14th century, while the 11th/17th century is not represented except in a few instances, such as pictorial poem “mushajjar.” Al-Rāfiʿī concludes by stating that it does not show any creativity. Of interest is the fact that his third volume was published posthumously and edited by his disciple Muḥammad Saʿīd al-ʿAryān (d. 1965).

1.1.3. Reynold Nicholson’s A Literary History of the Arabs

In 1908, Reynold Nicholson published A Literary History of the Arabs as one of the early contributions to the history of Arabic literature in the English language. It is true, as we learned earlier, that Manual of Arabian History and Literature (1890), by Arbuthnot, was perhaps the first English book on the subject matter. However, this book quickly became outdated as more sources came to light.

Nicholson begins with the history of pre-Islam and ends with “present day.” He traces the “historical development of ideas,” which he did not find it in Brockelmann’s

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50 Al-Rāfiʿī, Tārīkh ādāb al-ʿArab, 968.

51 Al-Rāfiʿī, Tārīkh ādāb al-ʿArab, 3: 10.


53 Brockelmann, Tārīkh al-adab al-ʿarabī, 1: 32.

54 Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs, 443.
book. As easily anticipated, the conclusion regarding literature in the pre-modern period is akin to that of Brockelmann that it is “an age of imitation and compilation.” Of course, one might argue that this is only descriptive. Still, it is evident that these words to classify and explain literary production of the period are implicitly pejorative.

Nicholson’s overall depiction of the trajectory of Islamic civilization after the Abbasid period reinforces the decline paradigm as evident in the following passage, in which he also quotes E. J. Gibb.

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries ‘witnessed the rise and triumph of that wonderful movement known as the Renaissance [. . .] but no ripple of this great upheaval, which changed the whole current of intellectual and moral life in the West, reached the shores of Islam.’ Until comparatively recent times, when Egypt and Syria first became open to European civilisation, the Arab retained his medieval outlook and habit of mind, and was in no respect more enlightened than his forefathers who lived under the ‘Abbásid Caliphate. And since the Mongol Invasion, I am afraid we must say that instead of advancing farther along the old path he was being forced back by the inevitable pressure of events. East of the Euphrates the Mongols did their work of destruction so thoroughly that no seeds were left from which a flourishing civilization could arise; moreover, the Arabic language was rapidly extinguished by the Persian.

The importance of this passage rests on the way many authors, especially Orientalists who deal with pre-modern or post-classical Arabic literature, resort to exactly the same inḥiṭāt paradigm. Were it not for the opening up with European civilization, Arabic literature would not enjoy an iota of florescence, even though Nicholson believes that modern culture only touched the surface of Islam.

55 Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs, xi.
56 Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs, 442.
57 Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs, 443.
58 Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs, 469, 470.
1.2. **Counter-Argument the *ḥiṭāṭ* (Age of Decline) Paradigm**

Despite its prevalence, the idea of *ḥiṭāṭ* has not always been accepted. Many accounts have rejected it and questioned its legitimacy. I have located some of the major accounts that are not fully representative, but—being written by renowned scholars—they could help us paint a picture of this argument. While some Arabic sources influence Western sources, others do not. To avoid confusion, I will deal with them separately beginning with the Arabic accounts, followed by the Western accounts.

1.2.1. **Arabic Scholarship**

ʿUmar Mūsā Bāshā, in his introduction to his 1989 book on Mamluk literature, provides examples of several Arab critics who questioned and refused the “Age of Decline” paradigm. To him, Muḥammad Bahjat al-Bayṭār (d. 1976) was the first to deem literary examples of 13th/18th century as valuable and competing with earlier poetry. Al-Bayṭār, taking his grandfather’s biographical dictionary Ḥilyat al-bashar as an example, claims that it includes many examples of eloquently composed poetry focused on love poems. According to al-Bayṭār, the poetry of those poets included in his grandfather’s work would compete with classical poetry only if they focused on other motifs other than *ghazal*. In other words, contrary to what was then taken for granted that poets prior to the *Nahḍa* lacked poetic capabilities and creativities—whatever those terms mean—al-Bayṭār recognizes, with some reservations, the quality of those poets.

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Maḥmūd Rizq Salīm’s important historical book on the Mamluk period ʿAṣr ṣalāṭīn al-mamālīk wa nitājuh al-ʿilmī wa al-adabī (1961), serves as one of the earliest accounts to be openly suspicious of the “Age-of-Decline” paradigm. In his introduction, he holds that the Mamluk period has been unjustly treated, abandoned as a subject of study and accused of being backward, dark, stagnant and imitative despite being important and influential. Elsewhere, he argues that it is implausible to judge Mamluk literary productions by our own standards.

Similarly, Muḥammad Sayyid Kilānī's al-Adab al-Miṣrī fī ṣill al-ḥukm al-ʿUthmānī (1965) rejects the disparagement of the Ottoman period as manifested in Zaydān’s works. Kilānī argues that literature in this period was nevertheless lively and reflective of its age.

Shawqī Ḍayf raises the question with regard to the disparagement of pre-modern or post-classical Arabic literature. For example, in his book published in 1972 and designed for graduate students as a manual for studying Arabic literature, Dayf claims that:

ولعل عصوراً لم تُظلم كما ظلمت العصور المتأخرة وبخاصة عصري الأيوبيين والمماليك؛ فقد قيل مراراً وتكرار إن الشعراء جدمو حينئذ

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Perhaps none of the periods [of Arabic literature] has been as unjustly treated as the late periods, especially the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. It has been repeatedly said that poets stagnated, so did poetry whose spring dried up. Poets lived off repeating and falling short in mimicking the past. This is an unjust treatment of the Ayyubid and Mamluk poets driven by the inaccurate interpretation of poets’ conservativeness [or conventionality], which scholars thought as a result of what they deemed as stagnation, decline and the decline of thought.

In this statement, Ḍayf acknowledges the poor treatment of late Arabic literature and indicates criticisms repeated in most of the works dealing with this particular period. They mischaracterize Ayyubid and Mamluk Arabic literature as lacking literary quality.

To explain the existence of the “contrived” quality of literature in these periods, Ḍayf suggests that one should contextualize it. For example, one must acknowledge that this literature, which has been called contrived, reflects an urban desire to embrace complexity as a way of life. To capture this quest for complexity, Ḍayf includes a story of the vizier al-Muhallabī al-Baghdādī, (d. 352/952) who is reported to have used different spoons when eating each kind of food.64 Rather than resorting to disparaging the pre-modern or post-classical literature, Ḍayf suggests that one should attempt to look at the social context to better assess the literary composition coming out of it. Yet, when it comes to Arabic literature in the Ottoman period, he judges it ideologically. According to

64 Ḍayf, al-Bahth al-adabī, 54.

"فمثلاً مذهب التصنع أو التكلف الشديد يحتاج ما يسنده من تكلف وتصنع مماثل في الحياة العربية والحضارة الإسلامية ومما يشهد على ذلك أن كان هناك وزير هو المهلبي البغدادي يتناول اللون الواحد من الطعام بملاعى متعددة."

ووجد معهم الشعر وحفته ينابيعه وإنهم عاشوا على اجترار الماضي ومحاكاته محاكاةً تقصر عن الأصول قصورا شديداً. وكل ذلك ظلم لشعراء العصرين الأيوبي والمملوكي، وهو ظلم جره التفسير الخاطئ لمحافظة الشعراء حينئذ، فقد ظن الباحثون أنها أثر الجمود وركود الفكر وخموده.
Fatḥ al-Raḥman al-Juʿlī, the Ottoman period in Ḍayf’s work is presented as a dark period that produced nothing of value.65

ʿUmar Farrūkh's seminal six volume work, Tārīkh al-adab alʿArabī, published between 1965 and 1982, is of similar importance to Ḍayf's Tārīkh, but it also provides a more informative presentation of Arabic literature in the periods it covers. In each volume, Farrūkh begins with the historical introduction, placing little focus on critical issues. Instead, he focuses on selecting a vast number of poets or littérateurs of a period, gives a brief biography, cites quotations, explains some of them and provides a bibliography.66 He deals in the first volume with Arabic literature in the Arabic East from Jāhiliyya (pre-Islam) until the end of Umayyad period (–132/–750). In the second volume, Farrūkh begins with the rise of the Abbasiad dynasty until 399/1008. The third volume ends with what Farrūkh calls the “Ottoman conquest” in 923/1517. The last three volumes, however, are devoted to Arabic literature of North Africa, including Arabic Islamic-Spain literature from the Islamic conquest in the first Hijri century until 932/1525. He states in the third volume that:67

ٍيتناول هذا الجزء فترة طويلة جداً من تاريخ الأدب العربي: من أول القرن الخامس إلى أواخر الثلث الأول من القرن العاشر للهجرة (٩٠٠١–٥٢٥١م). هذه الفترة غنية جداً بأنواع الأدب ووجوهه ونتاج الحياة الثقافية، وإن كان الأسلوب العربي قد عانى في أثاثها مقايد متفاوتة من الركاكة. في أعقاب هذه الفترة بلغ التكلف في البلاغة عامة وفي الصناعة اللفظية خاصةً—وفي الكتابة والتورية على الأخص—

66 On his method see Farrūkh's, Tārīkh al-adab alʿArabī, 1: 27-32.
67 Farrūkh, Tārīkh al-adab alʿArabī, 3: 5.
This volume treats a very long period of the history of Arabic literature. It begins with the fifth Hijri century and lasts until the first third of the tenth [sic] century (1009-1525AD). This period is rich in terms of literary kinds and the production of intellectual life. However, during this period, the Arabic style suffered varying degrees of feebleness. In the wake of this period, the contrivance in rhetoric generally and particularly in artificially-styled composition reached its peak, especially in the use of metonymy (kināya) and double entendre (tawriya) […] This period is not only unfamiliar but also has been unjustly treated; in that the later part has been called the Age of Decline—which can be relatively correct but mostly incorrect.

Note that the first volume of the book of Arabic literature was published in 1965 at a period during which sources became more available, as Farrūkh admits in his introduction.68 In the third volume, published in 1972, we do not see only the availability of new sources playing an essential role, but also the awareness of the inḥīṭāt paradigm, which was still influential to Farrūkh. In his sixth volume, Farrūkh underscores the necessity to refrain from resorting to such unproven assumptions, and considering them illogical and unacceptable. How can an age that produced great scholars such as al-Ishbīlī (d. 669/ 1270), Ibn Manẓūr (d.711/1311), Lisān al-Dīn ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 776/ 1374) and many others be called one of ‘decline”?69 Towards the end of his prelude to this volume, Farrūkh states that it is the modern age that one must refer to as decline.70 Arabic literature in the Ottoman period, however, is not included in this history.

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68 Farrūkh, Tārīkh al-adab alʿArabī, 1: 20, 21.
69 Farrūkh, Tārīkh al-adab alʿArabī, 6: 5, 6.
70 Farrūkh, Tārīkh al-adab alʿArabī, 6: 6.
Another work that revisits Arabic literature in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods is Bakrī Shaykh Amīn’s Muṭālaʿāt fī sh-shiʿr al-Mamlūkī wa-ʾUthmānī (Readings on Mamluk and Ottoman [Arabic] Literature), published in 1980. In it, Amīn admits the struggle in evaluating the poetry of this long period, since most of the sources were still in manuscript form. He calls for a rereading of this poetry.71 The way Amīn evaluates the poetry of these periods is baffling. In some instances, he warns us not to be trapped by our ‘modern’ literary values, but in on more than one occasion, he attacks the poetry of these periods depending on these same ‘modern’ values.72 For instance, when discussing a panegyric poem (madīḥ), he concludes by providing reasons related to its sincerity—how it praises the unworthy, especially non-Arab leaders or dictators.73 What he fails to mention is how literary critics of the period evaluated poetry. Amīn’s case is important, because it reveals the complexity in dealing with pre-modern or post-classical literature that scholars such as Amīn refute calling the literature of this period decadent, but cannot resist speaking of it in a manner that leads them to judge it as decadent.

In addition to the work on Mamluk and Ottoman periods, there are books on individual poets or figures that aim to challenge the decline narrative. ʿUmar Mūsā Bāshā's works on Ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī (d. 768/1366) and Ibn al-Naqīb (d. 1081/1670) are representative cases.74 Since this dissertation focuses on Ibn Maʿṣūm al-Madanī (d.

72 Amīn, Muṭālaʿāt, 161.
73 Amīn, Muṭālaʿāt, 86-87.
1120/1709), the works of Karīm al-Kaʿbī (published in 2008) and Ḥamad al Bulayhid (published in 2009) can be valuable. Both celebrated Ibn Maʿṣūm as an iconic poet and literary critic, although the former subscribes to the idea of decline (but claims that ibn Maʿṣūm is the exception that proves the rule). Editors of major texts of the pre-modern period, such as ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Ḥulw and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Sālim, ‘Umar Mūsā Bāshā, and others have emphasized the need to disregard any presuppositions about a period of richness and complexity.

Scholarly works on post-classical or pre-modern Arabic literature focused on regions such as Maghrib, Iraq, Baḥrayn, Yemen, India and others are so expansive that we cannot deal with them. One of the most important works in this area deals with Arabic literature in Arabia. This subject has often been neglected or dropped into oblivion within the major literary-historical books, except for few cases here and there. This book is ‘Āʾiḍ al-Raddādī’s al-Shi’r al-Ḥijāzī fī al-qarn al-ḥādiyya ‘ashar, on Hijazi poetry in the 11th/17th century. Having observed the neglect of Arabic poetry in Hijaz, especially after the Umayyad period, the book demonstrates a scholarship not unduly


76 For example, see Najāt al-Marīnī, al-Shiʾr al-Maghrībī fī ʿaṣr al-Manṣūr al-Saʿdi (Rabat: Kulliyat al-Ādab wa al-ʿUlūm al-Insāniyya, 1999); Kilānī, al-Adab al-Miṣrī fī ẓill al-hukm al-ʿUthmānī.

77 One of the earliest indications of Arabic literature in Arabia (modern Arabic scholarship) is Tāhā Ḥusayn’s al-Hayāt al-adabīyya fī jazīrat al-ʿArab (Damascus: Maktab al-Nashr al-ʿArabī, 1354/1935). In it, Ḥusayn chronicles the history of Arabic literature in Arabia. Ḥusayn argues that after the Umayyad period, until the first World War, Arabic formal poetry devolved, and there was only some colloquial poetry which succeeded in reflecting Bedouin life in Arabia.
influenced by the decline narrative.78 In the chapter called “Poetry in the Scale of
Criticism,” al-Raddādī identifies the need to read literary production of the period by its
own measures. He stresses that:79

والموازين الأدبية النقدية يتحكم فيها الذوق إلى حد كبير، ويؤثر فيها
الواقع الاجتماعي الموروث والمعاصر، ولذا فإن أدب كل عصر يزن عصره
معاصروه بميزانهم، ويزنهم قارئوه في العصور المتآترة بموازينهم، مثل
ما يوزن الذهب اليوم بالغرام وكان السلف يزنونه بالمثقال.

Literary critical assessments are, to a large extent, dictated by taste.
Current and inherited social reality influence it as well. Therefore, the
literature of a particular period is evaluated by the criteria of its own
contemporaries as the later generations of its readers evaluate it by their
standards. This is akin to the case of gold, which is weighted in grams,
while—in previous ages—it was measured in mithqāls.

In a two-volume project, this book investigates the poetry in Hijaz in the 11th/17th
century. Al-Raddādī argues that the often ignored Hijaz experienced ups and downs in
the pre-modern period, as did many regions.80 But especially in the 11th/17th century,
strong intellectual and scholarly currents were increasingly emergent, and could be
attributed to five reasons that played a vital role in reviving the intellectual and scholarly

life of Hijaz during this period. Since Mecca and Medina attracted Muslim scholars from many different Muslim regions between the 9th/15th century to the 11th/17th century, many came to practice mujāwara (immigrating to Mecca and Medina to reside temporarily or permanently). The second reason is the increase of al-riḥalāt al-hijāziyya (i.e., books of scholars writing about their travel to Hijaz) that became widely used in this century and yielded scholarly fruits. The third reason is the dissemination of schools and Ribāṭs (Muslim monasteries which accommodated and taught students, especially Sufis). The fourth reason is the culture of building libraries. The fifth reason is the Arabic culture of patronage that incorporated poets into courts and rewarded them for their poems. Hijaz in this period experienced a revival of that tradition, for example, the case of the Meccan sultan Ḥasan b. Abī Numayy (d. 1010/1602). Similar to Abbasid patrons, Ḥasan ibn Abī Numayy, himself a lover of poetry, played a vital role in encouraging poets and udabāʾ to become part of his court, where poetry was appreciated and rewarded. Apart from the merit of introducing source materials for the 11th/17th century (for a great deal of manuscripts), al-Raddādī’s work remains a milestone on 11th/17th centuries Hijazi poetry.

1.2.2. Western Scholarship

In the last 30 years, Western scholarship in the field of Arabic and Islamic studies has witnessed a reevaluation and revisionist movement to challenge the inhiṭāṭ narrative

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in a variety of disciplines, to objectively study and evaluate the work of these centuries. One of the early scholarly attempts to deal with this issue is Roger Owen’s article, published in 1976, on Gibb and Bowen’s *Islamic Society and the West*. He criticizes Gibb and Bowen’s application of the term “decline” to Islamic civilization and deems it “ideological [because it] stems directly from the initial project of examining the Middle East in terms of an entity called ‘Islamic’ society, something which can only be compared with another entity—Western society.” The problem of such use, Owen posits, is that it examines “Middle Eastern society in terms of one particular world-view […] preventing it from being analyzed in terms of the real forces and relations at work within it.”

Furthermore, Khaled El-Rouayheb’s monograph *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century* (2015) suggests that the prevalence of the *inḥiṭāṭ* argument in Arabic and Islamic studies emanates from three dominant narratives: the Ottomanists, the Islamists and the Arabists—who all categorize the period before the 18th century as decadent. El-Rouayheb argues against the decline of the latter part of the Ottoman empire, that even the 17th and 18th centuries experienced a growth, not only in Islamic traditional sciences, but also in theological and logical sciences.

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For the Nahḍa studies, a good example; yet with a different take, is Abdulrazzak Patel’s *The Arab Nahḍa* (2013) in which he argues that “the decline paradigm (the use of 1798 as a starting point for a modern period) considerably hampers any attempt to assess to what extent pre-modern internal cultural factors may have contributed to the emergence of the *nahḍah*.”

This led to the idea that the development of the Nahḍa must be in synch with Modernity “as a framework for the construction of the West as the major factor, and often sole agent, of the *nahḍah*.”

Arabic literature seems to have developed late in this area. For instance, *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* did not publish the edition on post-classical Arabic literature until 2006, more than a decade after its volume on modern Arabic literature was published (1993). Although scholars of Arabic literature welcomed this book, it fails to provide a comprehensive overview of post-classical Arabic literature. In the end, as Shawkat Toorawa asserts in his review of the volume “the greatest difficulty with pronouncing responsibly on the quality of the Arabic literature of the period 1500-1800 is the fact that most of the material is still unread, in part because the overwhelming bulk of it is still in manuscript.” Evidently, this particular shortage has been a critical issue for quite a long time. Many scholars indicate this, such as ʿUmar Mūsā

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90 Shawkat Toorawa, M. *Speculum* 83, no. 2 (2008), 397.
Bāsha, Bakrī Shaykh Amīn, as well as Thomas Bauer. But the harshest criticism of the volume comes from Thomas Bauer, in his article published in Mamlūk Studies Review. Bauer speaks of the volume’s shortcomings in providing “an overall impression of the period in question, because its concept is marred by a highly Eurocentric approach.” Problems of borrowed terms such as post-classical, neo-classical, elite and popular—which are widely used in varying studies of Arabic literature—are taken into consideration. Bauer argues that the way these terms have been perpetuated does nothing but cause more confusion. For example, the term “post-classical” is, as Bauer suggests, “a concept heavily depended on the philosophical ideas of Hegel, who presupposed that the whole of human history is a process of steady progress of mankind that gradually advances to self-knowledge.” Thus, to do the least harm, Bauer argues, one must refer to this period as “pre-modern”, or else refer to specific dynasties and regions, such as “Saljuq” or “Ayyubid.”

Another work that reevaluates pre-modern Arabic literature is Essays in Arabic literary biography (2009). In the introduction, Joseph Lowry and Devin J. Stewart argue

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91 Bāsha, Tārīkh: al-ʿaṣr al-ʿUthmānī, 5.
92 Amīn, Muṭṭālaʾāt, 84.
95 Bauer, "In Search of ‘Post-Classical Literature,’” 141.
96 Bauer, "In Search of ‘Post-Classical Literature,’” 145; Suzanne Stetkevych finds no issue in using the term post-classical and medieval as the Arabic poetry reached its peak with al-Mutanabbī, and especially with al-Maʾarī’s Luzūmīyyāt the transition to the period after the classical poetry emerged. See Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "From Jāhiliyyah to Bādīʾīyyah: Orality, Literacy, and the Transformations of Rhetoric in Arabic Poetry," Oral Tradition 25, no. 1 (2010): 219; In this dissertation, I use all terms except the derogatory term such “decline” as I am compelled to draw from different works that use these terms variously.
that “[the] consequences of the paradigm of decadence and decline for the study of Arabic literature in the five centuries covered by this volume have been disastrous, leading, at the least, to the wholesale dismissal of the period’s literature.”

Muhsin Al-Musawi’s book *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters: Arabic Knowledge Construction* (2015), which covers materials ranging from literary composition to scholarly manuals and books on literature, *adab* (etiquette) *balāgah* (the science of rhetoric) and grammar draws a thriving picture of the republic of letters.

Stephan Reichmuth’s *The World of Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī* presents a painstaking book on one of the most important polymaths of the 18th century. In it, Reichmuth argues that al-Zabīdī's commentaries on al-Fayrūz Abādī's *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* and al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʾulūm al-dīn* represent a multifaceted picture of Muslim scholarship.

In the realm of poetry, Adam Talib’s study of the *maqṭūʿ* (the short, epigram-like lyric form often in anthologies that was popular during the pre-modern period), demonstrates the possibility of adjusting our aesthetic “horizons of expectation” when dealing with the post-classical period. As for the poetic genre *badīʿiyya* (praise poem to the Prophet), which in modern Arabic scholarship epitomizes literary decline, Suzanne Stetkevych analyzes Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥilli’s *badīʿiyya* to argue that “[the] masters of the

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Badīʿiyyah [...] do not see themselves as derivative epigones of an irretrievable Golden Age, but rather as poets of originality and genius who have produced the consummate poetic, rhetorical and religious devotional work.”

These studies—especially given the gap between Arabic and Western scholarship—come to negate inḥiṭāṭ from different backgrounds, and most of the time with no conversation with one another. For instance, when an Arab historian in the 1960s questioned this discourse within Arabic scholarship, an Ottomanist historian in late 1960s questioned it too, but only within Western Ottoman scholarship.

The next chapter will specifically deal with pre-modern or post-classical major authors of three 11th/17th biographical anthologies: Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī, Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥībbī and Ibn Maʿṣūm al-Madanī. As will be shown, their attempts to document and record the literature of their time came with an understanding akin to their literary value and their perception of what they deemed as new, original, contrived, fluid and lower quality.

101 Stetkevych, “From Jāhiliyyah to Badīʿiyyah,” 222-3.
Chapter Two: How Do Major Biographical Anthologies Map Arabic Poetry in the 17th Century?

This chapter attempts to generally introduce works on poets the sort called *tarājim al-shuʿarāʾ* “biographical anthologies” of three 11th/17th century authors, including the major characteristics that they share. Building on previous analysis, it will discuss their motives, critical questions of originality, structure, and stylistic presentation. Before delving into this chapter, I will provide a brief introduction of the tradition of biographical works.

2.1. General Biographical Works

One of the most distinctive traits of Arabic and Islamic writing is the tradition of biographical works or *kutub al-ṭabaqāt wa al-tarājim*. Developed as a means to preserve significant information on significant incidents, these works strive to paint a picture that stays true to Muslim world-views and perceptions of life. These works operate in an ever-

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increasing corpus of historical and semi-historical works that present Islam as the driving force to fulfill both dīn (religious) and dunyā (worldy) purposes. The biographical genre emerged in different Islamic writings, but it was not seen by Muslim scholars as a separate ‘ilm (science) until the time of Ibn Khaldūn, as Ayman Fuʿād Sayyid argues.103 In the formation of their historical writings, Muslim historians relied upon Hadith scholars. However, some scholars have argued that biographical works started earlier and were not particularly influenced by Hadith, but rather by akhbār books such as Ibn Ishāq’s maghāzī.104 Still, the influence of Hadith scholars in structuring tarājim books to help develop them cannot be denied. For example, Ayman Fuʿād Sayyid argues that:

وهكذا درس المسلمون الأوائل "التاريخ" من خلال انشغالهم بعلم الحديث ومصطلحه، أي قبل أن يعوا تماما مقوماته من حيث هو علم وصنعة وإنما أمدهم بأهم أدوات التاريخ المنهجية وهي: الإسناد.

Thus, earlier Muslims studied ‘History’ through their studying of the science of Hadith and its terminologies before they grasped it as a science and craft. It helped them understand the essential tool of historical methodology, the isnād.

Tarif Khalidi extends the influence of Hadith to engulf all Islamic knowledge. As he explains, “it was under the general rubric of Hadith that the basic religious sciences of Islam, including historical writing were to overlap”106 and also “[it] was under this ‘Science of Hadith’ that historical writing first found shelter.”107 In other words, the

103 Sayyid, al-Kitāba al-tārīkhiyya, 19.
104 Cooperson, Classical Arabic Biography, 9-10.
105 Sayyid, al-Kitāba al-tārīkhiyya, 49.
106 Khalidi, Arabic Historical Thought, 17.
107 Khalidi, Arabic Historical Thought, 83.
tradition of knowledge in Islam displayed an overlap or interdependency between fields. Each field and subfield exhibits indications of the other, be they ʿulūm ʿaqliyya (rational sciences) or ʿulūm naqliyya (traditional-religious sciences). Whatever its precise origin, history became fundamental for Muslims in terms of their increasing understanding of their religion and to what degree it differs from other religions. For example, commenting on the Qurʾan, 3: 137, the Tunisian muftī and Qurʾān exegete Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr (d. 1973) said:

وفي هذه الآية دلالة على أهمية علم التاريخ لأن فيه فائدة السير في الأرض، وهي معرفة أخبار الأوائل، وأسباب صلاح الأمم وفسادها. قال ابن عرفة: السير في الأرض حسي ومعنوي، والمعنوي هو النظر في كتب التاريخ بحيث يحصل للناظر العلم بأحوال الأمم، وما يقرب من العلم، وقد يحصل به من العلم ما لا يحصل بالسير في الأرض لعجز الإنسان وقصوره.

This verse indicates the importance of the science of history because it signifies the value of ‘journeying in the land,’ which means knowing the reports of ancient people and the reasons for them thriving and decaying. Ibn ʿArafa said: ‘Journeying in the land is tangible and

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108 Mahmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī claims that such overlap belongs to what he calls ‘the comprehensiveness of Arabic library,’ that each science has a connection to the other—that one finds poetry quotations and Hadith reports in books on the subjects of animals and plants. See, Maqālāt al-ʿallāma al-Dukṭūr Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī: safahāt fī al-turāth wa al-tarājim wa al-lughā wa al-adab (Cairo: Dār al-Bashāʾ ir al-Islāmiyya, 2015), 1: 302.

109 “Divers institutions have passed away before you; journey in the land, and behold how was the end of those that cried lies.”


significative. The former is reading the books of history in order for the reader to gain knowledge about nations and their conditions and to bring him towards knowledge. [In this way,] one might be more informed than merely traversing the land since people are predisposed to weakness and incapacity.’

In his renowned biographical dictionary al-Wāfī bi-al-wafayāt, the Mamluk scholar Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363) stresses the quality of being informed about what predecessors had experienced, arguing that understanding this that can enrich our lives. He contends that:

وربما أفاد التاريخ حزاً وعزما، وموعظة وعلماً، وهمة تذهب همًا، وبياناً يزيل هنا ووهما [....] وصبراً يبعث التأسي بمن مضى، واحتساباً يوجب الرضا بما مر وحلا من القضا، ((وكلا نقصه عليك من أنباء الرسل ما نثبت به فؤادك))

History may provide a seriousness and determination, lesson and knowledge, eagerness that replaces worry, clarification that removes both weakness and doubt [...] patience that is revived by the example of those who passed, and a trust in Allāh that assumes accepting [outcomes] irrespective of the experiences of sweet and bitter fate, ‘And all that We relate to thee of the tidings of the Messengers is that whereby We strengthen thy heart.’

Ibn Ishāq’s (d. 150/767) sīra (Biography of the Prophet) followed by another sīra by Ibn Hishām (d. 208/833) and by Ibn Sa’d’s (d. 230/846) Ṭabaqāt (Book of Classes) are considered the early examples of biographical tradition. Influenced by these books, other biographical books on Qur’an reciters, grammarians, poets, philosophers and


114 The Qur’an, 11: 120.
notable individuals started to emerge and were increasingly produced up to the present day.115

2.2. Tarājim al-shuʿarāʾ or Biographical Anthologies

Central to this dissertation are the works on tarājim al-shuʿarāʾ, which I prefer to call “biographical anthologies.” Classical and post-classical Arabic sources on poets’ vary in being referred to as akhbār, ṭabaqāt or muʾjam. They are given titles to illustrate the eminence of poets and littérateurs such as Yatīmat al-dahr, Kharīdat al-qaṣr, ‘Uqūd al-jumān and others.

Books that compile literary compositions, including poems and prose pieces, have variously been referred to (according to Western scholarship) as anthologies, biographical dictionaries, compilations and prosopographies. A prime example is Essays in Arabic Literary Biography II: 1350-1850, which contains 35 literary figures, some of whose books, such as al-Khafājī’s Rayḥāna and Ibn Maṣūm’s Sulāfā, are termed literary anthologies. In contrast, Wadad Kadi includes books on poets such as Ibn Sallām’s ṭabaqāt under the category “biographical dictionary”116 while others, such as Hillary Kilpatrick, prefer the very general term “compilation.”117

While “anthology” is a term that is helpful in describing the genre of biographical collections of a literary nature, it is problematic to categorize works with purely


anthological nature alongside works that are either chiefly biographical and deeply rooted in the tradition of biographical tradition or a combination of both. If we rely only upon the term “anthology” we will not distinguish between this type of biographical works and other adab books of an essentially anthological nature.\(^{118}\) These books include *al-Mufaddaliyyāt* and *al-Ασμα’ιyyāt, al-Hamāsa*, other Ḥamāsas\(^{119}\) and thematic anthologies, such as Usāma Ibn Munqidh’s (d. 584/1188) *al-Manāẓil wa al-diyār* and al-Abshiḥī’s (d. 854/1446) *al-Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustażraf*. The term *kutub tarājīm al-shu’arā* or “biographical anthologies” recognizes the nature of such works and allows us to trace the genre back to its origins and situate works such as *Rayḥānat al-alibbā* of Shihāb al-Dīn Āḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Khafājī (d. 1069/1659) and *Sulāfat al-‘aṣr* of Ibn Maʾṣūm al-Madanī (d. 1120/1709) within their rightful genealogies. Therefore, I am using the term as closest to the Arabic term following the convention in modern Arabic works that categorize these works under the rubric “*tarājim al-shu’arā*,”\(^{120}\) Although particularly in English, it can legitimately be called an anthology, the term “biographical” does not preclude the anthological aspect as almost all biographical works include poetry in their entries on various figures. In the case of *Sulāfat al-‘aṣr* and similar works, each entry is defined by the biographical dimension that it begins with introducing the


\(^{119}\) There are many Ḥamāsas such as *al-Buḥturī* (d. 284/897), Ibn al-Shajarī (d. 542/1148) and ‘Alī ibn Abī al-Faraj al-Baṣrī (d. 659/1261). For more, see Abū Tammām, *al-Hamāsa*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh ʿAbdu al-Raḥīn ʿUsaylān, (Riyadh: Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, 1981), 47-51.

‘biographical information’ of the biographee before proceeding to quote his or her literary examples.

When did the tradition of biographical anthologies begin? In the introduction to his book al-Wāfi bi-al-wafayāt, al-Ṣafaḍī surveys the history of the biographical genre from its genesis until his time (8th/14th century). After indicating essential skills that a historian should acquire, he divides the biographical tradition—which he asserts belongs to ʿilm al-tārīkh (Science of History)—into several sections. These sections include the history of regions, for example, Egypt and Maghrīb, and the history of Caliphs, scholars and individual notables (kings, Qur’an reciters, Sufis, poets and many others). Of the history of poets, al-Ṣafadī gives a list of approximately 35 books that record poets and poetry. For example, we find Ṭabaqāt of Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī (d. 267/889), Ibn al-Marzubān (d. 309/921), and Ibn al-Muʿtazz (d. 296/908). We also find major works, such as the renowned Yatīmat al-dahr of al-Thaʿālibī (429/1039) and its sequels such

121 Al-Ṣafadī, al-Wāfi, 1: 25-66.
123 Muḥḥammad ibn al-Khalaf ibn al-Marzubān ibn Bassām al-Muhauwalī, an adīb who authored number of literary works including a one on poets, which does not seem to exist. See al-Ṣafadī, al-Wāfi, 3: 37-8.
as *Kharīdat al-qasr* of ʿImād al-Dīn al-Kātib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 597/1201).\(^{126}\) There is also *Ṭabaqāt al-shuʿarāʾ* of Ṣāḥib Ḥamāt\(^{127}\) (d. 617/1220), *al-Nisāʾ al-shawāʾir* of Abū al-Faraj al-Shilḥī al-ʿUkbarī al-Kātib\(^{128}\) (d. 423/1032), *Rawḍat al-azhār* of Ibn Qalāqīs\(^{129}\) (d. 567/1172) *ʿUqūd al-jumān* of Ibn Shaʿʿār\(^{130}\) (d. 654/1256) and *Akhbār shuʿarāʾ al-Shīʿa* of Ibn Abī Ṭayy\(^{131}\) (d. 630 or 650/1132-33 or 1152).

The first Arabic biographical anthologies is *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ* of Ibn Sallām al-Jumāḥī (d. 231/845) in which the author includes poets from the pre-Islamic period until the Umayyad period.\(^{132}\) One of the reasons that compelled Ibn Sallām to


write his book was to respond to Ibn Ishāq’s (d. 150/767) citation of inauthentic poetry attributed to Thamūd and ʿĀd tribes. Ibn Sallām indicates that

Among those who corrupted poetry, mixed the authentic with the forged, and transmitted weak poetry was Muḥammad b. Isḥāq b. Yasār [...] He was knowledgeable about military expeditions, biographies and other such things. People accepted poetry from him even though he is reported to have said: ‘I have no knowledge of poetry. It was reported to me, and I pass it on.’ However, this should not excuse him, for he included biographies of men [who] never composed poetry let alone the poetry of women. He even went beyond to quote ample poetry from the tribes of ʿĀd and Thamūd. But it was not even poetry; rather, a rhymed speech.

After Ibn Sallām, other biographical anthologies appeared, such as al-Shiʿr wa al-shuʿarāʾ of Ibn Qutayba; Țabaqāt al-shuʿarāʾ of the Abbasid poet and literary critic Ibn al-Muʿtazz and many others. However, it was Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī’s Yatīmat al-dahr fī maḥāsin ahl al-ʿaṣr and Tatimmat al-Yatīma that marked a turning point in the tradition of biographical anthologies. Almost all books written in this genre that came after it draw from it and adopted its method. According to Bilal Orfali, both of al-Thaʿālibī’s works “are the first anthologies to deal exclusively with contemporary literature and to

133 M.ʿAbd al-Ghanī Ḥasan, al-Tarājim wa al-siyar, 64; al-Shakʿa, Manāḥij al-taʿlīf, 408.
134 Al-Jumāḥī, Țabaqāt fuḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ, 1: 7-8.
categorize that literature not chronologically or thematically, but on the basis of geographical region.”

According to al-Ṭāhir Makkī, al-Thālibī’s *Yatīma* was a supplement (dhayl) to a previous work called *al-Bāri‘ī fi akhbār al-shu‘arā‘ al-muwalladīn* (The Brilliant on Reports of Modern Poets) by Hārūn ibn ʿAlī al-Munajjim al-Baghdādī (d. 288/900). This latter work is considered the first biographical anthology on contemporary poets, and it includes 16 poets beginning with Bashshār b. Burd (d. 168/785) and ending with Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ (d. 196/811).

Additionally, Makkī argues that this book might also have influenced the first biographical anthology in al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) by ʿUthmān b. Rabīʿa (d. 310/922). Following the same tradition, poets in each century are customarily preserved by a number of biographical anthologies. Orfali provides a list of the books influenced by al-Thālibī. These books include *Dumyat al-qaṣr wa-ʿuṣrat ahl al-ʿaṣr* (Statue of the Palace and Refuge of the People of the Present Age) by Bākharzī (d. 467/1075), *Wishāh Dumyat al-qaṣr wa-laqāḥ rawḍat al-ʿaṣr* (The Necklace of the Statue of the Palace and the Fertilization of the Meadow of the Age) by Abū l-Ḥasan b. Zayd al-Bayḥaqī (d. 565/1169) and *Kharīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat al-ʿaṣr* (The Virgin Pearl of the Palace and Register of the People of the Present Age) by ʿImād al-Dīn al-Kātib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 597/1201). Later biographical anthologies written in the Ottoman period, such as *Rayhānat al-alibbā* of Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Khafājī and the

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135 Orfali, *The Anthologist’s Art*, xi.


Sulāfa of Ibn Ma’ṣūm al-Madanī drew from al-Thaʿālibī and acknowledged his authority in the genre. Of interest is the fact that Yatīmat al-dahr and some of its sequels are not limited to poetry and poets but also include authors mainly known as prose writers, such as Abū Ishāq al-Ṣābī (d. 384/994), Abū Bakr al-Khawārizmī (d. 403/1012-13), or Bāḍī’ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d. 395/1007), whose prose is amply quoted with some poetry they may have composed. Ibn Maʿṣūm specifies that his book is about poets (fī maḥāsin al-shuʿarā’), but cites an immense amount of prose. Al-Khafājī’s Rayḥāna also quotes maqāmāt and other prose. Notwithstanding the ubiquitous presence of prose and sometimes prose writers, these works focus primarily on poetry, hence al-Ṣafadī, for instance, includes these works among works on poets.

2.3. Studies on Biographical Anthologies

Some of the aforementioned accounts have been variously studied. Of them, there are studies that to provide an overall introduction to a certain book, while others offer an in-depth analyses dealing with the literary aspect of these biographical anthologies. In this section, I will highlight some of the works that I find relevant to this dissertation.

In a rather general analysis of biographical dictionaries in Islam, Tarif Khalidi analyzes nineteen different biographical dictionaries by way of investigating four points: motive, method, selectivity, factual information and subjective evaluation. As for motive, Khalidi points out several motives. Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), in Jamharat ansāb al-ʿArab, offers a religious reason for writing his book: that being knowledgeable in the science of genealogy (nasab) is an obligatory duty (fard) on the part of Muslims. In

139 Khalidi, “Islamic Biographical Dictionaries,” 53-54.
contrast, Ibn Khallikān, in Wafayāt al-aʿyān, offers in his introduction a “secular” reason “which dispenses altogether with reference to religion, so prominent a feature of the earlier biographies.” Khalidi enumerates the different ways Islamic biographers used to include recorded figures, such as al-Ṣafadī, who emphasizes the notion of the umma (nation) in al-Wāfī. Furthermore, Khalidi points out that since biographical dictionaries enjoyed a good reputation, some people requested biographers, such as al-Sakhāwī, to include them in his al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ. Khalidi also asserts that unlike what Gibb would argue are forms of clichés “almost all biographers […] practiced some form of critical appraisal of the personality.” Lines of one’s poetry seem as “an extension of his personality” and to “commemorate him.” This means that even pious and religious figures are presented with poetry that they may have composed. This reveals the importance of poetry not only in literary biographical works, but in almost all types of biographical works. Even though Khalidi’s analysis as well as Wadad Kadi’s are general in scope, they are still important sources that help us understand how this tradition originated and emerged into different types.

More specifically within the realm of book on tarājim al-shuʿarāʾ ‘biographical anthologies’ is Bilal Orfali’s study. In it, he explores what he calls the “literary anthology” of Yatīmat al-dahr and Tatimma of al-Thaʿālibī “as a general category of adab, encompassing a range of compilations, as well as the function and motives behind

141 Khalidi, “Islamic Biographical Dictionaries,” 63; Orfali indicates the same point with Thaʿālibī that many people were sending him letters composed of literature, so that he would include them in his Yatīma. Orfali, The Anthologist’s Art, 145.
142 Khalidi, “Islamic Biographical Dictionaries,” 63, 64.
143 Khalidi, “Islamic Biographical Dictionaries,” 63.
them.” He argues that the complied literary texts (mainly poetry) that these work reintroduce cannot be regarded as secondary; rather a book such as the Yatīma is “original and possessing a structure and an agenda of its own.” Clearly, Orfali’s latter point is to argue how such compilations possess a complex and planned structure, and are not as often perceived as arbitrary and incoherent. More importantly, they are also not devoid of aesthetics. As “many of [the compilations] reveal the knowledge, taste, and care of their compiler,” one is informed about how and why they chose the best examples of literary compositions. Orfali points out that two works of Thaʿālibī were not only works of their own time, but became the models for later authors until the 12th/18th centuries drew from.

Orfali also provides a map of anthologies up to the fall of Baghdad 656/1258. He divides these anthologies into ten categories: anthologies concerned with forms, encyclopedic anthologies, theme or motif anthologies, anthologies based on comparison, monothematic anthologies, geographical anthologies, music anthologies, anthologies on figure of speech, chronological anthologies and anthologies on one poet. While such categories might help identify some literary works, they are not always consistent and compelling. K. al-Aghānī, for instance, is placed under the category of music anthologies, which is not entirely accurate because although the book takes lines of poetry sung by great Abbasid singers as a point of departure, it is overwhelmingly filled with reports on

144 Orfali, *The Anthologist’s Art*, xi.
145 Orfali, *The Anthologist’s Art*, xi.
poets, and it has always been perceived as a work on poets not musicians. Similarly, the work of Ibn Sallām’s ʿTabaqāt fuḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ, which Orfali categorizes under geographical anthologies, indicates that the use of ahl al-qurā (town people) suffices for one such category, and it thus ignores many studies that refer to it as a work of ʿtabaqāt (which its title reveals). Towards the conclusion of his study, Orfali explains how Thaʿālibī evaluates literary production, demonstrating that he does not provide much theoretical framework, and that his work on poetics, which might help us understand his evaluation, has not survived. Orfali’s section on Thaʿālibī’s evaluation of literary production is rather brief, and it includes some points that are not fully explored, such as usage of the terms sariqāt (motif theft or literary borrowing), muʿāraḍa (contrafaction), maʿānī (motifs) and others—all of which are not new to the author of Yatīma, but are drawn from the pre-existing literary-criticism corpus. These terms become signposts upon which Arab literary critics depend to evaluate literary production.

Khālid Saʿīd al-Mālikī’s M.A. thesis on al-Muḥibbī’s Nafḥat al-Rayḥāna is a recent analysis of how al-Muḥibbī constructed his Nafha. Al-Mālikī divides his thesis into four chapters: biographical anthologies in terms of structure (dirāsa jadwaliyya),

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149 Makkī, Dirāsa fī maṣādir al-adab, 200.
150 Makkī, Dirāsa fī maṣādir al-adab, 96.
151 The concept of sariqa was used by classical Arab critics to frequently mean taking a motif or a line of poetry from another poet either literarily thus plagiarizing it or by way of what we today call “intertextuality.” More can be found in the following entry: W.P. Heinrichs, “Sariqa,” Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 27 January 2022 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1446>
152 Orfali, The Anthologist’s Art, 188.
contextual study (dirāsa siyāqiyya), function (ważīfat al-tarjama al-adabiyya) and significance (dilālāt/dalālāt al-tarjama al-adabiyya). The thesis explores a number of issues that should be of interest, such as how al-Muḥibbi portrays his biographees and what style of writing he employs to develop a final picture. Al-Mālikī analyzes each entry in terms of its introduction, content and conclusion. He also discusses al-Muḥibbi’s style of writing in terms of using rhetorical devices, including rhyming sentences, similes, metaphor and others. Al-Mālikī’s chapter on the contextualization of biographical entries (tarjama ghayriyya) discusses the structure of biographical anthologies, and how al-Muḥibbi developed this tradition to reflect it through his Nafḥa. This chapter thus demonstrates the significance of family, places, time and his intertextual use of Qur’an, Hadith, Arabic poetry and proverbs.


Around the first quarter of the 11th/17th century, the polymath Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī (d. 1069/1659) finished penning his book on poets from the 10th to 11th/16th to 17th century and entitled it Rayḥānat al-alibbā wa-zahrat al-ḥayāt al-dunyā (The Sweet Basil of the Intelligent and the Flower of Life in This World). In its introduction, al-Khafājī explains that this book is a revised version of another book, which he entitled Khabāyā al-zawāyā fī-mā fī al-rijāl min al-baqāyā (What is Hidden in Corners, on What Men Have Left). Al-Khafājī made some additions and revisions to the content of this


In both books, he expresses his reliance on al-Thaʿālibī’s *Yatīma* and its followers. Again, *Yatīma* became a model whose method and division were adopted by all biographical anthologies that followed.

Al-Khafājī discovers that during his time, and about two centuries earlier, biographical anthologies fell short in recording the growth of Arabic poetry. Thus, Arabic poetry in his time began to suffer from neglect. His plan to revive it included adopting an existing model and inspiring other scholars—contemporary and succeeding—to fill the gaps in their regions and epochs. He evidently succeeded in this plan. Ibn Maʾṣūm al-Madanī (d. 1120/1709) and Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥībī (d. 1111/1699) composed their biographical anthologies to add to, modify and correct the *Rayḥāna*. Introducing al-Khafājī’s *Rayḥāna*, the editor ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Ḥulw maintains that:

والكتاب الذي نقدمه اليوم *ريحانة الألباقي* [...] إحدى مفاخر الشهاب الخفاجي أعاد إلى الأذهان ذكر يتيمة الدهر ودمية القصر ووشاح الدمية والذخيرة وخيرية القصر وقلائد العقبان وعقود الجمان، وتلك السلسلة الدرية [...] وأخر أثر وصل إلينا في هذا الفن قبل كتاب الشهاب الخفاجي هو عقود الجمان في شعراء هذا الزمان لأبي البركات مبارك بن أبي بكر بن الشعر الأصلي، [...] وقد أدى الثلاثة

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159 This notion is evidenced in his introduction, where he enumerates the books that influenced him to write his *Rayḥāna*. See al-Khafājī, *Rayḥāna*, 1: 5.

The book that we are introducing here is Rayḥānat al-alībbā [...] and it is one of the al-Shihāb al-Khafājī’s finest works, for it brings to mind the illustrious series of works such as Yatīmat al-dahr, Dumyat al-qāṣr, Wishāḥ al-dumya, al-Dhakhīra, Kharīdat al-qāṣr, Qalāʾ id-ʿiqyān, and ʿUqūd al-jumān [...] The last book that came down to us before al-Shihāb al-Khafājī’s book is ʿUqūd al-jumān fī shuʿarāʾ hādha al-zamān of Abū al-Barakāt Mubārak ibn Abī Bakr al-Shaʿrār al-Mawsīlī [...] The three scholars, al-Khafājī, Ibn Maʿṣūm, and al-Muḥibbī had performed such an essential and integral task, in that each of them elaborated in giving entries on poets of regions and reports that came down to them.

In his introduction to al-Muḥibbī’s Nafḥa, al-Ḥulw repeats the same idea of the effect of those scholars, referring to it as an example of contemporary poetry, one which has given rise to others in the following century.161 The question of why the tradition stopped with al-Mawsīlī can hardly be answered. One issue is that we are not fully informed about all the books written in this period. However, we know that the three works of al-Khafājī, Muḥibbī and Ibn Maʿṣūm became valuable sources of Arabic literature in the 10th/16th and 11th/17th centuries and that a great deal of what we know about poets during these periods stems from these works. Several works of poets following al-Khafājī or his followers acknowledge their influence. For instance, al-Rawḍ al-naḍr fī tarjamat udabāʾ al-ʿasr (The Verdant Meadow in Writing Biography on Contemporary Littératoeurs) by ʿIṣām al-Dīn ʿUthmān ibn ʿAlī al-ʿUmarī (d. 1184/1770) states in the introduction that he followed the Rayḥāna and Qalāʾ id-ʿiqyān.162 Also, as

161 Al-Muḥibbī, Nafḥat al-Rayḥāna, 1: intro 32.
noted by al-Ḥulw, Muḥammad ibn Khalīl al-Murādī (d. 1206/1792) in his biographical dictionary, *Silk al-durar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-thāniya ʿashar* (The Thread of Pearls on The 12th-Century Notables) reports that Saʿīd b. Aḥmad al-Saʿāmān al-Shāfiʿī (d. 1172/1785) attempted to write a book on contemporary poets following al-Shihāb al-Khafājī, Ibn Maʿṣūm and al-Muḥibbī, but died before completing it.163

While al-Khafājī’s book records 10th/16th century poetry, al-Muḥibbī’s *Nafḥa* extends beyond this to record some of the literary examples in the 12th/late 17th centuries.164 This effort to record contemporary poetry constitutes a florescence, as al-Ḥulw observes, especially in a period during which vernacular and non-Arabic poetry such as Persian, Urdu, and Ottoman poetry were reported to have dominated the literary scene.165 Why did these writers feel compelled to write their biographical anthologies?


165 Al-Khāfajī in *al-Maqāma al-Rūmīyya* accuses scholars from Anatolia of having poor knowledge of Arabic. Ibn Maʿṣūm never wrote on Arabic poetry in India, although he lived there for almost half of a century. True, he records literary examples of figures who used to live or visit India such as his father, but includes them in their proper regional category. The three scholars attempted to select mostly poetry and prose in classical Arabic and write on lexigraphy and Arabic-related language. Here they focused on pure Arabic, which is itself indicative of their perception of Arabic language and literature during their time, especially given their knowledge of both the Ottoman Turkish and Persian languages. Moreover, the period from the 10th/15th century onwards was marked by the wide use of Persian poetry by the Ottoman elites since “[they] retained Arabic as the language of religion and philosophy and Persian for its poetry and Sufi literature, but their enhanced Turkish became the medium for the cultural activities—poetry, historiography, administration—that created the Ottomans’ identity and distinguished them from the other great Muslim peoples.” See Linda T. Darling, “Ottoman Turkish: Written Language and Scribal Practice, 13th to 20th Centuries,” in *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order*, edited by Brian Spooner and William L. Hathaway, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 173; For an introduction to the role of Persian from ca. 1500—ca. 1800, see Nile Green, “Introduction: The Frontiers of the Persianate World (ca. 800–1900),” in *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca*, edited by Green Nile (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2019), 29-42.
2.4.1. Motive

Al-Khafājī and his followers felt obligated to record what they deemed as great poets of their own eras. In their introductions, they argue that contemporary poets bore a resemblance to their predecessors but had nevertheless created their own poetry to compete with, if not surpass them. Furthermore, all three scholars display a personal incentive for writing their books: each one of these scholars expresses a personal experience of being neglected or exiled. This is a situation that impels them to seek refuge in literature and inspires them to write about contemporary poetry. For instance, in a passionate passage, al-Khafājī states:166

وإذا ما روى الإنسان أخبار من مضى
وتحسبه قد عاش من أول الدهر
إلى الحشر إن أبقى الجميل من الذكر
وتحسبه قد عاش آخر دهــــــــره
ف فقد عاش كل الدهر من عاش عالما
كرما حليما فاغتنم أطول العمر
وسبه نفسه للطبيب، وفرحة الأديب بلقا الأديب، لا سيما
أهل العصر الهاصري أغلظ المُنئى ألفت هصر، الفائنين في
رياضها، الواردين نميز حياضها، فقد سرت كلماتهم مسرى الأرواح
في الأجناس [...] وقد انتصر لكل عصر من أحيا مَيّتُه، وعمر من
دارس عهوده بيتته، كصاحب "النبيَّة"، و"قلائد العقان" و"الذخيرة"
و "عقود الجمان"، وحميَّةُ المرء لعصره، وقياسه على منابر نصره،
من آيات الفتوحة [...] فليس منا من لم يعتد بذر المجد في مهاده، ولم
يفتخر في المحافل بأستاذة وإسناها، إلا أن الأدب في هذه الأعصار، قد
هبت على أطلاله ريح ذات إعصار، حتى أغلقت أعياد المحامد [...] وإن تأخر عصره فلا باس، ففي تأخر النتيجة عن القياس، والخدم تنقدم

166 Al-Khafājī, Rayhāna, 1: 5, 6, 7.
When a man transmits [and commits to memory] the reports of those who have passed,
It is as if he has lived since the beginning of days.
And if he leaves behind him a beautiful memory
He will live until the Day of Resurrection.
For he who keeps living erudite, generous and mild-tempered has surely lived eternally.
So, avail yourself of the longest of lifetimes!

When a littérateur meets another, it is like a sick patient looking at a doctor. This is especially true for littérateurs of this time, who gently draw towards them the branch of wishes, composing on its meadows and arriving at its sweet-water basin. Their words flow like souls penetrating bodies [...] He who revives what had gone lifeless in his time and rebuilds its ruins has surely defended it as did the authors of *Yatīma, Qalā’id al-‘iqyān, al-Dhakhīra, and ‘Uqūd al-jumān*. Zealously defending one’s time and standing upon its triumph’s platforms are signs of chivalry [...] Anyone who does not, in ceremonies or occasions, praise his birthplace’s pearl of glory and his mentor and *isnād* [that which connects him to his predecessors] is not one of us. But a windstorm has hit the ruins of literature these days, fraying the
bonds of praiseworthy qualities [...] It does not matter if [a poet] comes in the later period; as in syllogism, the result comes after. [Similarly,] servants advance before their masters. [Likewise,] we are commanded to perform the optional prayer before the obligatory one. Adding more digits makes the number greater.

Haven’t you noticed!
the Prophet Muhammad was the last messenger
Yet, he surpassed all humankind?

[...] O you signposts of guidance: “I have perceived a fire for you from the mountain’s nearby to be guided, or I shall bring you the flames of a firebrand to warm yourself.” If the former has left the latter nothing, then a little that is present is better than a lot that is absent [...] Though, later afternoons are sometimes better than early mornings [...] It is only due to jealousy that natures [of people] loathed the contemporary merits despite their being apparent to eyes and ears.

They are grateful to a dead man only because they know
That he no longer desires
what they have in their hands.

How right was Ibn Rashīq when he said:

People are obsessed with praising the old,
and blaming the modern
even if it is not worthy of blame.
It is because of their jealousy for the living
They empathize with the decayed bones.

In this lengthy yet powerful quote from al-Khafājī’s introduction, we are informed of his impression of the place of literature in his time. For him, it was almost a deserted campsite. Nonetheless, he is eager to defend it and extract from its soil literary examples worthy of standing in contrast with classical poetry. “He who revives what had gone lifeless in his time and rebuilds its ruins has surely defended it,” he claims. In so doing, one achieves honor and chivalry, which is striking, for it became required and moral to champion his time and its poetry. Besides its avid defense of contemporary poetry, al-Khafājī’s introduction reflects his mastery of Arabic prose, and can serve as a great

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167 This altered phrase is taken from Qurʾān: “When Moses said to his people ‘I observe a fire, and will bring you news of it, or I will bring you a flaming brand, that haply you shall warm yourselves.” The Qurʾān, 27:7.
example of Arabic literature in the Ottoman period. It towards the end of his book, al-Khafājī reiterates his appreciation of the poetic excellence of later poets and adds that especially Maghribī poetry could equal, if not surpass, classical Arabic poetry. It must be noted that he divides Arab eloquent men (bulaghāʾ) in poetry and oratory into six categories. First, there are the Jāhiliyyūn (pre-Islamic) from the time of ʿĀd and Qaḥṭān, then Mukhadramūn (those straddling the pre and early Islamic eras), Islāmiyyūn (early Islamic), Muwalladūn (racially mixed/modern), Muḥdathūn (modern) and Mutaʾakhkhirūn (later) to which his contemporaries belong.

The Damascene polymath and biographer al-Muḥibbī in his Nafḥat al-Rayḥāna—the biggest of the three biographical anthologies—which he assembled and wrote as a supplement to Khafājī’s Rayḥāna, follows the same lines of argument as did al-Khafājī’s work, but he does not as clearly emphasize the importance of documenting contemporary poets. However, one can infer this from his introduction in which he expresses his fascination with al-Khafājī’s Rayḥāna. Recalling his teacher Muḥammad ibn Luṭf Allāh

168 I personally find this passage eloquent and moving, and the more I read it the more I enjoy it. This personal taste can be different from one person to another, as is the case with the renowned scholar Muhammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr, who does not find Khafājī’s prose as satisfying as al-Faṭḥ ibn Khāqān’s, while al-Ṭāhir Makkī rejects ibn Khāqān’s prose as contrived and prefers over it the prose of Ibn Bassām. See al-Ṭāhir Makkī, Dirāsa fī maṣādir al-adab, 264; Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir ibn ʿĀshūr, Uṣūl al-inshāʾ wa al-ḥaṭāba wa yalīh Al-ḥaṭāba ‘inda al-ʿArab, ed. Yāsir Ḥāmid al-Muṭayrī (Riyadh: Maktabat Dār al-Minhāj, 1433/2011), 106-7.

169 Al-Khafājī, Rayḥāna, 2: 469.


171 However, he states it very clearly in his Khulāṣa. See Muḥammad ibn Amīn ibn Faḍl Allāh al-Muḥibbī, Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-ḥādiya ‘ashar (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Wahbiyya, 1282/1865), 1: 2-3.
ibn Zakaryā al-ʿArabī (d. 1092/1681) whom he stayed with until his death,\(^\text{172}\) al-Muhībī, with grief, relates that:\(^\text{173}\)

When Allāh decreed the death of the master/teacher—may Allāh cool his grave, and illuminate his face with the light of forgiveness […] I saw that fortune was against me when it came to dwelling and companions. Gray hair grew over me before I fully experienced my share of youth […] I kept to my house, and I was as quiet as a dead man. The span of my happiness was shorter than a beloved’s glance. My glimpse of the good times was like the look of the patient towards his doctor, in times heavier than repetitive conversation, and longer than the waiting for a date. I had no company with whom to stay the night nor a companion to whom I could relate. I had nothing but a bunch of papers torn by the wind, and scattered by agonies. I gathered each one from a different place and collected every scrap from parchments. Most of what it includes were poems of contemporary poets whose merits are countless […] and whom I had seen, which were a delight to my eye. Or [the poems] of whom I had heard, and


\(^{173}\) Al-Muḥībī, Nafḥat al-Rayhāna, 1: 8, 9, 10.
their reports were […] khilā, the book of Rayḥāna, which replaced the Sun and the Moon and made speech more pleasurable than wine and conversations in the evening.

To al-Muḥibbī, the reports of literature of his contemporaries not only seemed important as scholarly and literary materials, but also as one of a few things that were left for him to enjoy in life. Propelled by a biting loneliness, al-Muḥibbī, al-Khafājī and Ibn Maʾṣūm sought consolation in reports about contemporary poets and scholars. After the death of his mentor, who had promised him a job as a professor in a madrasa in Anatolia, al-Muḥibbī returned to Damascus and secluded himself. Later, he traveled to Hijaz where he gathered an immense amount of material on contemporary Hijazi and Yemeni poetry, then to Egypt and finally to the Levant.

Similarly, Ibn Maʾṣūm expresses his personal experience of loneliness and exile in India, where he wrote his Sulāfa (see more next chapter). However, it must be noted that, unlike al-Khafājī and al-Muḥibbī, he did not travel and collect his literary materials from other regions, which means that—beside his oral sources—he relied heavily on written sources that were available to him. He stresses, following al-Khafājī, the obligation to preserve and defend contemporary poets by stating that:

174 I am not sure what this means. It could be from khalwa, which could mean, in this context, that in his time alone the reports consoled him. Or perhaps it is khalā (from kh-l-y, not kh-l-w), “fresh herbage, green pasture”, a metaphor.


177 Joseph E. Lowry states that “Ibn Maʾṣūm managed to compile the poetry of, and information about, contemporary North African poets while living in South central India. The answer is instructive: he relied heavily on the anthology of Andalusian literature of al-Maqqarī (d. 1631).” See Joseph E. Lowry, “Ibn Maʾṣūm,” in Essays in Arabic Literary Biography, 178.

وإذا كان لكل زمان رجال. ولكل حلبة مضمار ومجال. فغير بدع إن برزت الأواخر بالبديع الفاخر. وأزجت فلكها المواخر في بحر الفضل الزاخر.

قل لمن لا يرى المعاصر شياً وبرى للأوائل التقديماً، وإن ذلك القدم كان حديثاً وسيبقى هذا الحديث قديماً.

على أن تأخر الزمان لا ينافي التقدم في الإحسان. فقد يتأخر الهطول عن الرعد. والنائل عن الوع. ومراتب الأعداد تترقى بتأخير رقمها وتزداد.

Since every age has its men and every race-track has its own domain and its own horses, then it is no wonder if those coming later stand out in their magnificent bādiʿ and later periods crowd with their ships a sea abounding in excellence:

Say to him who belittles the contemporaries, and gives precedence to the ancients.
There was a time when those ancients too were novel, and today’s novel ones will one day become ancient.

That is, coming later in time does not contradict being superior in excellence. After all, the downpour comes after the thunder; the gift comes after the promise, and in writing down numbers, the value of each digit is higher than the one preceding it.

In this passage lies the main argument. As Arabic poetry at the time of writing the Sulāfa had existed for over a millennium, Ibn Maʿṣūm questions if recording contemporary poetry would still be valid. The reason he comes up with is logical: every period has its own men or poets. He also recalls the proverbs li-kull jadīd ladhdha (there is a pleasure in everything that is new). Ibn Maʿṣūm’s argument is expressive of the poetry-oriented concerns that surrounded his poetic and intellectual milieu. This reveals a singling out what he calls ‘the magnificent bādiʿ’ as the contribution of later poets, as opposed to

179 Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 6.
earlier poets. There remains a problem, however, in identifying *al-awākhir* (later poets), for Arab poets had already championed *badīʿ* since the Abbasid era. In al-Khafājī’s terminology, *al-Muta’akhkhirūn* are the poets who came after the movement of *Muhdathūn* in the Abbasid period. The *Sulāfa*, too, speaks of those later poets but with no specification. One could argue that Ibn Maʿṣūm attempts to prove his point by highlighting the Abbasid poets as an example of being successful despite coming later.\(^\text{180}\)

However, Ibn Maʿṣūm does not only allude to the Abbasid poets, but also his contemporaries who necessarily belong to this category of later poets. His main argument is, in fact, to champion his contemporaries and their merits (*mahāsīn*).

The two lines of Ibn Rashīq that al-Khafājī quotes, and the two lines of Ibn Sharaf al-Qayrāwānī (d. 390/1076) that Ibn Maʿṣūm quotes, are evocative of the recurrent *al-qudamāʾ wa al-muhdathūn* debate (Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns), which first sprang up around the 3rd/9th century, and that has been repeatedly evoked by scholars of Arabic poetry until probably the mid 20th century, when the two camps parted ways and entered their own enclosed circles. However, unlike the emerging Abbasid debates over the legitimacy of new poetry, the *Rayḥāna*, the *Sulāfa* and other works of a similar nature emanated from a different cultural and intellectual setting, wherein new issues occurred. This is not to undermine the importance of innovation and originality, for it seems to have been the central motive behind poets in every generation.\(^\text{181}\)

\(^{180}\) On the *badīʿ*’s movement see Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām*, 5-38.

\(^{181}\) See the example of Şafi al-Dīn al-Ḥillī’s quoting al-Mutanabbi’s line:

“Leave off every voice but my voice, for I
Am the voice that speaks, the others are [mere] echoes.”
difference between the time of Abū Tammām and the debates over the concept of ʿamūd al-shiʿr (pillar of poetry), including interrelated issues, such as the purity of the Arabic language, and al-Khafājī and Ibn Maʿṣūm, where such different critical debates occurred. When al-Khafājī utilizes several analogies to credit and favor his contemporary poetry, or when Ibn Maʿṣūm explains why there is a patent legitimacy in recording later poetry, they already show an embracing of contemporary poetry. Already at the time of al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī, Ibn Rashīq, Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī, Qudāma Ibn Jaʿfar and others, contemporary poetry gained its legitimacy, and the idea of that each generation could present something of value became the paradigm. Al-Thaʿalibī and his followers aimed to preserve the merits of contemporary poets by drawing a poetic map. Not only did al-Khafājī and his followers revive this tradition that celebrates contemporary poetry, but they seem to demonstrate an urgency in accomplishing this. For al-Khafājī specifically, poetry was at risk and it needed to be preserved—not as merely poetry, but also as valuable poetry that competed with earlier poetry. The analogy of optional and obligatory prayers and the analogy of the Prophet Muhammad arriving last, but being superior, to all previous prophets demonstrates this need to preserve contemporary poetry.

2.4.2. What to Include?

Naʿīm al-Ḥimṣī, in his seminal work on Naḥw fahm jadīd li-adab al-duwal al-mutatābiʿa (Towards A New Understanding of the Literature of the Successor States),


Ibn Rashīq already confirmed that most of the scholars who sided with ancient poetry did so for philological and language-related reasons. See Stetkevych, Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the Abbāsid Age, 38.
speaks of the process of selection that determines post-classical or pre-modern Arabic scholars’ preference in poetry. He explains that what we know of literature in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods depends on their taste. Selecting poetry can be traced back to the first Arabic anthologies, such as *al-Mufaḍḍalīyyāt*, and continued in almost every book of literature. *Al-Mufaḍḍalīyyāt* deems certain criteria important, including verifying texts and using them for philological purposes—not to undermine the literary purposes. One the contrary, the *Ḥamāsa* by Abū Tammām, prioritizes the literary aspect that embodies what Suzanne Stetkevych calls “the literary *Ijmāʿ*” in that it should be recognized as “the ‘Abbāsid poet’s interpretation of his literary past, rather than a philological-historical attempt to document ancient poetry [...]”

One of the most significant features of 11th/17th century literature is its inheritance of over a millennium of literary traditions. Besides the *qaṣīda* form of panegyrics, invectives, elegies and others, one finds other poetic forms and themes that gained popularity in the post-classical time such as *ṭayf al-khayāl* (shadow play), *dūbayt*,

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186 Adam Talib, “Dūbayt in Arabic,” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 27 June 2020 [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_26102](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_26102)
zajal (vernacular strophic poetry),\textsuperscript{187} mawāliyā\textsuperscript{188} and other forms. The next question is: how did the three scholars select their contemporary poetry?

Selecting poetry based on literary merit was one of the objectives of these biographers, but they also included friends, teachers, princes and other notables to honor, praise and flatter them. What they selected of literary examples had to be mostly in classical Arabic (fuṣḥā), which is the classical Arabic poetic tradition that is founded ideologically as well as linguistically on early—pre-Islamic through some Umayyad—poetry and the Qurʾān, the sayings, khutbas of the Ṣaḥābah and other sources.\textsuperscript{189} Eschewing oral and colloquial poetry may have been driven by the authors’ intention to stand with the fuṣḥā poetry, which was mostly exclusive for elites in the Arab-speaking regions, as opposed to popular or colloquial poetry and non-Arabic (Ottoman and Persian) poetry. Since those authors are situated in Arabic and Islamic sciences, the way they mostly focus on grammatical, rhetorical, prosodic and other mistakes pertinent to literature is telling.\textsuperscript{190} It is their quest to preserve classical Arabic in every time and place, and to show that their knowledge is immortal. More importantly, they seek to compete with earlier authors. Thus, all lines of poetry and prose in their works must be perceived


\textsuperscript{189} On the concept of fuṣḥā see “ʿArabiyya” in Kees Versteegh, Mushira Eid, and others, Encyclopedia of Arabic language and linguistics (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006), 174-178.

\textsuperscript{190} For instance, on al-Khaṭāfī’s criticism of using scientific terms in poetry see Rayḥāna, 2: 68-9; on Ibn Maʾṣūm’s criticism on the overuse of chronogram by later poets, see Sulafāt al-ʿaṣr, 188; on al-Muḥibbī’s criticism on the incorrect use of gharīb (strange words), see, Naḥḥat al-Rayḥāna, 1: 395.
as carefully and intentionally chosen to reflect this erudition, as well as the aesthetics of their time. On more than one occasion, these biographers would remind the reader of how they reviewed someone’s poetry, or diwān, and chose the best examples.191

The auspices through which one detects other colloquial poetry practices cab be found in other forms of literature, including adab books and diwans that contain fragments of colloquial verses composed by several poets.192 The Bedouin oral poetry, which is different from merely colloquial poetry, remained undocumented by major adab books.193 Some non-Arabic motifs derived from Persian and Ottoman poetry have been detected in some of the lines of poetry they quoted.194

Besides maintaining the general biographical structure similar to earlier biographical works,195 each of the three scholars exhibit a distinctive taste or aesthetics.

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191 As noted by al-Mālikī, al-Muḥibbī explains how he carefully chose the best example from one of his biographee’s poetry. See, Al-Muḥibbī, Naḥfat al-rayḥāna, 4: 525 as cited by Khalid Saʿīd al-Mālikī, “Khaṣṣa’iṣ al-ṭarjama al-adabiyya,” 296; al-Khafājī, Rayḥāna, 2: 152.


193 One issue with oral poetry is that it is different from place to place, and now there is a new trend paying attention to this. In oral poetry in Arabia, the Saudi anthropologist Saʿd al-Ṣuwayyān wrote an important work. See Saʿd al-Ṣuwayyān, al-Ṣahrāʾ al-ʿArabiyya thaqāfatuhā wa shīʿ ruḥā ʿabr al-ʿuṣūr: qirāʾ a anthrūbolūjiyya (Beirut: al-Shabaka al-ʿArabiyya lil-Abḥāth wa al-Nashr, 2010).

194 On Ottoman poetry, al-Khafājī, Rayḥāna, 2: 267; Al-Muḥibbī, Naḥfat al-Rayḥāna, 1: 141; on Persian poetry, Al-Muḥibbī, Naḥfat al-Rayḥāna, 1: 99 and on inserting Persian words and verses within an Arabic epistle see Ibn Maʿṣūm Šūlūfāt al-ʿaṣr, 480.

195 Khalidi, for instance, indicates how al-Ṣafadī structures his entry by focusing on name, surname, kunya, connection to town, descendent, school of law, person’s particular knowledge, craft, power, position or principality, teachers, description (ḥāfīz, faqīḥ), date of birth, or more commonly date of death, and sometimes a concluding assessment would be added. See Khalidi, Arabic Historical Thought, 210; Orfali indicates a bit of an altered arrangement with Thaʿālibī, who does not include dates unless they are of famous figures or of odd deaths or suicide. Other than that, there are names, training and education, families of adīb, characterization of littérateurs and their literary oeuvres, geographical context, historical context, comparisons to other littérateurs, knowledge of Persian, relations between contemporaries, physical characteristics,
when citing poetry. Al-Khafājī seems to celebrate poems and muqattāʿāt (short lyric pieces) that employ what must be, for him, interesting metaphors and similes, while Ibn Maʾṣūm prefers lengthy poetry especially panegyric either to his father or to friends, scholars or rulers, and he frequently quotes them in their entirety. Al-Muḥibbī usually quotes prelude lines (nasīb) and eschews panegyric lines, perhaps deliberately.\textsuperscript{196} Additionally, al-Khafājī places his own poetry against what he chooses. Such a feature constitutes a drawback that Ibn Maʾṣūm criticizes bluntly.\textsuperscript{197} All of these biographers/anthologists quote verses of their own, and each has a collection of poems (diwan), but only al-Khafājī praises his and sees it as inimitable. As for prose selection, these biographers include many examples, but prefer to leave it as evidence of the poet’s excellence, not only in the domain of poetry, but also in prose.

To illustrate, I will give an example of the Levant-based (nazīl al-Shām) poet Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Ghazzī (d. 1042/1633) as all three authors include him in their biographical anthologies and present him differently (the next chapter will revisit this point with more emphasis on Ibn Maʾṣūm’s selection of poetry).

Al-Khafājī briefly portrays al-Ghazzī as a skilled poet who was known for his beautiful handwriting, and who was the victim of a psychological disorder called the patronage and admission to the court or meeting a patron. See Orfali, \textit{The Anthologist’s Art}, 165, 182.

\textsuperscript{196} According to Ralf Elger, al-Muḥibbī preferred staying away from administrations. If his father had not pushed him to do so, he would not have gone to Istanbul to meet his patron, Luṭf Allāh, and would not have quickly returned after his death. Elger, “al-Muḥibbī,” 302.

\textsuperscript{197} Ibn Maʾṣūm, \textit{Sulāfat al-ʾaṣr}, 413.
sawdā’,198 which causes anxiety and rapid changes of mood.199 Describing al-Ghazzī’s poetic talent, he says “his natural poetic talent (\textit{tab’}) is more elegant than the features of the breeze of the north.”200 After a brief introduction, al-Khafājī begins citing examples of al-Ghazzī’s poetry, including a short love lyric—against which al-Khafājī cites his own short lyric piece and challenges critics to find better than his. He then cites another short love poem, and several lines on love excerpted from a poem for their metaphorical expressions, such as this line:201

\begin{equation}
\text{رقمت في طرس خده قبلا، فظل يمحو بنائه قبلي}
\end{equation}

I’ve written kisses on the page of his cheek, but his (or her) finger kept erasing my kisses!

Making the cheek a parchment or sheet of a paper, and the poet’s kisses written sentences that the beloved kept erasing is precisely what makes al-Khafājī interested in citing these lines. The examples include several longer poems and short poems on love and wine. Love or \textit{ghazal} lines predominate, not merely because they deal with love, but also for their use of metaphor and similes that, for al-Khafājī, seemed worth including.

Ibn Ma’ṣūm’s entry on al-Ghazzī is more detailed, especially on the latter’s disorder. We are informed of the psychological ramifications of his disorder, such as shaving his beard and tricking those who visited him. Visitors noticed he had a sound

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199 Al- Khafājī, \textit{Rayḥāna}, 1: 257.

200 See Al- Khafājī, \textit{Rayḥāna}, 1: 257.

201 Al- Khafājī, \textit{Rayḥāna}, 1: 258.
mind that quickly changed.\textsuperscript{202} Still, al-Ghazzi’s poetic excellence is not ignored. Ibn Ma’ṣūm says:\textsuperscript{203}

شاعر فصيح. مجاله في الأدب فسيح. يسحر ببيانه العقول.
ويبهر الألباب بما يقول [...] حتى أفسدت السوداء عقله.

An eloquent poet, whose share of literature is immense. His eloquent language captivates minds, and what he composes fascinates intellects […] until the sawdāʾ corrupted his mind.

The first poem Ibn Ma’ṣūm cites is a long panegyric poem to the Egyptian chronicler, litterateur and Sufi Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Abī al-Surūr al-Bakrī (d. 1078/1667), followed by another long poem in praise of someone named ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Afandī (d. unknown). After citing these two poems, Ibn Ma’ṣūm cites a prelude, love lines from an apparently long panegyric poem, to be followed by a short love poem that al-Khafājī already included.\textsuperscript{204}

When we arrive at al-Muḥibbī’s entry on al-Ghazzī, we see that he continues to praise his poetic excellence, but he does not acknowledge his disease, or, to put it more bluntly, he does not want to depict him as having a mental issue. Instead, he plays with language to praise him by saying:\textsuperscript{205}

ومكانته في السؤدد عالية
His place in power is high

\textsuperscript{203} Ibn Ma’ṣūm, \textit{Sulāfāt al-ʿasr}, 383.
\textsuperscript{204} Al- Khafājī, \textit{Rayhāna}, 1: 385.
\textsuperscript{205} Al-Muḥibbī, \textit{Nafḥat al-Rayhāna}, 1: 85.
The sawdāʾ was the disorder that both al-Khafājī and Ibn Maʿṣūm mention as an essential part of the biographee’s personality. Al-Muḥibbī rejects that, and twists—I believe intentionally—the word sawdāʾ, making it suʿdad (power), which comes from the same root (s-w-d). A few lines later, the reason for ignoring the biographee’s mental illness is revealed. It seems that al-Muḥibbī considers al-Ghazzī a dear friend of his. He states:

وأنا ممن ألهج به ابتهاجا وزهوا. ولي بمحاسنه شغف المتيم بمن
يهوى.

Proud of delight, I speak highly of him. Of his excellence I have been infatuated like the one who is infatuated with him he madly loves.

To confirm this relationship, al-Muḥibbī presents this poet positively as being excellent at perfecting his poetry by means of introducing themes through the use of new metaphors. From there, more examples are cited. First, we have several love lines, followed by another love line, nasīb, and another nasīb that is part of a panegyric poem from which al-Muḥibbī includes some lines in madīḥ. After having other love lines followed by several madīḥ lines, al-Muḥibbī turns to al-Ghazzī’s short poems and includes seven of them, most of which deal with love. One of the short lyric piece is the one that al-Khafājī cites as well as Ibn Maʿṣūm. It reads as follows:

عاطيفته خلب العصير ولا سوى
زهر النجوم تجاه زهر المجلس
انظر إليه كانه متتبترم
ما تغازله عيون النرجس

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206 Al-Muḥibbī, Nafḥat al-Rayhāna, 1, 86.
207 Al-Muḥibbī, Nafḥat al-Rayhāna, 1, 86.
208 Al-Muḥibbī, Nafḥat al-Rayhāna, 1: 89-91
209 Al-Muḥibbī, Nafḥat al-Rayhāna, 1: 93-5.
I poured him (her) the best of wine, and there was nothing, but the light of stars reflecting on the majlis’s flowers. Look at him as if he is dissatisfied, because the eyes of narcissus flirt with him. The surface of his cheek is like a ruby, and the side of his face is like a meadow of silk.

In this example, coming up with interesting metaphors or similes seems to have haunted critics and poets in their pursuit of innovation and originality. That all three scholars mention this short poem in their works confirms this, yet Ibn Ma’sūm also includes it as an example of *insijām.211* However, most of their entries constitute a variety of examples of poetry that they deem worth citing.

2.4.3. **How Did They Divide their Books?**

Al-Khafājī’s divides his *Rayḥāna* into four sections.212 These sections include: “On the Excellences/Merits (*maḥāsin*) of the People (poets and litterateurs of al-Shām, the Levant and its Surroundings)”, “On the Excellences of Contemporary People of Maghrib and Beyond, On Egypt and its Conditions (*ahwāl*) and the Reason for Returning

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to its Traces (*rusūm*) and Ruins (*aṭlāl*), “On Rūm (Anatolia) and What Occurred During My Stay There” and “On What I Encountered of its Leaders, Scholars and the Rest of its Commoners.” Besides the four chapters, there are short chapters, including: “On the place of scholars of Rūm and their Corruption,” several *maqāmas*: *rūmiyya*, *ghurba*, *sāsāniyya*, *maghribiyya* and a *maqāma* as *muʿāraḍa* (emulation using the same form) to the *maqāma* of Rashīd al-Dīn al-Waṭwāṭ (d. 578/1182-3). He concludes his book with some literary critical points on classes about eloquent men and poets.

The structure of the *Sulāfa* emulates the *Yatīma* and *Rayḥāna* in using the geographical division, i.e., Hijaz, Egypt, etc., following particularly the *Rayḥāna* in defending current literature and focusing on the literature of the author’s own region. Almost half of the *Sulāfa* is devoted to Hijazi figures. This enormous section has two sub-sections: the excellences of people of Mecca and the excellences of people of Medina. The question is: what about other neighboring towns? Poets and scholars from neighboring towns such as Jeddah and Taif are included in the section on Mecca, especially since most people from other cities traveled to Mecca for various proposes. Unfortunately, Ibn Maʿṣūm does not explain why, and we do not know if there are towns close to Medina of some whose poets and scholars he was aware.

The second section is poets from the Levant and Egypt. The section on Yemen is included as the third section to be followed by the fourth section “On Non-Arabs, Iraq, and Bahrayn, and Maghrib.” Especially noteworthy is his contribution to mapping the lesser known Arabic poetry in Yemen and non-Arab lands.

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Al-Muḥibbī divides his biographical anthologies into eight sections: “on Damascus,” “on Aleppo,” “Rūm,” “Iraq and Baḥrayn,” “Yemen,” “Hijaz,” “Egypt” and finally “on Maghrib.” In the first two sections, al-Muḥibbī devotes times to poets on the Levant. These sections take up the most significant portion, occupying two volumes of the edited five volume works. In contrast, the Maghrib section is the shortest (about 48 pages in the edited text). Dhayl al-Nafḥa (supplement) was left to al-Muḥibbī’s disciple Muḥammad al-Suʿālāfī (d. 1132/1720), who collected the materials and put it into a monograph with an entry on his teacher. This book has only three sections: “On poets and litterateurs of Damascus,” “Aleppo” and “Medina.”

It is important to notice that al-Khafājī does not include Baḥrayn, Iraq, Persia and his chapter on Yemen is very short, but they are included by Ibn Maʿṣūm and al-Muḥibbī. Equally important, all three scholars put greater emphasis on their own regions. For example, the Hijaz occupies a substantial part in Ibn Maʿṣūm's book, whereas Egypt occupies about a third of al-Khafājī's book, and the Levant, especially Damascus, occupies the most significant section in al-Muḥibbī's book. Such divisions enable us to understand how poetry was performed, practiced and received in the Hijaz and its neighboring regions (Egypt and Levant).

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214 Al-Muḥibbī, Nafḥat al-Rayḥāna, intro 28.
218 Ibn Maʿṣūm’s journey to India was delayed in Mocha for 14 months, which allowed him to meet many Yemeni scholars and poets. See Joseph E. Lowry, “Ibn Maʿṣūm,” Essays in Arabic Literary Biography, 176.
2.4.4. **Stylistic Issue: Revisiting Saj‘**

In the three works of al-Khaḍājī, al-Muḥibbī and Ibn Maṣūm saj‘ is central not only to the introduction—which is typical of the introductions of Islamic books,\(^{219}\) but also throughout their biographical anthologies. Beside saj‘, one finds extensive use of metaphor (*istiʿara*), simile (*tashbīh*), allusion (*talmīḥ*), and other figure, but saj‘ is the most noticeable, and is the definitive stylistic feature of each entry. However, in modern accounts of Arabic literature, saj‘ is considered a sign of contrivance, a feature dominant in the literary compositions of the so-called “stagnant” literature. Yet, as we shall see later, saj‘ is actually more rooted in the Arabic tradition and thus more complicated than being merely decorative.

Etymologically speaking, saj‘ means to be equal and symmetric, the rhymed saying of pre-Islamic soothsayers, and pigeon’s cooing.\(^{220}\) Classical Arabic scholars discussed saj‘ in terms of its permissibility, providing religious and aesthetic reasons. Because the Qur‘ān uses rhymes, which is called Qur‘ānic *fāṣila* (pl. *fawāṣil*), some scholars such as Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) try to elevate the Qur‘ān above all composition, by distinguishing it from saj‘. He claims that meaning (*maʿnā*) follows expression (*lafẓ*) in the latter, but with Qur‘ānic *fāṣila* meaning concurs (*yataṭābaqu*) with complete expression.\(^{221}\) Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311 or 1312) in his renowned *Lisān al-ʿArab* quotes Abū Manṣūr al-Azhari (d. 370/981) who proposes that although the

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\(^{220}\) See “s-j-,” *Lisān al-ʿArab*.

Prophet is reported to have disapproved of *saj* because it was reminiscent of the pre-Islamic soothsayers (i.e., *iyyākum wa sajʿ al-kühān*), there is no issue of using it in oratory and epistles as long as it is not used to intentionally imitate soothsayers.  

Aesthetically speaking, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Ghaflūr al-Kalāʿī al-Ishbīlī (d. middle of 6th/12th century) in his important work *Aḥkām ṣināʿat al-inshāʾ* (The Principles of the Writing Craft) claims that classical Arab critics abhorred *saj* because it contains *takalluf* (contrivance), however, that quality conveys no negativity since it also occurs in poetry.  

Scholars speaking of *saj* as a sign of decline can be found in almost all modern works on pre-modern Arabic literature. In the introduction of his anthology of prose writers *Umarāʾ al-bayān* (Princes of Eloquence/Elucidation), the Syrian literary critic, writer and champion of the *Nahḍa* Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī (d. 1958) surveys the development of Arabic prose from pre-Islam to the dawn of the *Nahḍa*. When discussing the “contrived style” of pre-modern or post-classical Arabic prose, he claims, with a dramatic tone, that the stagnation of Arabic prose appeared when Abbasid *kuttāb* (secretaries) such as Abū Isḥāq al-Ṣābī, Abū Bakr al-Khawārizmī and Bādīʿ al-Zamān al-


Hamadhānī started to intentionally write in rhymed prose. He adds that most of the littérateurs of “these periods” showed contrivance and artificiality (ahl takalluf wa taṣannu`). He further argues that if Abū al-ʿAlā al-Maʿarrī (d. 449/1057) had written his famous Risālat al-ghufrān (Epistle of Forgiveness) with a lighter use of saj’, it would have been one of the great examples in its subject matter. As for later periods beginning with al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418) and al-Khafājī, Kurd ʿAlī holds that saj’ dominated the literary scene and writing in free prose (mursal) was no longer evident, resulting in a great literary decline. This decline persisted until Muḥammad ʿAbdu and Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq (d. 1887) brought Arabic prose back to its mursal style.

F. Rosenthal, in his *A History of Muslim Historiography* speaks of the use of saj’ as a blatant deficiency that somewhat confused presentation of facts and truths. He explains that this decorative style of writing within which unskillful writers sought refuge does not add anything of value to historical compositions.

In his seminal work *al-Nathr al-fannī fī al-qarn al-rābi’* (Literary Prose in the Fourth Century) Zakī Mubārak (d. 1953) scrutinizes saj’ from pre-Islam until the fourth century, and argues that being embedded in oral as well as written compositions, saj’ became a vital part of great Arabic literary examples. Moreover, saj’ is one of the central

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227 Kurd ʿAlī also holds that the epistle of Ibn al-Qāriḥ is more eloquent because of its lighter use of saj’. See Kurd ʿAlī, *Umarāʾ al-bayān*, 1: 30.

228 Kurd ʿAlī, *Umarāʾ al-bayān*, 1: 34-35


features of ‘natural’ (fiṭrī) eloquence and can be found in most languages, notably with proverbs and famous sayings. Mubārak gives examples of how Arabs used saj’ as something inherent in their way of speaking and composing literature. He explains that it was not the Persian language that influenced litterateurs in the fourth century to use saj’ in their writings as often assumed. Mubārak concludes his chapter by remarking on the danger of shunning saj’ in modern writing. Mubārak argues that even though it sounds contrived and unaccepted to our modern tastes, it does not need to be eliminated when it may add to the meaning. Entirely eliminating it, Mubārak concludes, falls into the same mistake of overusing it at the expense of meaning.

ʿAbd Allāh al-Rushayd also touches the notion of takalluf in his al-Ḥadaqa wa al-ufug: dirāsāt fī al-nathr talīdih wa tarīfih (Eye Pupil and Horizon: Studies on Old [Classical] and New [Modern] Prose). He devotes a chapter on the saj’ that ancient Arabs composed and attributed to sājiʿ al-ʿArab (Arab Rhymer) and faqīh al-ʿArab (Knowledgeable Arab) to personify natural beings such as animals, stars and the moon, or to commemorate natural occurrences. Al-Rushayd interprets such a phenomenon as a way of “poeticizing life” (shaʿranat al-ḥayāh). Drawing from ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, Abū al-Qāsim al-Kalāʾī al-Ishbīlī and Zakī Mubārak, al-Rushayd argues that since pre-Islamic time Arabs always we should not resort to the idea that takalluf is

232 Mubārak, al-Nathr al-fannī, 101. He says: 

"ونحن في العصر الحاضر نهرب من السجع والمزواجة عامدين حتى في المواطن التي يفرض فيها المعنى أن نسجع أو نزاوج وليس خططنا في هذا بالاقل من خطأ من يجنون على المعنى بالتزام السجع. ولكل عصر أفله فالتأنق المغرِب آفة والتحرر المسرف أفة والصواب أن تكون السيادة للمعنى." 

233 This is of course, different from the jurist or legalist as known in Islamic sciences.
negative, for it can be positive and does not contradict eloquence nor rhetoric
\( (balāgha) \).\(^{235} \)

But this is not only the case with modern scholars. Pre-modern scholars whom modern critics classify as an adhering to artificiality did engage in debates about the overuse or the ill-use of \( saj ' \) and \( badī ' \). For instance, al-Ṣafadī criticized the use of \( jinās \) by al-ʿImād al-Iṣfahānī and found it unpleasant.\(^{236} \) Not only did al-Ṣafadī dislike al-Iṣfahānī’s style of writing, there is Abū Shāma (d. 665/1267) who “observes that the rhymed prose of the ‘Imad [sic] is long-winded, boring, and obscure, and that he proposes to abridge or precis it.”\(^{237} \) Moreover, even later scholars whom Kurd ʿAlī accused of corrupting Arabic literature such as al-Qalqashandī and al-Khafājī offered their opinions regarding misuse of the “literary style” or literary technique either in prose or poetry. For instance, al-Qalqashandī “argues that, if carefully handled, both ‘assonance and doubling’ are a sign of great talent, but that ‘the best assonance is what is devoid of contrivance.’”\(^{238} \)

\(^{235} \) Al-Rushayd, \( al-Ḥadaqa wa al-ufuq \), p. 30.


Chapter Three: Ibn Maʿṣūm in his Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr

This chapter takes Ibn Maʿṣūm’s Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsin al-shuʿarāʾ bi-kulli miṣr as a representative of works on tarājim al-shuʿarāʾ in the 11th/17th century. It attempts to provide the author’s biography and studies the Sulāfa in terms of its importance, title, introduction, entries, its presentation of criticism, and its connection—if possible—to the already established standardization of Arabic poetics.

3.1. A Brief Biography of Ibn Maʿṣūm al-Madani

The 11th/17th century scholar and poet Ṣadr al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad Ibn Maʿṣūm al-Hāshimī al-Shīrāzī was born in Medina in 1052/1642 to a Shiʿi father and Sunni mother. He grew up in Mecca, spent most of his adulthood in India, before dying in Shiraz, Persia (modern-day Iran). In his autobiographical travelogue Salwat al-gharīb, which documents his trip from Mecca to India, he traces his lineage to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Although he lived in India for forty-six years, he was never dubbed al-Hindī (the Indian). However, he is referred to as al-Shīrāzī, notwithstanding the brevity of his spell in Shiraz, the reason being that he had ancestors living in Shiraz long before he was born. According to the 12th/18th century scholar Azād Biligrāmī (d. 1220/1786) in

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240 Ibn Maʿṣūm, Salwat al-gharīb, 72.

241 I have come across one source where he is called al-Hindī. See Ibn Maʿṣūm, al-Darajāt al-rafiʿa, 1: 39.
his *Subḥat al-murjān fī ʿāthār Hindustān* (The Coral Rosary: On [The Preeminence of] Hindustan and its Legacy), Ibn Maʿṣūm’s grandfather Sayyid Muḥammad Maʿṣūm served the Safavid court. He was asked by Shāh ʿAbbās II (d. 1038/1629) to accompany his sister on her pilgrimage to Mecca to instruct her on how to perform Hajj properly. Seeking to escape religious constraints, the noblewoman convinced Sayyid Muḥammad Maʿṣūm to marry her, which he did en route to Mecca.\(^242\) As they both feared retaliatory consequences from Shāh ʿAbbās, they decided to settle in Hijaz, where his wife in 1027/1619 gave birth to Ibn Maʿṣūm’s father Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Maʿṣūm in Ṭāʾif. Ibn Maʿṣūm’s Hijaz-born father decided in his late twenties to leave the Arabian Peninsula in 1055/1645 to pursue a prestigious position in the Hyderabad court in Golkonda. After persistent attempts, he managed to convince Sultan ʿAbd Allāh Quṭb Shāh (d. 1083/1672) to allow him to marry his daughter and eventually rose to the rank of court secretary. We learn from the *Sulāfa* that many Hijazis were encouraged to travel to India as the Sultan welcomed Arab scholars and poets and rewarded them for their panegyric poems. Ibn Maʿṣūm’s father was a subject of panegyric poems, and he too rewarded poets and scholars coming to Hyderabad court. This phenomenon underscores the importance of the court, particularly in the Umayyad and Abbasid courts, to celebrate panegyric odes and bestow generous rewards upon accomplished poets.\(^243\)

After Nizām al-Dīn succeeded in securing his place in the court, he sent for his family back in Hijaz to join him. The family, including our Ibn Maʿṣūm al-Madanī, left


Mecca in 1066/1656 and journeyed to India via Yemen. They were held up for over a year in the Port of Mocha, before finally arriving in India in 1068/1657.

Ibn Maʿṣūm lived in India for almost half a century, during which he experienced tumultuous times. After years of being part of the court and enjoying a lavish lifestyle, Ibn Maʿṣūm’s father—an influential figure in the Hyderabad court—fell a victim of to a plot that ultimately saw him thrown into prison from the year 1082/1671 until his death in 1086/1675. This event upended Ibn Maʿṣūm’s life; his wealth was confiscated and he was placed under house arrest. Nearly a decade later, in 1092/1681 Ibn Maʿṣūm managed to escape Golkonda to Burhanpur and was admitted to the court of the great enemy of the Deccan Sultanate the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb “Alamgir” (d. 1119/1707). During his stay in the India, he occupied several prominent positions, the last of which was the local governor of Māhur. In 1114/1702, he resigned from his position and asked permission to perform the Hajj, having in fact already made up his mind to leave India for good.

Several months later, he arrived in Mecca and then Medina, but somehow felt unwelcome and estranged. The Hijaz he longed for was nothing but an ashen fantasy. In several of the poems he had composed while in India, Ibn Maʿṣūm had expressed his yearning to return to the Hijaz.244 He headed to Iraq then to Isfahan. In 1117/1705, he arrived in Isfahan, but once again, felt unwelcome, especially after his two panegyric poems praising the ruler of Isfahan Ḥusayn al-Ṣafawī (r. 1694-1722) proved a complete failure. He finally settled in Shiraz. During his three-year stay there, Ibn Maʿṣūm devoted himself

to teaching at the al-Manṣūriyya Madrasa, which was built by his ancestor Ghiyāth al-Dīn Manṣūr (d. 949/1451). He continued to write books until his death in 1120/1709 at the age of sixty-eight.

3.1.1. Education

Ibn Maʿṣūm left for India when he was fourteen years old. In Mecca, we do not know who his teachers were or the type of education he received. However, it is proper to assume that he was taught the basics of the Qurʿan, grammar, literature, algebra, and theology, as was customary for the education of young students at the time as we will see with the entry of al-Murshidī. In India, his father had a significant influence on him. Scholars and littérateurs, both passing, visiting and residing in Golkonda, served as sources of intellectual and literary communication, fostering Ibn Maʿṣūm’s intellectual and scholarly faculties, especially his literary skills. His evolving knowledge was based on self-education for most of the time he spent in India. We do not know the names of all the scholars from whom he received instruction, but drawing upon various accounts on Ibn Maʿṣūm, scholars have agreed on two names: Jaʿfar ibn Kāmil al-Baḥrānī (d. 1091/1681) and Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Maḥmūd al-Shāmī (d. 1104/1692). Another source indicates that Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699), who wrote the important Shiʿa work Bhār al-anwār, had been both a teacher and a student of Ibn Maʿṣūm.

246 Shukr indicates variations of Ibn Maʿṣūm’s date of death. They range from 1117, 1119 or 1120, but the last is the most accurate. See Ibn Maʿṣūm, Anwār al-rabīʿ, 1: 22.
248 Ibn Maʿṣūm, al-Darajāt al-rafiʿa, 1: 70.
3.2. Ibn Maʿṣūm’s Works

A full list of Ibn Maʿṣūm’s works—extant and lost—can be found in a number of already-mentioned accounts on him. Ibn Maʿṣūm authored more than twenty books on various topics, including poetic and sectarian biographical dictionaries, Arabic grammar, *balāgha* (rhetoric or eloquence), lexicography, Shiʿa theology, poetry, and a travelogue. But since he was more of an *adīb* (littérateur) and a scholar of Arabic sciences, most of his works focus on literature and the Arabic sciences.\(^{249}\) Within Shiʿa scholarship, he is mostly known for his sectarian biographical dictionaries *al-Darajāt al-rafīʿa fī ṭabaqāt al-Imāmiyya min al-Shīʿa* (The High-Ranking Levels on the Classes of Imāmī of Shiʿa), which was one of the very few of its kind in the Arabic language.\(^{250}\) Another work is the voluminous *Riyāḍ al-sālikīn fī sharḥ ṣaḥīfat sayyid al-sājidīn* (the Meadows of the Devout, a Commentary on the Writing of the Lord of Prostrators), which he wrote as a commentary to compiled sayings attributed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

His biographical anthology *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*—which he wrote while under house arrest following his father’s imprisonment—contributes significantly to his reputation in the field of Arabic literature. Almost every biographer writing about him places the *Sulāfa* as one of Ibn Maʿṣūm most esteemed works.\(^{251}\)

\(^{249}\) See the introduction by Shākir Hādī Shukr in which he includes the works attributed to Ibn Maʿṣūm edited or in manuscript or lost; see also Lowry, “Ibn Maʿṣūm,” 174-5.

\(^{250}\) Ibn Maʿṣūm argues that previous works on the Shiʿa biographical dictionary were mostly written in Persian. Even the Arabic version was written by a non-Arab, who did not write it in an eloquent and correct manner, a fact which Ibn Maʿṣūm argues, propelled a need to write a new Shiʿa biographical dictionary by an Arab. See Ibn Maʿṣūm, *al-Darajāt al-rafīʿa*, 1: 74.

\(^{251}\) See the editor’s introduction, where he includes statements on Ibn Maʿṣūm by various scholars. Ibn Maʿṣūm, *al-Darajāt al-rafīʿa*, 1: 37-58.
Another important work is his balāgha (Arabic rhetoric) book *Anwār al-rabīʿ fī anwāʾ al-badīʿ* (Lights of Spring on the Kinds of Badīʿ)\(^{252}\) (f. 1093/1682), which comprises a commentary on his *badīʿiyya* poem that he wrote over the course of twelve days in 1077/1666. In the *Anwār*, he argues that the *badīʿiyya* did not originate with Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī (d. 749 or 750/1348 or 1349), but rather with Amīn al-Dīn al-Sulaymānī (d. 670/1271).\(^{253}\) According to Mājid al-Sulamī, modern opinions differing over the origin of the *badīʿiyya* genre and attributing it to al-Sulaymānī are entirely reliant on Ibn Maʾṣūm.\(^{254}\)

His other important work is the lengthy lexicon *al-Ţārāz al-awwal wa al-kināz li-mā ’alayhi min lughat al-ʿArab al-muʿawwal* (the High-Rank of What the Language of Arab Has Relied On) in which Ibn Maʾṣūm corrected, added, and modified *al-Qāmūs al-muḥiṭ* of al-Fayrūzabādī (d. 817/1415). He structures it by beginning the entry on each word with its etymology, literal and figurative usage in the Qurʾan, Hadith, and Arabic proverbs. The book concludes at the root *q-m-ṣ*.\(^{255}\) Although he died before finishing it,

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\(^{253}\) Ibn Maʾṣūm, *Anwār al-rabīʿ*, 1: 31-32; According to Van Gelder, al-Ṣafadī was the first to indicate that Amīn al-Dīn al-Sulaymānī’s poem included a rhetorical term in each line. See Geert Jan van Gelder, “Badīʿiyya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 22 December 2021 \url{http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23309}.

\(^{254}\) Al-Sulamī, *al-Baḥth al-balāghī*, 27.

the surviving seven volumes in the edited version demonstrate Ibn Maʿṣūm’s scholarship, especially in the field of lexicography.

A peculiar work among his oeuvre is his travelogue *Salwat al-gharīb wa uswat al-arīb* (the Consolation of the Stranger and the Example of the Clever) (f. 1075/1665). This work, which he wrote several years after arriving in India, documents—inter alia—his trip from Mecca to India. Written in his youth and is considered as one of his earlier works, *Salwat al-gharīb* represents his narrative writing in *mursal* (non-rhymed) style. More importantly, it reflects his intellectual capacity or his erudition in several Arabic-Islamic fields. Joseph Lowry observes that this book uses the travele genre “innovatively for two purposes.” The first as “a display of anthologizing literary virtuosity” and the second as “a kind of summation of his studies in the Arabic tradition.” In this very early work, Ibn Maʿṣūm, who was around twenty-three years old, relied on works, such as al-Ṭabarī’s *Tārīkh*, al-Damīrī’s *al-Ḥayawān*, al-Masʿūdī’s *Murūj al-dhahab*, al-ʿĀmilī’s *al-Kashkūl*, and others. *Salwat al-gharīb* also preserves

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256 There is an earlier version published in Iran which according to al-Maḥmūdī runs to fifteen volumes. See Ibn Maʿṣūm, *al-Durarajāt al-rafiʿa*, 1: 66.


261 Lowery argues that the “sparse details of his actual voyage are used as pretexts to introduce quotations from many classics of Arabic literature, both poetry and prose, so that the work as a whole gives the impression of an anthology. But to make a work of travel literature into an anthology leads to something new: the quotations begin to look like extended digressions on various themes that suggest themselves, however tangentially, from the rhythms of voyage. See Lowry, “Ibn Maʿṣūm,” 177.
contemporary poetry such as Jaʿfar al-Khaṭṭīʾs (d. 1028/1619) poem narrating the incident of the poet himself being struck by a fish at sea. This poem never ceased to amaze Ibn Maʿṣūm and his contemporaries (the fourth chapter will translate and analyze this poem).

The other important work that could be highly useful in understanding the author’s poetics and literary conceptualization is Miḥakk al-qarīḍ (The Touchstone of Versification) to which he refers in his Anwār al-rabīʾ. Unfortunately, this book is lost.

*al-Tadhkira* (the Notebook) is another work that includes various notes in different fields, albeit scholars agreed in early accounts on Ibn Maʿṣūm that the work is lost. Still, according to Muḥammad Jawād al-Maḥmūdī, the book was being edited by his cousin Muḥammad Kāẓim al-Maḥmūdī.

Besides his *badīʿiyya*, we have his collection of poems (two volumes in the edited version), which includes another important work, his 694-line rajaz poem on the virtue of friendship, and the *takhmīs* of al-Būṣīrīʾs "Mantle Poem" (*Qaṣīdat al-Burda*).
3.3. *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*

This book stands as one of the preeminent sources of poets in the 11th/17th century in tandem with al-Muḥibbī’s *Naḥḥat al-Rayḥāna*. Ibn Maʿṣūm wrote a supplement to the *Sulāfa* titled *Mulḥaqāt al-Sulāfa*. Again, that book appears to be lost.\(^{268}\) To my knowledge, there are two supplements to the *Sulāfa* by two 12th/18th-century authors: the first is *Nashwat al-Sulāfa wa maḥall al-idāfa*\(^ {269}\) by Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Bishāra al-Khāqānī (d. after 1166/1752), and the other is *Tadhyīl Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr* by Ṭabd Allāh ibn ʿAlī Nūr al-Dīn al-Jazāʾirī (d. 1173/1759). In the former, the author detects some errors in Ibn Maʿṣūm’s book and attempts to rectify them, and adds notable figures and littérature.\(^{270}\)

One of the merits of the *Sulāfa* is its immense body of entries on Hijazi poets which are cited by several sources when including 11th/17th-century literature. It also influenced subsequent works such as *Tuhfat al-dahr wa-naḥḥat al-zahr* (The Present of Time and the Scent of the Flowers) by ṬʿUmar b. Ṭabd al-Salām al-Dāghistānī (d. 1206/1791)\(^ {271}\) and *Ḥadīqat al-afrāḥ li-izāḥat al-atrāḥ* by Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Yamanī al-Surwānī (d. 1253/1838).\(^ {272}\)

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\(^{270}\) Ibn Maʿṣūm, *al-Darajāt al-rafiʿa*, 1: 64.

\(^{271}\) Orfali, *The Anthologist’s Art*, 30 footnote 109.

3.3.1. Reception of the Sulāfa

Contemporary reception of the Sulāfa was mostly welcoming, except in a few instances citing accusations of tribal, racial, and sectarian bias. For example, the Meccan poet Taqiyyy al-Dīn al-Sinjārī (d. 1057/1647), whom Ibn Maʿṣūm includes in his Sulāfa but seems to have indirectly accused of descending from a low-class family, is defended by one of his descendants.273 The latter launched into a diatribe on Ibn Maʿṣūm, disparaging his Sulāfa. After reporting such an accusation, al-Muḥibbī concludes: 274

ومن ذلك كثر فيها اللاغي والقادح وأهمّت عن الاعتناء بشأّنها مع أنها أخرى من كل حري بالقبول وأنت إذا استبختها عرفت لمؤلفها أغراضًا قديمة أراد بهذا التأليف تقييدها ومن جملة أغراضه أنه إذا ترجم شيعيًا يغالي في مدحه [...] وإذا ذكر سنيًا لا يعطيه حقه بل ينكت عليه.

Because of that, the number of those harshly criticizing it [the Sulāfa] increased. It was disregarded even though it deserves to be appreciated more than anything else. [Yet,] if you scrutinize it, you will uncover the truth behind the author inner’s intentions that inspired him to write this work [motivated by sectarian drive] as he sometimes when he writes about a Shiʿī, he praises him to excess […] and when he mentions a Sunni, he does not give him his due but ridicules him

Although this passage reaffirms the significance of the Sulāfa as an unfairly neglected major source, it also accuses it of being biased. The fact of the Sulāfa being disregarded by some of Ibn Maʿṣūm’s contemporaries due to sectarian and tribal motives raises a crucial question of how Ibn Maʿṣūm sometimes favors individual personalities, not strictly based on literary merit. If

273 Ibn Maʿṣūm’s Sulāfat al-‘aṣr, 230.

this is true, we should be alert to this in our reading and evaluation, but we also have to evaluate the accusations. For example, one must study the *Sulāfa* from within and read how Ibn Maʾṣūm portrays poets from different sects, i.e., the Sunni.

Upon reading the entry on Taqīyy al-Dīn al-Sinjārī al-Makkī, we find that Ibn Maʾṣūm only accuses al-Sinjārī’s son of composing lampoons against honorable families, including his Āl al-Bayt (the family of the Prophet), but he never disparages the biographee, nor his poetry. On the contrary, he affirms not only his poetic value, but his decency as well.275 He supports his argument by a verse of al-Mutanabbi, where he praises himself over his ancestors (*judūd*).276

On another occasion, when Ibn Maʾṣūm provides an entry on the Indian-descendant, Arabic poet Ibrāhīm ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Muhtadī al-Hindī, he emphasizes his importance as a poet and his eloquence, despite his Indian descent as the following passage demonstrates:277

Of Indian origin, but Arabic tongue. Unlike the non-Arab, he always expresses himself in the way the eloquent Arab would do [...] If the

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275 Ibn Maʾṣūm’s *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, 231.
276 Ibn Maʾṣūm’s *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, 230. The line is:

ما بقومي شرفت بل شرفوا بي ـــ وبنفسي فخرت لا بجدودي

which can be translated as “I boast not about my forefathers/ as they’re proud I’m their descendant/ I boast not them but me!”

277 Ibn Maʾṣūm’s *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, 469-70.
banner’ standard-bearer\textsuperscript{278} al-Kindī [Imruʾal-Qays] were to meet him, he would have said: be careful! He withdrew his Indian sword […] He grew up in Yemen […] A man is he where he grew up, not where his people come from […] His poetry is a combination of elegance and eloquence.

As for accusations of sectarian bias, Ibn Maʾṣūm gives an informative and positive entry on Sunni figure ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn ʿĪsā ibn Murshid al-ʿUmarī (d. 1037/1627), which besides showing admiration and wholesome respect, provides a great deal of prose and poetry.\textsuperscript{279}

### 3.3.2. Editions of the Sulāfa

The Sulāfa’s journey to print started early. In 1324/1907, the famous Syrian and Egypt-based publisher Muḥammad Amīn al-Khānjī (d. 1910) published it relying on a manuscript copied in 1135/1722 by Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ziyāda al-Maydānī (d. unknown).\textsuperscript{280} It was reprinted in Tehran (1960) and Qatar (1970). But since it was mostly copied from one manuscript without proper edition, the editor ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Ḥulw, upon publishing the edition of the Rayḥāna in 1967-9 was scheduled to edit the Sulāfa along the Naṣḥa and Dhayl al-Naṣḥa of al-Muḥibbī.\textsuperscript{281} He produced good editions for both works of Muḥibbī several years later, while the Sulāfa remained unedited. In

\textsuperscript{278} This is an allusion to the prophetic Hadith that Imruʾal-Qays will be the holding the banner of poets in hell. Yet, the Hadith is a very weak according to scholars of Hadith. See ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn ʿAbd Allāh Al-Khudayr, “Darajat ḥadith Imrī’ al-Qays qāʾid liwāʾ al-shuʿarāʾ ilā al-nār,” Ṭarīq al-Īslām (Islamway), 04/14/2015. https://ar.islamway.net/fatwa/65942/%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%AC%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AF-%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1.

\textsuperscript{279} Ibn Maʿṣūm’s Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 65-91.

\textsuperscript{280} Ibn Maʿṣūm’s Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 599.

\textsuperscript{281} Al-Khafājī, Rayḥāna, 1: 471.
2009, Maḥmūd Khalaf al-Bādī undertook the mission to edit it and had it published by the Syrian publisher Dār Kinān. Despite a few good changes compared to the earlier editions, including useful indexes, this edition suffers from many shortcomings. First, al-Bādī did not study earlier editions nor did he analyze the book in terms of its context, structure, and sources. When identifying the book’s genre, he confuses purely thematic anthological books such as Abū Tammām’s Hamāsa with works such as the Sulāfa. More importantly, the editor bases his edition on only two manuscripts, including ‘Ārif Ḥikmat’s, which was copied in 1184/1770 and al-Maktaba al-Zāhiriyya’s, which does not have a copy date, while ignoring the many other manuscripts C. Brockelmann indicates in his GAL. According to the latter, several manuscripts are scattered in various libraries including Gidi Hammoha, Asʿad, Cairo, Beirut, Tehran, Rāmpūr, Būhar, Āṣaf and Berlin. Moreover, upon reading al-Bādī’s edition, I detected many printing and reading mistakes as well as some incorrect references. Additionally, the publisher Dār Kinān is not a reliable one; it produces ill-edited and ill-printed editions. Take for example the

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284 For example, in the entry of Jaʿfar al-Khaṭṭī al-Bādī repeats the same mistake in al-Khānjī’s version it as follows:

"ناهج طرق البلاغة والفصاحة، الزاخر الباحث، الرحب المساحة .."

The accurate reading is “الزاخر الباحة” as it concurs with the rhyming end. See Ibn Maʾṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 2: 845; Berlin 452a; see also al-Khānjī’s Ibn Maʾṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 524.

285 Al-Bādī gives an inaccurate biography of Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Ghazzī (d. 1042/1632) calling him Abū al-Barakāt—which is a kunya of an earlier scholar, who died in 984/1576. When citing al-Khafājī’s Rayḥāna, he refers to page 118 in the first volume, but the closest entry of the name al-Ghazzī is in page 138, and it is on the earlier scholar Abū al-Barakāt. See Ibn Maʾṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 2: 618 footnote 1; On Abū al-Barakāt al-Ghazzī, see al-Khafājī, Rayḥāna, 1: 138-145; on Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Ghazzī, see al-Khafājī, Rayḥāna, 1: 257-262.
edition of `Āʾisha al-Bāʿūniyya’s 1430/2009 al-Fath al-mubīn fī madh al-Amīn, a commentary on her badiʿiyya. It does not acknowledge the already existed edition (edited in 1994) by F. al-ʿAlawī, 286 but more importantly it contains many printing errors and strange readings of lines of poetry to the point that it would be far better to read it from manuscript.

According to Muḥammad Jawād al-Maḥmūdī, the Sulāfa underwent a new edition in 2013-4. I have yet to find any news of it being published.287

3.3.3. The Title of the Sulāfa

The Moroccan critic ʿAbbās Arḥīla argues that at the time of the very early formation of Arabic books, titles were mostly single-worded, in keeping with the title of the Qurʾan. However, from the 4th/10th onwards, the use of rhyming titles proliferated to become the dominant feature of Arabic books until the age of the Nahḍa (Arab Renaissance).288 Such a feature, he contends, cannot simply be construed as merely ornate, as it concurs with the premodern Arabic mode of aesthetics that hailed titles with rhyming and dual sentences. More importantly, it achieves the objective of conveying—except in rare instances289—the book’s content from the title. It also demonstrates to a

288 It should be pointed out that although the Nahḍa and mainstream intellectual domain abandoned the rhyming title, it never vanished. Traditional circles especially on fields of Hadith, creed (ʿaqīda), jurisprudence, and others kept using the rhyming title such as Muhammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī’s (d. 1999) Tahdhīr al-sājid min ittikhād al-qubūr masājid. Even some names that are mostly affiliated with the Nahḍa wrote titles using rhyming titles such as Shakīb Arslān’s al-Ḥulal al-sundustiyya fī al-āthār wa al-akhbār al-Andalusiyya.
greater extent how Muslim scholars preoccupied themselves, at the very beginning of
their books, with creativity and originality. Attempting to come up with a creative title
is in itself an attempt on their part to put a great effort into phrasing an appealing title—
perhaps comparable to advertising nowadays. Leaving all that aside, I wish to add that in
the case of the Sulāfa, the rhyming title corresponds with the style of writing that
dominates the entire book, which aspires to reach the poetic style of the full-fledged
tradition of saj˚. As saj˚ was not new to Muslim scholars and authors, as shown in the
previous chapter, such emphasis can be interpreted as a recognition of a tradition that
celebrates saj˚ from pre-Islamic oral tradition to until the time of Ibn Ma˚ṣum’s Sulāfa.

Several variants of the title are indicated in the available manuscripts. One
finds various versions that copyists might have added, such as Sulāfat al-˚aṣr fī maḥāsin
al-shu˚arā˚ bi-kull miṣr; or fī maḥāsin ahl al-˚aṣr; or fī maḥāsin a˚yān al-˚aṣr. In the
introduction, however, Ibn Ma˚ṣum clearly states the title adopted by the printed
versions, Sulāfat al-˚aṣr fī maḥāsin al-shu˚arā˚ bi-kull miṣr. Sulāfa means the first and
purest juice pressed from grapes, and the addition of the phrase “bi-kull miṣr” (in each
region) indicates the goal of the work to record trans-regional contemporary literary
excellences (maḥāsin), which means their best literary productions. In Arabic literature,
especially poetry, the Sulāfa became associated with the finest wine. Drawing from
similar books of tarājim al-shu˚rā˚, the title of the Sulāfa invokes earlier titles
and emphasizes the excellences of contemporary poets. Looking at the titles of

290 Arḥila, Al-˚unwān, 81.
291 Berlin MS 1, Ārif Ḥikmat MS 1.
biographical anthologies that followed the *Yatīma*, one finds that each title recalls its
precursor, creating a sort of “genealogy” of *tarājim al-shuʿarāʾ* and competing to outdo
each other as do the works themselves. It is the very title that indicates such relevance
and can be demonstrated in the chronologically ordered titles: *Dumyat al-qaṣr wa-ʿuṣrat
ahl al-ʿašr* (Statute of the Palace and the Pressed Juice of the People of the Present Age)
by al-Bākharzī (d. 467/1075) followed by *Wishāḥ Dumyat al-qaṣr wa-laqāḥ rawdat al-
ʿašr*, (The Scarf of the Statue of the Palace and the Fecundation of the Meadow of the
Age) by Abū al-Ḥasan b. Zayd al-Bayhaqī (d. 565/1169), *Kharīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat al-
ʿašr* (The Virgin Pearl of the Palace and Register of the People of the Present Age) by
ʿImād al-Dīn al-Kātib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 597/1201), and *Zinat al-dahr fī latāʾif shuʿārāʾ al-
ʿašr* (The Ornament of Time on the Subtleties of the Poets of the Age) (a sequel to
*Dumyat al-qaṣr*) by Abū al-Malī al-Ḥazīrī (d. 568/1172–3). Each title models itself in
light of its precursor, dividing the title into two parts: one emphasizing the importance of
the selected literary compositions, and the other concerning itself with the present age
(ʿašr). Al-Khafājī’s *Rayhāna* is alluded to by the title of the *Naṣḥat al-Rayhāna* of al-
Muḥibbī, but the latter as well as Ibn Maʿṣūm use wine—either its sprinkle (*rashḥ*) or its
pressed grapes (Ibn Maʿṣūm)—as an allegory of the neat selection of the best literary
examples that they aimed for as confirmed by their introductions. But the title of
the *Sulāfa*, which states very distinctly “the excellences of contemporary poets,” bears
more similarity with the *Yatīma* and its followers. Since sometimes titles can be inspired
by earlier texts, the naming of the *Sulāfa* might have been influenced by the introduction
of al-Ṣafadī, in which he states the expression “Sulāfat ʿaṣrihim” (the pressed-wine of their age, i.e., the notables.)

3.3.4. **The Sulāfa’s Sources**

Throughout the Sulāfa, Ibn Maʿṣūm does not always specify his sources. However, we learn that he depends upon various sources such as his memory, other oral sources, and written sources such as contemporary collections of poems, and exchanging of letters, which seems to have been a common practice at that time. Concerning the latter, many examples of what Ibn Maʿṣūm calls “murājaʿa” (reply) between littérates and scholars that include a great deal of prose and poetry are used as well. It is not clear whether murājaʿa can also be oral, but this could be a possibility, especially since sometimes the two parties meet and exchange prose or poetry directly. The isnād, which was used frequently in books such as the Yatīma, does not appear in the Sulāfa. One finds almost no conventional isnād as ḥaddathanā (he related to us) and akhbaranā (he reported to us) with a chain of transmission. Nonetheless, the Sulāfa frequently includes terms of direct transmission such as anshadanī, (he recited [some poetry] to me) samīʿt min (I have heard from), akhbaranī (he reported to me). On more than one occasion, Ibn Maʿṣūm reports lines of poetry either directly or indirectly; from one mediator/guarantor such as his father and his teachers. Besides major written sources, there Ibn Maʿṣūm cites what is called a tadhkira, which is basically a notebook in which a given author

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294 Orfali, *The Anthologist’s Art*, 146-54

writes down what might be of interest from various sources and which also encompasses a great deal of biographical information. According to al-Raddādī, the *tadhkira* appears to be a common practice among Hijazi scholars in the 11th/17th century.\(^{296}\) The practice of the *tadhkira* reached its height in the 11th/17th century, particularly in the Ottoman and Persian-speaking world.\(^{297}\)

Cited books and written sources are mentioned by the name of their authors and occasionally with their abbreviated title. As is known in the Islamic tradition of books, titles are not always clear, for they might be added by copyists\(^{298}\) or be given in abbreviated form, especially well-circulated books such as Ibn Sallām’s *Ṭabaqāt* and al-Maqqari’s *Naḥ al-ṭīb*. Sporadically, Ibn Maʿṣūm enumerates the books that a certain biographee composed, as is the case with ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Jamāl al-Dīn al-ʿĪṣāmī (d. 1037/1627).\(^{299}\) Since earlier works such as the *Yatīma* indicate receiving written sources from their authors, Ibn Maʿṣūm, too tells, for instance, that he received a collection of prose and poetry as a gift from Ahmad al-Jawharī al-Makkī (d. 1069/1658) from which he cited some literary examples.\(^{300}\) The following are the cited sources mentioned—once or more—in the *Sulāfa*:

- Sībawayh (d. 180/796) with no specified source.\(^{301}\)

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299 Ibn Maʿṣūm gives an informative entry on him citing number of his books as well as his profession as a scholar teaching at the Holy Mosque. Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, 122.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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<td>Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Nawājī (d. 859/1455) with no specified source.</td>
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303 Ibn Ma’sūm, Sulafat al-‘aṣr, 526
304 Ibn Ma’sūm, Sulafat al-‘aṣr, 360.
305 Ibn Ma’sūm, Sulafat al-‘aṣr, 89.
306 Ibn Ma’sūm, Sulafat al-‘aṣr, 89.
307 Ibn Ma’sūm, Sulafat al-‘aṣr, 568
308 Ibn Ma’sūm, Sulafat al-‘aṣr, 562.
309 Ibn Ma’sūm, Sulafat al-‘aṣr, 450.
310 Ibn Ma’sūm, Sulafat al-‘aṣr, 591; I used “maqrī” instead of “maqqarī” because it perfectly rhymes, and that both spelling of the surname of this author are correct.
311 Ibn Ma’sūm, Sulafat al-‘aṣr; 538.
312 Ibn Ma’sūm, Sulafat al-‘aṣr, 61.
- Khıdır Allāh al-Mawsīlī’s (d. 1007/1598) *K. al-Isʿāf bi-sharḥ ābyāt al-qādi wa al-kashshāf*.

- Sharaf al-Dīn al-Aṣīlī al-Miṣrī’s (d. 1010/1601) *Tadhkira*.

- Muḥammad Darrāz al-Makkī’s (d. after 1012/1603) *Tadhkira*.

- Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī’s (d. 1030/1621) *al-Kashkūl*.

- Aḥmad al-Maqqari’s (d. 1041/1631) *Naḍḥ al-muṭaʿāl al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*.

- Muḥammad ibn Kabrīt al-Madani’s (d. 1070/1660) *Naṣr min Allāh wa fathun qarīb*.

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319 Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, 595; al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ (d. 544/1149), a Muslim scholar from Ceuta and well-versed in many Islamic sciences, but he is mostly known for his work on the Prophet, which gained huge readership, especially in the Maghrib. See
- *Riḥlat al-shītāʾ wa al-ṣayf.* 323

- Abū al-Baqā’ al-Wafā al-Wadāʿī’s (d. unknown) old collection that Ibn Maʿṣūm encountered in India. 324

- *Dīwāns* (collections of poems) of individual poets; more than one occasion, Ibn Maʿṣūm states that he selects poems from *dīwāns.* 325

- Epistle/letters that include poetry or prose he or his father received, or he finds in sources but does not identify whether they are in books or letters. 326

- Unidentified historical (*Sīra*) books (*Arbāb al-siyar*). 327

- Unidentified notebooks/biographical collections (*tadhkiras*). 328

In the sections where he experienced some shortages of sources, Ibn Maʿṣūm apologizes to his readers for such a lack, as in the section on Egyptian poets when says: 329

قال المؤلف عفى عنه: هذا ما تيسر ذكره. وإثباته من محاسن
أهل مصر والقاهرة. واقتطافه من رياض آدابهم الزاهرة. مع علمي بأنه
 قطرة من ماء ونجمة من سماء وقل من جد وغيض من فيض وكيف وفي
مصر وأهلها يقول القائل:

قل للذي سار بلاد الورى وأظهر القوة والباسا

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The author—may Allāh forgive him—said: This what I was able to cite and write down regarding the best of the literary productions of the people of Egypt and Cairo, and it is what I have plucked of their flowering literature. Notwithstanding, I acknowledge that it is but a drop of water, a star in the [wide] sky, a little from the much, and a little water from a flood water. How [could I not fall short] when one poet says on Egypt and its people:

Say to him, who has traveled to lands of mankind, showing strength and courage:
“he who has not seen Egypt and its people, has not seen the world or its peoples!”

However, the vast distance between Egypt and India played a role in not acquiring the sources of their excellences. How far is Egypt from India!

3.3.5. The Sulāfa’s Introduction

In addition to what I have already stated with regard to Ibn Maʿṣūm’s introduction in the previous chapter, I focus more on other aspects of the introduction such as why the book was written, and how that can help us understand Ibn Maʿṣūm’s stance regarding the literature of his time. To begin with, the structure of the introduction of the Sulāfa is conventional, akin to major pre-modern Arabic works, in that it begins with the basmala, uses a highly ornate style, and specifically employs rhyming sentences (saj´) with heavy use of figurative/metaphorical expressions.330 Despite its conventional form, it is informative of the work’s motive, importance, and the circumstances surrounding the course of its writing, as well as its contents. Foundational to the aim of writing

biographical anthologies is its reassurance of the necessity of literature as an ever-lasting practice of humankind. Ibn Maʿṣūm asserts:\textsuperscript{331}

\[
\text{إن الأدبِ روضٌ لا تزال عذباتُ أفنانِ فنونِه تترنح بنسماتِ القبول}
\]

وثمراتُ أوراقه في الأدِوِاق مَعِسولةُ المُجتنى لا يعتري نضارُتها على

\[
مَرَ الزمانُ ذبولٌ
\]

Literature is a meadow whose varied tree branches forever sway in the breezes of reception/acceptance. And whose honeyed fruits never lose their freshness or wither with the passage of time.

Moreover, Ibn Maʿṣūm narrates the genesis of his book and the surrounding circumstances. That foundational works on tarājim al-shuʿarāʾ such as al-Thaʿālibī’s Yatīmat al-dahr and Ibn Khāqān’s Qalāʿid al-ʾiqyān inspired him to spend about eight years writing down and collecting materials on ‘the best literary examples’ of contemporary poets is confirmed. But al-Khafājī’s Rayḥāna, which was sent to him from Hijaz as a gift, had already accomplished this objective. Yet, upon reading it, he found that despite its precedence and encompassing of vast geographical expanses, it still overlooked some important figures. To fill the gaps, Ibn Maʿṣūm adds literary figures who were to him worthy of recognition and recording. Initially, he planned to exclude poets recorded by al-Khafājī, but quickly changed his mind quoting the 5\textsuperscript{th}/11\textsuperscript{th} century biographical dictionary Dumyat al-qaṣr, in which its author—al-Bākharzī—argues that repeating some already-mentioned figures in previous biographical anthologies is acceptable, when adding more literary examples.\textsuperscript{332} Similarly, Ibn Maʿṣūm repeats some poets, but does not often duplicate the verses of poetry that appear in the Rayḥāna. His

\textsuperscript{331} Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 5.

\textsuperscript{332} Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 9.
recognition of the tradition of biographical anthologies is further highlighted in a passage that alludes to number of important works in this genre. He says:\textsuperscript{333}

\begin{quote}
 والله عصابة فوقعوا سهام الإصابة فجددوا معاهده في كل عصر واجتغوا من خرائده يتيمة دهر ودمية قصر ونظروا من فارائده قلائد العقبان ونسقوا من فوائده عقود الجمان وادخروا من أعلاقه ذخيرة ووردو من منهله صافييه ونميرته وانتشوا من سلافته في أشرف حانة واقتطفوا من رياض ورده وريحانه فنهجوا لإقتناء آثارهم سبيلًا
\end{quote}

Allāh bless a band of men [composers of biographical anthologies] whose arrows hit their mark. They revived the places [of adab] in every age and revealed from among its Virgin Pearls one Unique of its Age (\textit{Yatīmat al-dahr}) and a Doll/Statue of the Palace (\textit{Dumyat al-qāṣr}). They strung from its unique gems Necklaces of Gold (\textit{Qalāʾid al-ʿiqyān}) and from its precious things, they preserved a Priceless Virgin Pearl (\textit{al-Dhakhīra}) […] From its spring (\textit{al-Manhal al-ṣāfī}), they drank pure sweet water. They became inebriated from its pure wine (\textit{Sulāfī}) in the noblest of taverns; and they plucked from its meadow [the choicest] roses and sweet basil (\textit{Rayḥāna}). In doing so, they cleared a path/established a road for others to follow.

This sense of continuity and kinship revealed towards those authors and their works recognizes their precedence in paving the way for others to follow. The shortcomings of the \textit{Rayḥāna}, Ibn Maʿṣūm believes, is the confirmation of the famous maxim: “how much has the earlier left for the later” \textit{kam tarak al-awwal lil-ākhir}.\textsuperscript{334}


\textsuperscript{334} Ibn Maʿṣūm, \textit{Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr}, 8: According to Ibn Rashīq, Abū Tammām was one of the first poets to reverse this proverb from “there is none that the former has left to the latter” to “how much has the former left to the latter.” See bn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī, \textit{al-ʿUmda fi sināʿat al-shiʿr wa naqdih}, ed. al-Nabawi Abū Wāḥid Shaʿlān (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1420/2000), 1: 138; This maxim has always encouraged Muslim scholars not to stop pursuing \textit{ijtihād} (independent reasoning) in their fields. See for instance the book on seeking knowledge (\textit{ṭalab al-ʿilm}) by the Saudi Salafī scholar Bakr Abū Zayd (d. 2008) in which he says:

"فاحذر غلط القائل: ما ترك الأول للآخر. وصوابه: كم ترك الأول للآخر!"

The last important point that can also be found in the Sulāfa’s introduction as well as the Rayhāna’s and the Nafha’s is the personal experience of isolation—voluntarily or otherwise. As already discussed, those authors perceive the literary production of their contemporaries as a reflection on their ‘literary’ view but also as tools upon which they depend to pass the time and to fight isolation. Here again lies the importance of literature in healing the wound, repairing the damage and becoming the ultimate shelter. Ibn Ma’ṣūm explains how he found refuge in reading about contemporary poets, and stresses that:

I have often thought of writing a poetry collection that contains the merits of my contemporaries, in which I would follow the Yatīmat al-dahr, the Dumyat al-qaṣr, and similar works devoted to such a topic […] But I was held back by misfortunes that would drain patience of the steadfast and by adversities that would make a baby’s hair turn gray. And I suffered the hardships of departure, exile, and separation from homeland, family, loved ones, and companions, as well as the distresses caused by adversity, pain, and calamity, which, if the tongue of a pen were [to try] to express them, it would go up in flames […] especially since I have been abandoned by every acquaintance and

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335 Ibn Ma’ṣūm, Sulāfat al-‘aṣr, 7.
close friend [...] and I have been confined to a house narrower than the
eye of a needle [...] I have no friend nor companion but a book or a
paper which I resort to enjoy [various] types of scholarship, from
whose scribal corruption (tashīf) I have been freed [...] Up until now,
there seems no relief from this crisis, nor an indication of when the
morning following this dark night shall gleam.

Despite hardships, Ibn Maʿṣūm wrote his Sulāfā with the hope that such hardship would
fade away once and for all. It seems that the act of writing can be interpreted beyond the
content; it becomes a quest for relief, or a hopeful attempt to find consolation.

3.3.6. The Sulāfā’s Entries

A look at the organizational principle of almost all entries reveals the importance
of not only the literary examples but also the biographical, that in which they presented.
Of course, each entry is written in an ornate style defined by sajʿ, but one that also
conveys biographical features, as demonstrated in the following points:

- Full name of the biographee with the kunya (i.e., Abū Muḥammad) and
  epithet (i.e., Sharaf al-Dīn).
- Expressions to describe the standing of the biographee and his importance as
  ʿallāma, adīb al-zamān who surpasses earlier Arab poets, orators, and adībs.
- Biographical information of his time, education, masters, place, travel,
  profession, and books.
- Date of death.
- Poetry selections.
- Prose selections.

Ibn Maʿṣūm often introduces the biographical information before the literary
examples, but all features are not always indicated; they vary from entry to entry
depending on the availability of sources. Ibn Maʿṣūm repeatedly reminds his readership of his lack of access to sources as a result of his stay in India, so that the entries on other regions than Hijaz and, to a lesser extent, the Levant (al-Shām), are shorter and not as extensive. When sources are lacking, as is the case with Maghribi, Egyptian and non-Arab sources, Ibn Maʿṣūm includes only few literary examples.\footnote{Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 243-44.} In addition, influential figures, including his teachers, father, and many Hijazi scholars, are allocated lengthy entries.\footnote{For his entry on his father see Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 10-22; For his entry on his teacher see Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 323-353.} Those originally from Hijaz are given proper attention, and those from different regions who eventually settled in Hijaz (either Mecca or Medina) are also included. Although most of the biographees are from the 11th/17th century, there are a few personalities who lived most of their lives in the previous century (10th/16th) and are allocated an extensive entry, as is the case with the renowned Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1031/1622).\footnote{Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 289-302.} Similarly in his work al-Darajāt al-rafiʿa, Ibn Maʿṣūm records in the section of 12th (AH) figures those who spent most of their lives in 11th century but died in the 12th.\footnote{Ibn Maʿṣūm, al-Darajāt al-rafiʿa, 1: 77.}

Others receive medium-to-very-short entries.\footnote{For instance see Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 217-19, 242-44, 260-70.} In general, one can confidently assume that the lengthier the entry, the more important the biographee, but not to undermine the possibility that the availability of sources, written or oral, contributed significantly to the length of a specific entry. Not all entries are on professional poets and littérateurs. Scholars, muftis, and others who composed only little or no prose and poetry
are also included, although Ibn Maʿṣūm does not explain why.\footnote{See for instance Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿasr, 105-107, 304-308.} Of course, this is not new, for it can be found in the Rayḥāna\footnote{See al-Khaṭājī’s entry on Ibn Ḥajār al-Haytamī (d. 974/1567) al-Khaṭājī, Rayḥāna, 1: 435.} and many biographical anthologies that include preeminent scholars and secretaries, even though they are not professional poets or prose writers, but interacted in some way or another with their contemporary literary domains.

In one example, which runs against the overriding tone of the Sulāfa, Ibn Maʿṣūm expresses outright hostility towards the biographee. That is the entry on the Meccan poet Ibrāhīm al-Mihtār (d. 1040/1630). Introducing him, he declares:\footnote{Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿasr, 244.}

A poetaster with a foul tongue whose errors are many and whose excellence is little. He composed poems but did not compose poetry; so he continuously says nonsense. Gus fat is lean and his new is worn […] He kept insulting [people’s] honor by his invectives, uttering from his mouth that which is similar to what his buttocks ejects of his dirt until death covered him and Allāh washed existence of this baseness and criminality. When he died, nobody knew for two days until the smell of his decayed [body] reached [people]. He was thrown as a corpse into his grave. I have skimmed his dīwān, which he collected, but found only what ears refuse, and of whose expression and meaning one’s
hearing disapproves. Except for few words that are almost filtered from impurity, for among many mistaken arrows one only hit the mark.

If al-Mihtār is an weak poet “whose errors are many and whose excellence is little,” why include him in the first place? Ibn Maʿṣūm provides no answer. To al-Raddādī, this confirms the racial and/or tribal bias found in the Sulāfa due to the status of al-Mihtār as being a son of a slave, whose poetry other contemporary historians and biographers regarded poorly. Fortunately, other historians, such as al-Muḥibbī, Muṣṭafā ibn Fath Allāh al-Ḥamawī (d. 1123/1710), and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad al-Dhahabī (d. 1128/1715), were appalled by the unfair portrayal and defended al-Mihtār, placing him among the best Meccan poets. After asserting that al-Mihtār is a great and skillful poet, al-Raddādī adds that Ibn Maʿṣūm’s hostility might have had something to do with al-Mihtār’s arrogance and indifference to the opinions of his contemporaries. Interestingly, Ibn Maʿṣūm’s opinion in the Sulāfa is at odds with his works Salwat al-gharīb and Anwār al-rabī’. In both works, he acknowledges al-Mihtār as an adīb (littérature) and cites some of his poetry. One wonders whether this has to do with a personal incident that might have played a part in changing Ibn Maʿṣūm opinion from impartiality to outright hostility. In the previous passage, there is an indication that al-Mihtār verbally attacked honorable families, which could be a reason of Ibn Maʿṣūm’s hostility, especially if those attacked families are from the same tribe of Ibn Maʿṣūm. In

345 Al-Raddādī, al-Shiʿr al-Ḥijāzī, 2: 699-700
346 Al-Raddādī, al-Shiʿr al-Ḥijāzī, 2: 700.
347 Ibn Maʿṣūm, Salwat al-gharīb, 157; Ibn Maʿṣūm, Anwār al-rabī’, 2: 245; It is important to note that Salwat al-gharīb was written a decade earlier than the Sulāfa while Anwār al-rabī’ was written a decade after.
a similar but less hostile way, Ibn Maʿṣūm portrays Ghars al-Dīn al-Ḥimṣī (d. 1075/1647) as:

أديب أحرز من الأدب طرفا [...] فنظم شعرآ وسطا. وكان بغيضا إلى الطباع بعيدا عن الانطباع. وقد حجاا إلى مكة المعظمة. وفي نفسه ما فيها من التكير والعظمة. فلم يلفت إلى إله من أهلها أحد. ولم يكن له بها من المعارف من ملتحد. فخيل له فكره المريض. أن يهجوهم بالكتابة والتعريض. فلم يلتفت إليه من أهلها أحد. ولم يكن له بها من المعارف من ملتحد. فخيل له فكره المريض. أن يهجوهم بالكتابة والتعريض. فلم يلتفت إليه من أهلها أحد. ولم يكن له بها من المعارف من ملتحد. فخيل له فكره المريض. أن يهجوهم بالكتابة والتعريض. فلم يلتفت إليه من أهلها أحد. ولم يكن له بها من المعارف من ملتحد. فخيل له فكره المريض. أن يهجوهم بالكتابة والتعريض. فلم يلتفت إليه من أهلها أحد. ولم يكن له بها من المعارف من ملتحد. فخيل له فكره المريض. أن يهجوهم بالكتابة والتعريض.

A litterateur, who had some literary talent [...] allowing him to compose middling poetry, but he was repugnant and far from having natural talent (intibā᾿). He came to Mecca as a pilgrim arrogant and filled with ego. But no Meccans paid attention to him. He had no acquaintance in Mecca that would shelter him. His sick mind then deluded him into ridiculing them [the Meccans] by means of allusions and insinuations, until they responded to him [in kind] and he submitted and yielded.

In this entry, al-Ḥimṣī is portrayed as an arrogant poet whose poetry is modest, the reason being that he composed an invective against Meccans and received a flood of invectives in return. Consequently, he submitted to the Meccans. Such a portrayal seems to suggest that because of this incident, Ibn Maʿṣūm depicts him poorly. A more revealing instance is when Ibn Maʿṣūm cites one of al-Ḥimṣī’s poem and introduces it with the expression “kamā zaʾam (as he claims)” and ends it with a comment from a Meccan scholar not in favor of the poem. As Meccan scholar had a connection with al-Ḥimṣī, the latter sent him this poem for evaluation, or more properly for taqrīz (commendation) as was customary at that time. Interestingly, the Meccan scholar vaguely praises the poem and finally

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348 Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 391.
349 Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 396; The expression here clearly indicates Ibn Maʿṣūm’s bias against this poet.
admits that his humble knowledge does not allow him to evaluate this poem.\textsuperscript{350} In other words, the very comment cited in this entry supports Ibn Maʿṣūm’s portrayal of a poet whose poetry is not especially good.

Ibn Maʿṣūm does not include any women; yet, in his sectarian biographical dictionary \textit{al-Darajāt al-rafīʿa}, he includes a section on female Shiʿa figures.\textsuperscript{351}

Particularly intriguing is the informative entry on ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿĪsā ibn Murshid al-ʿUmarī. It includes an autobiographical passage that provides an overview of educational texts (curricula) of different fields that one—or at least anyone seeking to become a scholar—had to study in the 10\textsuperscript{th}/11\textsuperscript{th} (16\textsuperscript{th}/17\textsuperscript{th})-century Hijaz.\textsuperscript{352} For instance, on Hadith, there are the \textit{Ṣaḥihs} (al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s), \textit{al-Shifā} of al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ (d. 544/1149), and commentary on \textit{al-Nukhba} of Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449). On Arabic grammar, there are the \textit{Alfiyya} of Ibn Mālik (d. 672/1204-5), the \textit{Ājurrūmiyya} of Ibn Ājurrūm (d. 723/1323), Khālid al-Aṣhari’s (d. 905/1499) \textit{Sharḥ al-Qawāʿid al-ṣughrā}, and \textit{Sharḥ Qaṭr al-nadā wa ball al-ṣadā} of Ibn Ḥishām al-ʿAnṣārī (d. 761/1360), and others. On Morphology, there is \textit{Sharḥ al-Taʾrīf} of Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390). On Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), there are \textit{Munyat al-muşallā wa ghunyat al-mubtadiʿ} by Ṣadīd al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Kāshgharī (d. 705/1305) and \textit{Sharḥ al-Kanz} by Maḥmūd ibn Aḥmad al-ʿAynī (d. 855/1451). Most of these works belong to two to three centuries before the Sulāfa. Some of these works, especially with


regard to grammar, are still used by students in both universities and traditional circles at mosques.353

3.3.7. The Sulāfa’s Poetic Aesthetics

In his study of the Yatīma, Muḥammad Ashhabār expounds that—like the early practice of Arabic literary criticism—its literary criticism pertains to wording (lafẓ), meaning/motif (maʿnā), poem’s structure, prosody, and finally, grammar and language. He enumerates each point individually with examples from the Yatīma and the Tatimma.354 For example, he contends that the Yatīma provides terms to describe and analyze the wording of a certain line of poetry. They include terms such as jazāla (eloquence), gharāba (uncanniness), takalluf (contrivance), al-ʿāmmiyya fī al-shiʿr (use of colloquial words in poetry), takrār (repetition), ikhtilāf (difference), and waḥdat al-nasj (the unity of style).355 Such terms that are used throughout the Yatīma to explain literary examples are deemed impressive or unimpressive. Of course, those terms were not new to al-Thaʿālibī. After all, he belongs to a tradition that supplied him with terms already in use by scholars to appraise literary examples. What he developed was the geographical division that categorizes poets based on their regions; a structure that almost all works on tarājim al-shuʿarāʾ produced thereafter adopted. Ashhabār holds that al-Thaʿālibī’s cataloguing the section on the Levant (Ṣām) first

353 YouTube is filled with courses on texts such as the Alfiyya of ibn Mālik, Ājurrūmiyya, Sharḥ Qaṭr al-nadā wa ballu al-ṣadā.


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concedes the centrality of the geographical climate and/or environment mirroring the poet’s merits and excellence. This means that even such a broader categorization conveys what the Yatīma argues in that each section weaves the poet’s and/or prose writer’s literary selection to the geographical space in which they existed. Ashhabār continues that concerning al-Tha’ālibī’s criticism on motifs (ma‘ānī), terms such as ikhtirā’ (originality), ibtikār (innovation), lam yusbaq ilayh (unprecedented) and very rarely al-infirād (individual-ness/ idiosyncrasy) are repeated to describe what poets such as his dear poet al-Mutanabbī came up with.

Orfali concurs that the importance of geographical division as significant, but he argues—with regard to al-Tha’ālibī’s presentation of literary criticism—that “[most] comments in the work are flattering; criticism is rare,” as the book assembles “the elegant achievements of contemporary people” (maḥāsin ahl al-ʾaṣr), and inferior material would thus have been excluded. He adds that many lines are “circumscribed rather vaguely as possessing pithiness (jazāla), purity or eloquence (faṣāha), eloquence (balāgha)…,” and so on. However, Orfali maintains that al-Tha’ālibī shows a tendency to emphasize the importance of the term literary borrowing (sariqāt) to credit contemporary poets who, despite being later poets, were able to take earlier motifs and develop them.

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357 Ashhabār, “Malāmiḥ naqdiyya, al-qism al-thānī,” 39, 44.
358 Orfali, The Anthologist’s Art, 189.
359 Orfali, The Anthologist’s Art, 189.
360 Orfali, The Anthologist’s Art, 90-91
Works such as the *Rayhāna* and the *Nafḥat al-Rayhāna* contain remarks of literary criticism and examine—albeit haphazardly—instances where a given poet either succeeds or fails at composing a good poem. For instance, al-Muḥibbī’s *Nafḥat al-Rayhāna* exhibits critical remarks that tend to be essentially technical (i.e., grammar, rhyme, lexicon etc.) exclusively when applied to poetry. They are general, positive, and written in non-rhyming style; only the prose is included with no accompanying criticism.\footnote{Al-Mālikī, “Khaṣā’iṣ al-tarjama al-adabiyya,” 251-60.}

A study that examines the critical literary aspect of the *Sulāfa* is Maʿmūn Jarrār’s article that investigates its critical stance (*al-mawqif al-naqdī*). Jarrār divides the *Sulāfa*’s remarks of the book’s literary criticism into five subdivisions, including: tracing the poetic motif, tracing the poets employing rhetorical devices, evaluating poetry and poets, providing instances of verifying texts, and finally, providing critical terminology.\footnote{Maʿmūn Jarrār “al-Mawqif al-naqdī li-Ibn Maʿṣūm fī Sulāfat al-‘asr” *Majallat Kulliyat al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya w-l-‘Arabīyya*, no. 18 (2000): 269-295.} For example, in tracing the poetic motifs, Jarrār finds that Ibn Maʿṣūm sometimes attributes them to an early example of poetry or proverbs with no evaluation. Occasionally, he speaks of whether or not the poet’s usage was successful. This latter point is further explained in the second section, in which Jarrār enumerates the position Ibn Maʿṣūm takes to gauge poets and their poetry, which are sub-categorized as follows:

- General evaluation of poetry.
- Evaluation of a poem.
- Evaluation of a certain line of poetry.
- Evaluation of a certain meaning and/or motif, and deeming it innovative or not.
- Evaluation of a certain poetic genre.

The other important section is the Sulāfa’s critical terminology, when Ibn Maṣūm uses his laudatory and pejorative comments to compare and contrast two poems or poets. Positive terms such as “it is an innovative (mubtakar) meaning” and negative ones such as takalluf (contrivance), sāqīt (slang), mukhtall al-qāfiya (flawed rhyme), and so on, are portrayed by Jarrār as self-explanatory. Expressions or comments, which the author compares and contrasts two poets with respect to evaluating the literary borrowing or plagiarism (sariqāt shi’riyya) as acceptable or not, or whether the latter overrides the former, is also provided. Jarrār generally speaks of Ibn Maṣūm’s critical position, but does not explain how it connects with the previous critical tradition.

3.3.7.1. Contextualizing the Sulāfa’s Poetics

When Ibn Maṣūm wrote his Sulāfa, it was in the context that witnessed an evolving genre of works that combined prose and poetry with technical and literary criticism. A prime example is the Badi’iyya genre. No one can even begin to comprehend the critical domain in the 11th/17th century—and perhaps a few centuries earlier—without recognizing that the Badi’iyya played a significant role in creating the

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365 According to Suzanne Stetkevych “[the] badi’iyyah-proper is a subgenre of madih nabawī (praise poem to the Prophet Muḥammad) that consists of a mu’āraḍah (an imitation or contrafaction in the same rhyme and meter) of the preeminent medieval praise poem to the Prophet, Abū Ḥabd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Sa’īd al-Būṣīrī’s (d. 694-96/1294-97) celebrated Burdah (Mantle Ode) […] with the added requirement that each line exhibit a particular rhetorical device.” See S. Stetkevych, “From Jāhiliyyah to Badi’iyyah,” 220.
literary canon, especially for scholars and elites. One should ask why the Badi‘iyya-poem tradition that combines poetry with commentary reached such a level of popularity and importance in the pre-modern/post-classical period. On this point, a couple of interpretations can be useful. For instance, Suzanne Stetkevych investigates the development of the Badi‘iyya-poem as primarily stemming from a tradition that began with the pre-Islamic oral poetry and evolved in the High Abbasid written culture into the Badi‘ movement, which tended to employ complicated and abstract language.

When it comes to the Badi‘iyyāt, one witnesses something different. We see a long poem praising the Prophet, adorned with a rhetorical device in every line. The poem is also supplemented with a lengthy commentary explaining every rhetorical device. To understand this phenomenon, Stetkevych suggests that:

[To] combine in a single poem a contractual guarantee of the Prophet’s intercession on Judgment Day with the rhetorical knowledge requisite for witnessing the miracle of the Qur’ān and the truth of Muḥammad’s prophethood is to consummate the Islamic faith.

Put differently, the practice of combining both a poem and its commentary achieves, by means of performativity, a spiritual end.

In his history of Arabic Balāgha, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Aṭīq argues that the commentary of Ibn Ḥijja’s Khīzānat al-adab—as it encompasses a wide range of knowledge and scholarship—is more important than the poem itself. Following Zakī Mubārak and

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367 S. Stetkevych, "From Jāhiliyyah to Badi‘iyyah," 216.

368 S. Stetkevych, "From Jāhiliyyah to Badi‘iyyah," 222.

Maḥmūd Rizq Saлим, ‘Alī Abū Zayd maintains that Badī‘iyya’s commentators offered more than a commentary; they demonstrated an erudition in Arabic sciences.\textsuperscript{370} As it spanned in seven centuries, Abū Zayd continues, Badī‘iyya and its commentaries and super-commentaries intertwined with literature and literary criticism.\textsuperscript{371}

Once we arrive at Ibn Ma‘ṣūm, we see that Ibn Ḥijja’s Badī‘iyya inspired him; yet he does not seem to concur with the spiritual dramatization of dreaming of the Prophet as a purely faith-oriented impetus for composing the ode. Ibn Ma‘ṣūm narrates that while reading Ibn Ḥijja’s Badī‘iyya, he was suddenly struck by an inspiration that led him to compose a Badī‘iyya on which he later decided to write a commentary.\textsuperscript{372} The unspoken implication of the Badī‘iyya-poem tradition is that it allowed Arab scholars to present their critical and scholarly faculties and weave them into the enduring tradition of literary criticism. In other words, Badī‘iyya and its commentary became the medium through which one expresses his or her knowledge particularly the literary.

Ibn Ma‘ṣūm’s Badī‘iyya work (Anwār al-rabī‘) as his only surviving work to deal with poetry besides his Sulāfa, can serve as a reference for his poetic and critical standards. Therefore, when analyzing the presentation in the Sulāfa’s criticism, one must contextualize it as being in an age where the Badī‘iyyāt reached their zenith.

Bearing that in mind, we now turn to the Sulāfa’s poetics of aesthetics which can be divided into two main sections: one analyzing the way in which Ibn Ma‘ṣūm selects


\textsuperscript{371} Abū Zayd, \textit{al-Badī‘iyyāt}, 248, 217.

\textsuperscript{372} Ibn Ma‘ṣūm, \textit{Anwār al-rabī‘}, 1: 28,
the literary examples i.e., here is primarily poetry, and second how he sometimes analyzes poetry depending on certain criteria.

3.3.7.2. The Selection of Themes and Forms in the Examples of Poetry

Particularly indicative of the Sulāfa’s poetic aesthetics is how Ibn Maʿṣūm chooses certain poetic genres to the exclusion of others. As we already learned from Abū Tammām’s Ḥamāsa and similar works that select literary examples, the act of selection is driven by the literary taste of the compilers/anthologist as well as the aesthetics emergent from the book’s critical remarks. Ibn Maʿṣūm’s intention was to largely avoid what al-Khafājī included of figures and their poetry, except when he feels the necessity to do so.\(^{373}\) This means that duplications of figures or their literary examples may possibly occur. However, this should not come as a surprise, especially since Ibn Maʿṣūm emphatically expresses the Rayḥāna’s importance in fulfilling the task of recording contemporary poetry, and particularly with regard to Egyptian poets. Let us first start with what Ibn Maʿṣūm does not include.

First, colloquial poetry\(^ {374}\) is excluded, except for the Yemeni muwashshah, perhaps due to their unique style. A very interesting example is a story Ibn Maʿṣūm narrates that Ḥātim al-Ahdal al-Ḥusaynī (d. 1013/1604) fell in love with a beautiful girl,

\(^ {373}\) In another occasion, Ibn Maʿṣūm justifies his exclusion of literary examples that al-Khafājī already included. He says: “وأورد صاحب الريحانة شعراً غير هذا لم نثبت منه شيئاً وفاءً بالشرط” (The Rayḥāna’s author included poetry that we have excluded as per [the aforementioned] condition.) See Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 364.

\(^ {374}\) Şafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī in his important work on colloquial poetry speaks of several colloquial poetry, including zajal, mawāliyā, al-kān wa-kān and al-qūma. See Şafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī, al-ʿAṭil al-ḥālī wa al-murakkhhas al-ghālī, ed. Ḥusayn Naṣṣār (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub wa al-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyya, 2003), 2.
but an envious person tried to convince the girl to ignore him. Responding to this love incident, al-Ahdal says in a Yemeni *muwashshaḥ*:

\[
\text{يا وردْ نيسانْ}
\]

**O April’s flower!**

The delight of [the melody] of *dan dān*

Who taught you to violate a covenant?

May he be attacked by a snake

That bites his tongue, O’ slanderer!

Until he is put on grave.

As a sign of *karāma* (sing. of *karāmāt* i.e., miracles of saints), Ibn Maʿṣūm reports that a snake came that night, bit and killed this slanderer. 375 It is important to note that the *Muwashshaḥa* is a poetic genre composed mainly in classical Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) except, often, for the *kharja*. 376 There is also an instance where Ibn Maʿṣūm narrates from his father a poem attributed to a contemporary Bedouin poet from the clan of Shahrān. 377 One would assume that this Bedouin poetry is colloquial, 378 but the two quoted verses are *fuṣḥā*, which means they might be fabricated and attributed to a fictional character. The same applies to non-Arabic poetry of bilingual scholars and poets. In a rare example, Ibn

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376 Hakan Özkan, “Muwashshah,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 12 March 2022 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_40656>

377 Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, 359; The two lines read as follows:

\[
\text{و والله ما الثوب الذي مقتلنَ على شرف تومي الذواري بجانبِهْ}
\]

\[
\text{بأكثرَ مِن قلبي خَفُوقاً وحيَّنا}
\]

\[
\text{جميعَ وخوفٍ من نتاني عواقِبهْ}
\]

378 Al-Ṣuwayyān indicates this Ibn Khaldūn was the first pre-modern scholar to pay attention to this kind of poetry, *al-Ṣahrāʿ al-ʿArabiyya*, 111-34.
Maʿṣūm quotes a prose letter that includes two lines in Persian, but leaves untranslated.\(^{379}\) He does not pay attention to these two lines, but rather, includes them as part of the prose. Other widely colloquial known poetic forms such as mawāliyā, zajal, and others which became widely used in the pre-modern/post-classical period, do not seem to interest Ibn Maʿṣūm at all. One could argue that the idea of chiefly selecting fuṣḥā poetry, not to mention the embrace of classical critical tools signifies his “Arabness,” especially given his stay in a non-Arab land (India).

Unlike his two counterparts al-Muḥibbī and al-Khafājī, Ibn Maʿṣūm does not include examples of mujūn in the sense of explicit references to sex, obscenities, scatology, or explicit rejection of Muslim prescriptions except for what he indicates in his entry on al-Mihtār that we discussed earlier. However, in his Anwār al-rabīʿ in the section on ‘serios jest’ (al-hazl al-murād bih al-jidd),\(^{380}\) he does not shy away from quoting long passages, where obscenity is presented with a language that acquires wordplay and intertextuality with many expressions either in Quran or in Arabic poetry.\(^{381}\) Additionally, he explicitly quotes obscene lines of poetry.\(^{382}\)

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\(^{379}\) Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 80-81.

\(^{380}\) “Advancing one’s purpose in praise or satire by a witty sally or by pleasing facetiousness.” Pierre Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician: Or The Schemer's Skimmer*, vol. 3. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), 68.

\(^{381}\) Ibn Maʿṣūm, Anwār al-rabīʿ, 2: 166-185.

\(^{382}\) See for instance when he includes two lines of poetry by Ibn Sanāʾ al-Mulk (d. 608/1211) as an example of splendid metaphor despite its mujūn:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{يا هذه لا تستحي} & \quad \text{مني قد انكشف المغطى} \\
\text{إن كان كسكك قد تندد} & \quad \text{سأب إن أبي قد تمغطى}
\end{align*}
\]

O’ don’t you feel embarrassed
When Ibn Maʿṣūm says “wa-min naẓmihi” (from among his poetry), we start paying attention to his actual literary taste in choosing poetry. So, what kind of poems to which Ibn Maʿṣūm pays keen attention? I stated earlier that madiḥ occupies a large part of the Sulāfa, especially in poems in praise of Ibn Maʿṣūm’s father to whom many Hijazi scholars and poets traveled seeking his company, influence, and financial support.

Intriguingly, Ibn Maʿṣūm himself, despite serving two patrons, composed no panegyric for neither Quṭb Shāh nor Aurangzeb. He only composed a panegyric poem to Ḥusayn al-Ṣafawī (1139/1726), to whom he also dedicated a book, but both efforts went unappreciated by al-Ṣafawī.383 Beside the poems praising his father, the Sulāfa also brings many example of poets composing panegyrics to notables and politicians, especially in the section of Hijazi poetry.384 Furthermore, as madāʾih nabawīyya (panegyrics to the Prophet) were widely celebrated before the 11th/17th-century and thereafter, the Sulāfa cites some of them.385 The madiḥ nabawī is included since it was widely celebrated by 11th/17th Hijazi poets also to express their feelings of estrangement and the longing for their homeland of Hijaz. As indicated previously, Ibn Maʿṣūm himself composed several madiḥ nabawī poems in which he echoes this very feeling of estrangement and longing from his long-stay residence in India for homeland in Hijaz.

When the concealed is uncovered?
[Well,] if your pussy has yawned
My penis has stretched!


383 Al-Bulayhid, Ghurbat shāʾir wa shiʿr, 64.
384 See for instance Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿasr, 11, 22, 47, 77, 93, 204, 527.
One of the useful ways to investigate the Sulāfa’s selection of poetry is to take an entry and explore how Ibn Maʿṣūm presents the example of its literary productions. For instance, the Sulāfa begins with Ibn Maʿṣūm’s father, and it is replete with literary examples. It starts with an eighty-four-line panegyric ode dedicated to the Deccan Sultan Quṭb Shāh. The ode begins with *nasīb*, then praising the patron, and ends with praising the self. There comes another poem, which Ibn Maʿṣūm describes as “eloquently worded, and showing varieties of meaning and branching into many kinds.”\(^{386}\) Looking closely at the poem, we find that it praises a contemporary poet named ‘Īsā al-Najafī (d. 1084/1673), and it is structured in a recognized way of classical panegyric *qaṣīda*, starting with halting on the abodes, moving to descriptions of journeys and wine, and finally ending with lines in praise of the praised. Of special significance is the section on abodes in which the poet alludes to number of the Hijazi places around which he grew up. As he left his homeland, this poem serves as a medium through which to express longing for the Hijaz that Ibn Maʿṣūm’s father never had the chance to visit again; he eventually died in prison in India. Interestingly, one of the lines in this poem lists Abū Tammām, indicated by his first name Ḥabīb, with great pre and early Islamic poets. It reads as follows:\(^{387}\)

\[\text{وزهيراً وذا القروحِ وجـــلاه} \]
\[\text{وبنظم يصوغُهُ فاق كعباً} \]
\[\text{وحبيباً في الشعر قد فاق كلاً} \]
\[\text{ولبداً والأعشيِن وعمراً وحبيباً في الشعر قد فاق كلاً} \]

By poems he composed, he surpassed Kaʿb, and outshined all:

Zuhayr, Imruʿ al-Qays,

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\(^{387}\) Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, 16.
Labīd, the two Aʿshās, ṬʿAmr, and Ḥabīb.

Naming Abū Tammām as the only Abbasid poet in this list of those preeminent poets implies that Ibn Maʿṣūm’s father considers him one of the great poets, an opinion reaffirmed in the entry of Ḥusayn ibn Shadqam al-Ḥusaynī al-Madanī (d. 1097/1686) of whom Ibn Maʿṣūm speaks as siding with al-Mutanabbī, while his father sides with Abū Tammām.388

Moreover, besides the panegyrics, one finds poems and short poems in zuhd (asceticism), ḥamāsa (valor), nasīb, ghazal, boy ghazal, and poetic forms such as mushajjar.389 One also finds a poetic genre called ijāza (giving the permission to one or more poets to complete or add to the composed verses).390

Moreover, the presentation of poetic genres can sometimes be defined by the biographee’s personal experience. When a poet such as the Meccan poet Aḥmad ibn Masʿūd ibn Abī Numayy (d. 1041/1631) spent many years pursuing a political career in Mecca, it comes as no surprise that he—akin to his forerunner al-Mutanabbī—became a panegyrist to powerful rulers. Ibn Abī Numayy wanted to become a governor of Mecca, but was denied his dream by his cousins. Determined to secure help to defeat his cousins and ultimately gain the rulership of Mecca, he traveled to Yemen and Istanbul. He composed panegyric poems to both the Yemeni Sultan and the Ottoman Sultan seeking help from both, but unfortunately, his two journeys proved a complete failure, especially


389 Mushajjar often refers to “emblematic verse,” written for instance in tree-form. But in Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, it usually refers to “acrostic,” in which the initial letters of the lines spell a name such as Aḥmad and Gharbiyya. See Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 49, 192.

the second. It is reported that when Ibn Masʿūd returned from Anatolia, having failed at his quest, he died suddenly in Syria.³⁹¹ Intriguingly, one is reminded of a similar incident that occurred hundreds of years earlier to one of the great Arab poets of all time, Imruʿ al-Qays, who went to Anatolia and asked the Emperor to help him defeat the Arabs, but died from poison on his way back.³⁹²

Ibn Maʿṣūm’s selection of the of Ibn Abī Numayy ‘s poetry reflects on his political quest. It starts with 5 lines from the panegyric poem to the Yemeni Sultan, to be followed by another panegyric to the Ottoman Sultan cited in full (chapter 4 will expand more on this poem).³⁹³ Ibn Maʿṣūm abruptly changes from poetry to prose of the biographee, which he finds in Tāj al-Dīn al-Mālikī’s tadhkira.³⁹⁴ In it, there are corresponding poetry—usually short lines (short poems)—between al-Mālikī and the biographee, to be followed by a short prose, love poem, several lines added to a famous line (called tadhyīl), two lines in nasīḥ, two lines on a singer, several lines in ʿitāb (admonition) and finally a prelude and three lines from the middle of a unidentified poem.³⁹⁵ From the very beginning of the entry, the poet is presented as politically


³⁹² Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 22; in an incident reminiscent of Imruʿ al-Qays’ tragic and legendary death, it is reported that Ibn Abī Numayy was also killed by a poisonous ring that was given to him by a darwīsh and “[when] Aḥmad b. Numāī [sic] kissed it respectfully, his mouth was filled with a lethal dose of poison.” See Muhammad M. Abahsain, “Aḥmad b. Abī Numaī and his Dīwān: the Precipitable Intertwining of Politics and Poetry in Mecca during the Eleventh Century A. H.,” (PhD dissertation, the University of Utah, 1983), 17.


ambitious in the biographical introduction as well as the first selected examples of his poetry.

To further illustrate, the entry on the Meccan scholar and poet Tāj al-Dīn al-Mālikī shows how Ibn Maʿṣūm frequently arranges poetry as a reflection of his biographee. After introducing al-Mālikī as a leader of the Sunni Mālikī school (madhhab) in the Holy mosque, and after citing some of his prose, he begins the poetry section with themes ranging from a madiḥ nabawī that starts with ascetic lines—instead of love lines—as a transition to praising the Prophet, to an ascetic poem and supplicatory lines (tawassul) to the prophet.396 After that Ibn Maʿṣūm cites a panegyric poem to Mecca’s Sharīf Idrīs ibn al-Ḥasan (d. 1019/1610) after the latter appointed al-Mālikī to become an orator (khaṭīb) in the Holy Mosque.397 Similarly, as a leading figure in Mecca, it seems that al-Mālikī was assumed to partake in any political ceremony by congratulating and praising rulers as is the case with the lengthy panegyric poem that he composed upon the appointment of the Sultan of Mecca and Medina al-Sharīf Muḥsin ibn al-Ḥusayn (d. 1038/1629), and another poem on al-Sharīf Masʿūd ibn Idrīs (d. 1040/1630). The former poems begin with praising lines, while the latter sustains nasīb lines to move to the main praising lines to finally arrive at the meta-poetic lines that praise the poem as incomparable.398 The remaining examples include a poem dating a house built by a

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398 Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfât al-ʿaṣr, 150-154; These meta-poetic lines boasting about the excellence of a poem, which had been widely used by Abbasid poet such as Abū Tammām, al-Buḥturi and others seemed to have been customary too among the Sulāfaʾ’s poets, especially when composing panegyric. A prime example is ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿĪsā ibn Murshid al-ʿUmarīʾs poem in praise of the governor of Mecca al-Sharīf Ḥasan ibn Abī Ṣumîl ibn Barakāt (d. 1010/1601). Towards the end of the poem, the poet begins praising his poem in 14 lines and wraps up the poem by returning to again praise the patron who is expected to appreciate such quality. The first line read:
Meccan leader/chief, short poems on number of motifs including boy ghazal, women’s burka, and flowers as well as an example iqtibās (a type of badīʿ) 399 Ibn Maʿṣūm closes the entry with two interesting short poem that al-Mālikī composed on two violins that belonged to al-Sharīf Masʿūd ibn Idrīs’s singing girl named Zahrā’. It reads as follows:400

وقوله [...] وكتب بها على عنق كمنجة أخرى لسمعة اسمها

زهراء:

وكمجنة قد أغربت آلحائها
وغناها ما قط عنه غناء
فقرر السروال بها كما فرنت به
زهراء طلعة بدرها الغراء
دامت لنا أيامها الزهراء
سُعد لدى إدريس سلطان الورى
أعلى الملوك فهم إذا نسوها إلى
علياهُ كانوا الأرض وهو سماء

His poetry […] these lines were written on a neck of a violin that belongs to a singer named Zahrā’:

There was a violin with strangely good melody,
That we can never do without.
Joy is joined with it as Zahrā’,
the rise of whose moon is beautiful
is joined with it.
A source of contentment for Idrīs, the Sultan of mankind.
May his flowering days last forever.
Among kings, he is supreme so that when

يا سيده السادات دونك مدحة
نفتح بعزف من تلك معطَّر
O the master of the masters!
This is a panegyric poem
From your praise,
it spreads a fragrant smell.


399 Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 155-7; This term means that a poet or a writer quotes an expression from the Qur’an only when it is not given as a quotation. See Ibn Maʿṣūm, Anwār al-rabī’, 2: 217.

they are compared to him,
He is the sky, and they are the earth!

Again, as a scholar and important notable, he was assumed to participate even in entertaining gatherings, where music and probably wine were present, but as this instance conveys, the poet twists this short poem to become—in a witty way—a praise to the patron.

Another useful way is to compare how Ibn Maʿṣūm chooses of examples to a poet’s dīwān (collection of poems). While most of these collections are either lost or in manuscripts and either inaccessible or unedited, there are some scholarly efforts that help paint a picture of the eminent poetic forms in the 11th/17th century. For instance, ʿUmar Mūsā Bāshā, in his study of Arabic literature in Ottoman period, investigates a number of poets and the poetic genres they included in their dīwāns. For instance, the Damascene-Medinan poet Fatḥ Allāh Ibn al-Naḥḥās al-Ḥalabī (d. 1052/1642)—to whom both al-Muḥibbī and Ibn Maʿṣūm give an entry—did not collect his poems; they were collected after he died by number of his friends in Medina in response to a request by a notable. Bāshā, Tārīkh: al-ʿaṣr al-ʿUthmānī, 94-5. Basing his investigation on a manuscript, Bāshā observes that it almost exclusively includes madīḥ, but hastens to add that this genre subsumes love poetry, boast, description, complaint. The dīwān, Bāshā continues, includes forms such as dūbayt and mawāliyā. Bāshā, Tārīkh: al-ʿaṣr al-ʿUthmānī, 96.

What Bāshā highlights from the poet’s dīwān is partly covered in the Sulāfa. Ibn Maʿṣūm’s portrayal of Ibn al-Naḥḥās starts with a 37-line (20 nasīb and 17 madīḥ) poem

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401 Bāshā, Tārīkh: al-ʿaṣr al-ʿUthmānī, 94-5.
in praise of the prince Muḥammad ibn Farrūkh (d. 1048/1639) that begins with these two lines:⁴⁰³

والدجى إن يمض

فكان الشرق باب للدجي

The calmed eyed slept as [my] desire awakes urgently.
The gloom: when darkness goes
another darkness comes.
It is as though the East is a door for the darkness
that, for fear of dawn’s attack, cannot be opened.

After this poem, Ibn Maʿṣūm cites another poem, which apparently is a panegyric
to a notable, but we are not informed of whom al-Naḥḥās praised. As Ibn Maʿṣūm
continues to cite examples, he notifies us that he recently came across Naḥḥās’s dīwān,
which suggests that before this announcement, the cited examples were from his memory
or his notebooks, and what comes after—which is not that much—were excerpts he
selects particularly from the dīwān. The remaining examples vary from madīḥ to nasīb
and love lines—which can also be part of a long madīḥ poem—to self-praise.⁴⁰⁵

Although al-Muḥibbī, unlike Ibn Maʿṣūm, seems to overlook madīḥ poems and
focus rather on their nasīb lines, he presents a more comprehensive entry on al-Naḥḥās

⁴⁰³ Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 277; According to al-Muḥibbī, this poem gained huge popularity
among al-Naḥḥās’s peers. In modern time, its beginning lines of nasīb has been sung by many
singers, especially in the Hijaz as is the case with the renowned Saudi singer Muḥammad ʿAbdu.
See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDLp24DjOio>; See also another version by the late

⁴⁰⁴ This al-Ḥulw’s reading. See al-Muḥibbī, Naḥḥat al-Rayḥāna, 2: 521.

with abundance of examples (around 26 examples) including short poems on opium, description, smoking, and *rubāʿīyyāt* and others. This breadth of examples is due to the fact that al-Muḥibbī pays greater attention to poets from the Levant. However, a more practical reasons lay upon the fact that al-Muḥibbī, unlike Ibn Maʿṣūm, lived between the Levant and Istanbul, and traveled to the Hijaz and Egypt before finishing his *Nafḥa*, which means he was able to incorporate more examples. Also, al-Muḥibbī uses the *Sulāfa* as one of his sources and gives an entry on Ibn Maʿṣūm.407

3.3.7.3. Textual Criticism: Grammar, Lexicon and Text’s Authenticity

Ibn Maʿṣūm’s tendency to verify in the *Sulāfa* the sources of some of the lines of poetry is evident. For instance,ʿAbd al-Raḥman al-Murshidī composed a panegyric poem in praise of the Sharīf Ḥasan ibn Abī Numayy ibn Barakāt (d. 1010/1602). This poem, Ibn Maʿṣūm contends, was believed by his contemporaries to be a contrafaction (*muʿāraḍa*) of Ibn Hāniʾ al-Andalusī’s (d. 362/972) ode.408 After quoting Ibn Hāniʾ ’s ode in its entirety, Ibn Maʿṣūm argues that he found a poem of the *mukhaḍram* poet Ḥassān Ibn Thābit (d. 40/659 or between 50/669 and 54/673), similar in rhyme and meter, and quotes it in full. After quoting all three poems, Ibn Maʿṣūm includes a poem of his own following the same rhyme and meter.409 Not only does this example illuminate Ibn Maʿṣūm’s inclination to determine the base-text of a certain poem, but it also shows the

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409 It is important to note that this poem is not included in the edited *diwān* of Ḥassān Ibn Thābit, The earliest source that indicates it before Ibn Maʿṣūm is al-Nuwayrī’s *Nihāyat al-arab* in which only eleven lines are quoted. See ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Barqūqī, *Sharḥ diwān Ḥassān Ibn Thābit* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Raḥmāniyya, 1929); Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1923), 3: 203.
significance of contrafaction among 11th/17th-century poets, producing layers of intertextuality with earlier and contemporary poetry.\footnote{According to al-Raddādī, Hijazi poets exercised muʿāraḍa widely not only of earlier poems but also of contemporary poetry local and outside. For instance, the Meccan poet Muhammad Ḥaydar al-Ḥusaynī (d. 1138/1725) devotes a large section of his collection of poems on muʿāraḍa poems. See al-Raddādī, al-Shiʿr al-Hijāzī, 2: 703-778, 711.} By quoting the contrafaction by the biographee (al-Murshidi), then the early version of Ibn Hāniʿ al-Andalusī, followed by what he claims the original base-text of Ḥassān Ibn Thābit, and finally back to his own contrafaction of this poetic lineage, the layers of intertextuality come full circle. Through muʿāraḍa, this instance succeeds in drawing a poetic map connecting contemporary poetry with its antecedents, emphasizing the importance of ‘classical’ Arabic poetry as a backdrop against which 11th/17th-century poets frequently competed to outshine one another.\footnote{This reminds us of the modern use of emulation by neo-classical/revivalist poets, yet their choices were not always the same.}

Another example of Ibn Maʿṣūm’s concern for verification is evidenced in the muwashshaḥ Abū al-Faḍl ibn Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād al-Makkī (d. 1030/1620) composed praising a Maghribi king. As the poem reminds Ibn Maʿṣūm of Lisān al-Dīn al-Khatīb’s (d. 776/1374) famous muwashshaḥa, he quotes some of its lines. Feeling immersed in the mood of muwashshaḥ, he begins tracing its origin by stating that Lisān al-Dīn al-Khatīb’s muwashshaḥa was a muʿāraḍa of a poem by Ibn Sahl al-Ishbīlī (d. between 643/1245 and 659/1260), who was the first to compose muwashshaḥ. Ibn Maʿṣūm argues that it was ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muʿāfā al-Qabrī (d. 299/912) whom Ibn ʿAbd Rabih imitated, but as the muwashshaḥ evolved, the success of later poets almost overshadowed the originators. Ibn Maʿṣūm draws attention to the already mentioned
Yemeni *muwashshah*, which despite being colloquial (ʿāmmī), is included in an otherwise collection of formal/classical (fuṣḥā) poetry perhaps due to the paucity.

Correcting, or questioning some references is demonstrated as the case in a poem of Aḥmad al-Ḥasanī (d. unknown) some of whose lines al-Khafājī attributes to Muḥammad al-Hilālī al-Ṣāliḥī al-Dimashqī (d. 1012/1603), but Ibn Maʿṣūm, given the Shiʿa allusions within the poem, believes that it belongs to al-Ḥasanī.\(^{412}\) He says:

\[
فإن كليهما كانا في عصر واحد. وكلا منها لانتحالها جاحد. غير أن فيها أبياتاً لا يقولها إلا فاطمی حسني وذو مقام في الشرف سنی.
\]

They are contemporary and they both denied plagiarizing the poem, although it contains lines that cannot be composed but by a Fāṭimī, a descendent from al-Ḥasan [ibn ʿAlī] and the one whose place in honor is high.

When al-Khafājī rejects in his *Rayḥāna* the use of the word (*zayn*) and considers it improper, Ibn Maʿṣūm challenges al-Khafājī’s conclusion by arguing that this word—which is colloquial—is being used for a rhetorical end. The word *zayn*, which looks like perfectly good Arabic, is used (punningly) for the name of the letter Z as well as for the word *zayn* “ornament” and (colloquially) “nice.” Al-Khafājī apparently thinks that the letter Z is properly called *zāʾ*, not *zayn*. It is actually more often *zāy*. Ibn Maʿṣūm further explains that emphasizing linguistic accuracy destroys the rhetorical/poetical purpose.\(^{413}\) This again serves as a reminder of the importance of *Sulāfa* in correcting and modifying its model, the *Rayḥāna*.

\(^{412}\) *Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, 565.

\(^{413}\) *Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, 289.
3.3.7.4. **Literary/Poetic Comments**

Before we get to this part, I must note that I am using the term ‘literary’ loosely to describe comments that are not concerned with mainly technical comments.

The *Sulāfa*’s presentation of literary terms that describe the brilliance of poets or poetry—both or separately—can be reduced to three major terms that seem to be central in Ibn Maʿṣūm’s poetic aesthetics. These include innovation (*ibtikār*), freedom from contrivance (*ʾan ghayr takalluf*), and harmony/fluidity (*insijām*). Not only did Ibn Maʿṣūm cling to such characteristics, but even his contemporaries such as al-Muḥibbī reiterate these very criteria, which suggests their importance to critics and literary compilers of that time.\(^{414}\) As a result, these terms define Ibn Maʿṣūm’s whole view of what it means to be a great poet; in that, a poet who is portrayed as exemplary must exhibit in his or her poetry several qualities especially those three, which are repeatedly indicated within entries of superior or ideal personalities.

As for the first term, Ibn Maʿṣūm quotes two lines by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Murshidī and calls their motif innovative/original (*mubtakar*). He says:\(^{415}\)

\[
\text{وقوله وهو معنى مبتكر:}
\]

\[
\text{ألا انظر إلى هذا الصفاء لبركة}
\]

\[
\text{لن غبت عن عيني وكذرت مشربي}
\]

---


Also, his [two] verses, which contain an innovative meaning:

O you! gaze at the purity of [that] pond,
that utter[s] to its absent friends:
“If you are away from my sight
and have thus muddied my pure water,
Behold! You’ll find your semblance reflected in my heart.”

It does not take us long to figure out that what Ibn Maʻṣūm finds interesting in this short poem is the use of metaphor. For instance, we see a personification of a pond that speaks and has feeling towards friends with whom it communicates, and whom it blames for absence. Intriguingly, through a conceit of inversion, the absence of its friend, or the departing muddies the water, and the presence returns the pond back to its purity.

Another example of innovation is found in the following short poem by Tāj al-Dīn al-Mālikī:416

وقوله في البرقع الشرقي المعروف بالحجاز وهو أول من ابتكر هذا المعنى:
بدا البرقع الشرقي كالشفق الذي على فرقه لاح الهلال بلا فرق
وأبدى عجباً من عجيب لأنه أرانا هلال الأفق يبدو من الشرق

He says describing the Eastern Burka‘ (women’s veil) known in Hijaz, a meaning which he is the first to come up with:

The Eastern Burka looks like a twilight,
Upon whose head the crescent moon appears clearly,
It shows us a most amazing sight:
Seeing the crescent moon appearing from East.

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416 Ibn Maʻṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʻaṣr, 157; al-Raddādī, al-Shi’r al-Hijāzī, 2: 802-3
In this example, the poet, contrasting dark with light in the face of a women behind veil, uses an intense simile of a twilight that has a crescent moon. To him, this is an astonishing moment. It renders possible the impossible, blending two opposites. Ibn Maʿṣūm, however, does not explain why he finds it innovative.

Ibn Maʿṣūm describe Shihāb al-Dīn al-Murshidī’s poetry as *badīʿ* (splendid) quoting a 50-line poem in praise of the Meccan governor Masʿūd ibn Idrīs. According to him, this poem gained popularity among many contemporary poets, who competed to compose a contrafaction of it. The poem beings as follows:417

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واستوقفا العيس لا يحدو بها الحادي
وعرجا بي على ربع صحبته به
شرخ الشبيبة في أكناف أجياد
إبن التعقل يشفى غلة الصادي
وسائلا عن فؤادي تبغا أملي
يقدر الله إسعافي وإس
ـعادي
واستشفعا تُشفعا تسآلكم
ـفعسى
في سوح مُردي الأعادي الضيغم العادي
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Stop at the right side of the valley, and make the reddish-white camels stop before caravan leader starts to sing.

And stope over an abode on whose soil I grew up in the fold of Ajyād.

And ask about my heart and you will fulfill my hope for a second drink quenches the burning thirst.

And intercede for me and you will receive intercession, for maybe Allāh destines to help and fill me with luck.

And behave decently to me, then descend from your camels, to arrive at the place of the wide-mouthed lion, the attacker, who destroys enemies.

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Later on, Ibn Maʿṣūm quotes four lines of the same poet and calls it *bādiʿ* (splendid):\(^418\)

ومن بديع نظمه ما كتبه في ديوان قصر ابن عقبه [...] وهي قصيدة

قصر ابن عقبة لا يحضرني الآن منها إلا قوله:

مني إليك التحايا نسمة السحر
ولا عدتك غوادي السحب تسحب في رحابك الفيح دليل الظل والمطر
يوماً وأرغمت أنف الشمس والقمر
أطراف أخبار أهل الكتب والسير

One of his splendid “*bādiʿ*” poems is what he wrote describing Ibn ʿUqba’s castle […] And it is a distinctive poem of which I only recall the following lines:

O castle of Ibn ʿUqba, may my greeting to you last
as long as the dawn breeze blows,
And may the morning clouds never cease to draw over your fragrant expanses the trains of shadow and rain.

How many a delight's desire did I, one day, fulfill in you,
In defiance of the Sun and Moon?

And how many friends of mine have conversed with me
On the choicest reports from the men of books and biographies?

Splendidness here can be understood as an interaction with this place that reminds the poet of a nostalgic past, a motif frequently used in classical *nasīb*; yet the poet here adds another aspect of that past; that is, the joyful intellectual interaction with companions as demonstrated in the fourth line.

The question, then, is what does he mean by *bādiʿ* in these two cases? Is it the rhetorical term, or is it just a an adjective to express the quality of a certain poem or poetic technique. Obviously, in the latter, it means splendid, and it has been used as such

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throughout the *Sulāfa* and his other books. However, a more coherent allusion to the rhetoric term *al-badī‘* is demonstrated in the use of the technical terms, such as *tawriya* (double entendre), *tawjīḥ* (having two faces/opposite of meaning), and so on, which are used for specific rhetorical purposes. For example, Ibn Ma‘ṣūm cites a poem as having many kinds of *badī‘*, but he does not specify them, which means that one has to extract them.

The first two examples use the past participle (ism *maʃ‘ul*) *mubtakar*, which is derived from the noun *ibtikār*, which literally means coming up with something new. But how does it differ from related terms, such as *ibdā‘* and *ikhtirā‘*? When examining Ibn Ma‘ṣūm’s work on Arabic rhetoric, one finds that the term *mubtakar*/*ibtikār* to be synonymous with other commonly used terms i.e., *ibdā‘* and *ikhtirā‘*. Ibn Ma‘ṣūm defines something similar to *ikhtirā‘* and calls it—following earlier scholars—the ‘soundness of innovation’ (*salāmat al-ikhtirā‘*). He defines it as the following:

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421 The deceptive series in Cachia’s *The Arch Rhetorician*. For instance, the poet would be using the word “*maʃ‘un*” to refer to either the al-Ma‘ṣūm (d. 208/833), the Abbasid caliph or the adjective *maʃ‘un* (trustworthy), or rather to play with the mind of the reader, having applied this ambiguity to cause “poetical” charm. See Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician*, 44-5; Ibn Ma‘ṣūm, *Anwār al-rabī‘*, 3: 143-78.
This kind [of badīʿ] means that an individual poet innovates an unprecedented meaning/motif. Some [scholars] called it ibdāʿ, which is a name that accurately applies to the named, except that the scholars of badīʿ agreed upon defining ibdāʿ as coming up with several kinds of badīʿ in each line or section.

When Ibn Maʿṣūm speaks of a motif or meaning as mubtakar, he alludes to the other two terms that are defined mainly as creating something new. Even if novelty was not largely an option, since many of the poetic motifs had been already reached by earlier poets, Ibn Maʿṣūm still holds—albeit rarely—that some poets can still come up with new motif. As he defines the term, he provides examples mostly from Abbasid poets such Ibn al-Rūmī (d. 276/889), al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/965) but also includes example from his contemporary such as his teacher al-Shāmī, Sharaf al-Dīn Ḥasanī and himself.425

According to Mājid al-Sulamī, Ibn Maʿṣūm’s definition is no different from earlier scholars of badīʿyyāt.426

In the tradition of Arabic literary criticism, we find literary critics such as Ibn Rashīq differentiating between ibdāʿ and ikhtirāʿ, considering the former a new twist to a previously used motif, while the latter tends to create a new motif or images from scratch. Ibn Rashīq elaborates:427

الفرق بين الاختراع والإبداع وإن كان معناهما في العربية واحداً—أن الاختراع خلق للمعاني التي لم يسبق إليها، والإبداع بما لم يكن منها قط، والإبداع إتيان الشاعر باللفظ المستطرف الذي لم تجر العادة بمثله، ثم لزم هذه التسمية حتى قبل له بديع وإن كثر ونكر فصار الاختراع للمعنى والإبداع للفظ.

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426 Al-Sulamī, al-Baḥth al-balāghī, 314-16
Despite having the same meaning in Arabic, the difference between *ikhtirāʿ* (invention) and *ibdāʿ* (innovation) is that the former means coming up with [new] motifs that [no one] came up with, while the latter is when a poet composed an interesting expression unconventionally. Such epithet became affiliated with it until it became called *badīʿ* even if it increases and recurs. Novelty then became attached to meaning/motif, and splendidness became attached to the word.

When Maʿṣūm uses the term “*badīʿ*” as an adjective he follows Ibn Rashīq.

On the issue of freedom from contrivance (ʿ*an ghayr takalluf*), which Ibn Maʿṣūm frequently reiterates for the general appraisal of poets or their poetry, let us read the following example, where he comments on the poetic talent of the Meccan poet Muḥammad ibn Saʿīd Bāqushayr (d. 1077/1666) in terms of composing in a manner free of contrivance, and concludes:

\[\text{كل ذلك عن غير تكلف نحو وعروض بل عن قريحة تذلل له جوامع الكلم وتروض فجاء نظمه السهل الممتنع.}\]

[He did] all that [naturally] without contrivance in grammar and prosody. Instead, his natural poetic gift (*qarīḥa*) subdues and trains the combinations of speech so that his poetry composition seems easy but is hard to emulate.

To illustrate, Ibn Maʿṣūm cites 24-line in which the poet starts with love lines then transitions to praise the poet Aḥmad ibn Masʿūd. The first few lines read:

\[\text{عليقاً أظرنيك بالطيباء الرود أمه وهاً بهوي الطباء الغيد}
\text{أسيلن ألمثلة الغذاف غداً سوداً تطول على الليالي السود}
\text{وسفرنا عما لو لطمن ب مثله خد الظلام لما بدا بالبيت}\]

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I think you are enamored of the delicate gazelles
Or distracted by the tender gazelles?
They let hang loose their tresses,
blacker than crows,
longer than night.
When they unveil they reveal faces [so radiant]
That if they slapped the cheek of darkness with one like it,
The deserts would never turn dark,
White, reeling from the [fragrance] of basil on the East
Wind,
Straying like the tender branches of the Moringa tree.

As one scholar has argued that the meter al-Kāmil tends to be more soft and delicate if used in a ghazal lines, Bāqushayr’s lines can be a good example. Especially relevant to the smoothness of a poem is its rhyme, which is here the letter “D,” one of the docile/easy to use (dhulul) rhymes. More significant are the incorporated metaphors of girls, whose bright faces shine over a world that seems as if “deserts would never turn dark.” Only in desert does darkness overwhelm the spacious and wide horizon, but the beautiful and bright faces of those girls would nonetheless prevail. Despite the recurring themes of girls like gazelle or the zephyrs, these lines go in tandem with what Ibn Ma’ṣūm describes as smooth and free from contrivance.

Pertinently, one of the most striking comments is the one concerning the widely celebrated new rhetorical devices in the post-classical period: chronogram (tārīkh/taʾrīkh shīʾrī)—which, to our modern Arabic taste, epitomizes the stagnation of post-classical

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431 Al-Ṭayyib, al-Murshid, 1: 44.
432 Tārīkh/taʾrīkh shīʾrī is a rhetorical device that poets used to date certain events, including a disaster, celebration, finishing a book or a poem, and the like. It uses the ancient alphabetical order (abjad). A poet must use words that hint at taʾrīkh, such as qultu muʾarrikhān (I said dating
Arabic literature. Despite being very brief, Ibn Maʿṣūm’s criticism might be one of a few post-classical examples speaking against the overuse of chronograms.\(^\text{433}\) He declares:\(^\text{434}\)

وإني أوجه إلى التكلف التزام التاريخ. وهذا النمط اعتناني به المتأخرون فنجفوا في غير ضرم. واستسمنوا ذا ورم. والسلاسة والانسجام غير هذا.

What compelled him to such contrivance was his obsession with chronogram. This [poetic genre] was widely celebrated by later [poets]. Yet, what they blew on was not fire, and what they thought was fatty meat was rather swollen [diseased]. This is not smoothness and fluency.

The expression “nafakh fī ghayr daram…etc.” is not only indicative of Ibn Maʿṣūm’s irritation of the overuse of the chronogram, but also of the disagreement of his contemporaries’ celebration of a poetic genre that to his taste was acceptable, but not poetically ingenious.\(^\text{435}\) Ibn Maʿṣūm proclaims that the chronogram is overrated, although he still quotes some examples of it.

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\(^{433}\) In an another occasion, Ibn Maʿṣūm criticizes the overuse of al-jināṣ al-mulaffaq (bi-conjunct paronomasia) since al-Thaʿālibī’s Yatīma and particularly accusing al-Ṣafādī for overusing it. See Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 446.

\(^{434}\) Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 188.

\(^{435}\) Al-Raddādī argues that what Ibn Maʿṣūm protests of contrived chronograms is very rare, and that most of the sources he consulted include only these two examples. He adds that upon reading their poetry (Hijazi poets), it seems that they only enjoyed this chronogram among themselves, which means that only elite were occupied with it, and it was never their intention to spread it among the larger domain of adab recipients. al-Raddādī, al-Shiʿr al-Ḥijāzī, 2: 695.
Along with freedom from contrivance is the term *insijām*, which Ibn Maʿṣūm repeatedly uses and applies specifically to poetry, rather than to the poet, or to both.\(^{436}\) However, Ibn Maʿṣūm does explain what he means by the examples he calls as having *insijām*. For example, in speaking about *insijām* in a poem, he says:\(^{437}\)

> وما أحسن قوله في كتابه المذكور مؤرخا عام تمامه وهو في غاية الانسجام.

How beautiful his verse is when [he] composed a chronogram dating the completion of his abovementioned work; it flows beautifully.

The allusion to dates is in the last line when the poet says:\(^{438}\)

> وسائر الأتباع والأصحاب مؤرخا فقد انتهى كتابي

[...] and all other followers and companions,
My book has ended, and I date that.

Another example is the lengthy D-rhymed *rajaz* poem by Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Baḥrānī in praise of Ibn Maʿṣūm’s father. It reads as follows:\(^{439}\)

> أحمد من صعد كعب أحمد بالعلم والفضل وطيب المحتد
وذروة المجد وهم السؤد وهمة تدوس فوق الفرقـد

Aḥmad is he who walks in the footsteps of Aḥmad (the Prophet),
In knowledge, virtue, and noble descent,
And the highest glory, and peak of sovereignty,
And an ambition that tramples on
the head of the two bright stars of Ursa Minor.

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\(^{436}\) Non-contrivance and vice versa can be ascribed to both the poet and his or her poetry.


The term harmony is not new, for it dates back as far as Usāma ibn Munqidh (d. 584/1095), and it occupies a favorable spot in both Ibn Ḥijja’s *Khizānat al-adab* and Ibn Maʿṣūm’s *Anwār al-rabī’* ⁴⁴⁰. In his *Balāgha* work *Anwār al-rabī’*, Ibn Maʿṣūm defines *insijām* as:⁴⁴¹

الانسجام في اللغة الانصباب. وفي الاصطلاح أن يكون الكلام عذب الألفاظ، سهل التركيب، حسن السبك، خالياً من التكلف والعقادة، يكاد يسيل من رقته ويحدد انحدار الماء في انسجامه، لا يُتكلف فيه بشيء من أنواع البديع إلا ما جاء عفواً من غير قصد. وإذا قوي الانسجام في النثر جاءت فقراته من غير قصد، كما وقع في كثير من آيات القرآن العظيم، حتى وقع فيه من جميع البحور المشهور أبيات، وأشعار أبوات.

Etymologically, harmony means [water] flowing. In rhetorical terminology, it is defined as a speech that has sweet wording, easy structure, beautiful form, and is free from contrivance and complexity to the point that because of its delicacy, it descends fluidly like water. None of the *badī’*’s types are permitted unless they come naturally/spontaneously. When *insijām* comes stronger in prose, its parts come naturally as the case with many of the Qur’anic verses coinciding with well-known meters [of poetry] in either complete line or half line of poetry.

After Ibn Maʿṣūm provides several pages of examples, where Qur’anic verses happen to correspond with poetry meters, including *dūbayt* and *mawāliyā*, he turns to poetry. To him, poetry examples of *insijām* are limitless, but he spends about 190 pages providing instance of poetry from Imru’ al-Qays, Ḥassān ibn Thābit, Jamīl Buthayna (d. 82/701), al-Mutanabbi, Ibn Zurayq al-Baghdādī (d. 420/1029) and many poets including his

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⁴⁴⁰ Van Gelder, "Poetry for Easy Listening.” 33.
contemporaries such as his teacher Maḥmūd al-Shāmī, Abū al-Ṭayyib Badr al-Ghazzi, Muḥammad Bāqushayr and others. Not only does he include excerpts of one or two lines, but he sometimes includes a large portion or an entire poem as an example of *insijām,* and sometimes calls them as *gharīb* (astonishing), *badīʿ* (splendid), *muṭrib* (moving) and *muraqqis* (lit., makes one dance). *Insijām* also means high-ranking and naturally-composed poetry. Interestingly, many of the examples of his contemporaries are mentioned in the *Sulāfa* without describing them as *insijām.*⁴⁴² For example, a poem by the Meccan poet Muḥammad Bāqushayr is cited both in his *Anwār al-rabīʿ* and the *Sulāfa,* but only in the former does Ibn Maʿṣūm describe it as having *insijām:*⁴⁴³

Are what I see pearls? Or wine foams?  
Or chamomiles? Indeed they are sweet teeth.  
Forbidden though permissible, and from the palm pollen,  
It pours honey!  
The gleam of those dark red lips didn’t know that  
because of them, my heart is burning!

Reading these lines gives us a hint of how Ibn Maʿṣūm sees *insijām.* In broad terms, the concept can be defined as the antithesis of contrivance, and it is similar or derived from terms such as *suhūla,* *riqqa,* *salāsa,* and water (*māʾiyya*) as we see in major Arabic

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In fact, Ibn Maʿṣūm indicates that some scholars of eloquence categorize *suhūla* (ease), which he calls *tashīl*, as part of *insijām*.

*Insijām* amounts to the ability to compose poetry naturally, and while “many of the poems that show *insijām* do not seem to tax the listener, just as some music is meant to be relaxing and reassuring […]” But this is not necessary, and it does not apply to all examples of *insijām* as “many other poems that, though easy to listen to, hide deeper layers of meaning and thought for those listeners who make an effort.”

Ibn Maʿṣūm's definition here is not different from earlier scholars. What Ibn Maʿṣūm adds, however, is providing many examples of it to produce the lengthiest entry on *insijām*, even surpassing Ibn Ḥiṭṭa. Such additions seem excessive to Mājid al-Sulamī only due to competition to outdo his predecessor Ibn Ḥiṭṭa. But more revealing is the fact that as *insijām* is dear to Ibn Maʿṣūm, he not only includes it but cites many examples, including—as previously noted—one line to an entire poem from many great Arab poets from pre-Islam until his time.

Within the larger context of the *Sulāfa*, the terms innovation (*ibtikār*), freedom from contrivance, and harmony/fluidity (*insijām*) are evoked when Ibn Maʿṣūm deems certain poets superior to other poets. A prime example is the entry on Ibn Maʿṣūm’s teacher Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd ibn Yūsuf al-Shāmī al-ʿĀmilī. Having cherished his teacher, Ibn Maʿṣūm elevates him to the point of impeccability to pronounce:

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When he utters, he arrests meanings from nearby. Even the deaf hear his words. Strung pearls are nothing but the strung jewels of his speech, and the mighty magic is nothing but what his magical pens spit out. I swear I never heard of excellent poetry after Mihyār’s and al-Raḍī’s better than his shining and bright poetry! When delicacy is mentioned, he is its slave market. Or eloquence is mentioned, he is its ravine worn by torrent. Or if harmony is mentioned, he is its generous rain. Or if smoothness is mentioned; he is the road that Abu al-Ṭayyib (al-Mutanabbī) shunned.

As we can see, the major qualities that bestow upon the biographee this poetic mastery are delicacy/elegance (rīqqa), eloquence/purity of style (jazāla), fluidity (insijām), and smoothness/softness (suhūla). Similarly, the idea of situating al-ʿĀmilī with major poets such as Mihyār al-Daylamī (d. 428/1037) and al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1016), whom Ibn Maʿṣūm thinks as possessing such qualities as opposed to al-Mutanabbī. Here Ibn Maʿṣūm illustrates his biographees’ literary excellence within a larger domain of Arabic poetry, especially Abbasid poetry whose poetic tradition even after many centuries was still looked upon as the model.

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450 The use of “rīqqa” (slavery) here is used as a pun with a close word “rīqqa” (delicacy).

451 Criticizing al-Mutanabbī for complexity and obscurity dates back to the quarrel of those siding with al-Mutanabbī and those against him. For instance see Yūsuf Khulayf, Fī al-shīʿr al-ʿAbbāsī: nahw madhhab jadīd (Cairo: Dār Gharīb, n.d.), 140.
Not only does the poetic tradition take center stage in the *Sulāfa*, but also in the critical tradition, such as the qualities mentioned above, as well as some recognized critical points, like the dichotomy between urban and Bedouin poetry.\(^\text{452}\)

Equally important is the presentation less skilled poet. For instance, Ibn Maʿṣūm deems contrived and unacceptable the poetry of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Haykālī.\(^\text{453}\) Another example is the entry on the poet ʿĪsā al-Najafī, where Ibn Maʿṣūm says:\(^\text{454}\)

 أحمد من عانى الشعر والنظم [...] وله أشعار لم يعن بتنقيحها.

One of those who struggled in composing poetry and verse [...] He has poetry that he did not bother to revise.

Here we find the flaws of a substandard poet: inability to create poetry that seems effortless and spontaneous, and more importantly, the lack of revision and edition.

Interestingly, earlier, he quotes one of his father’s poems in praise of this particular figure, especially for his poetic talent. What Ibn Maʿṣūm’s father praises al-Najafī as an impeccable poet is only in poetry, and obviously Ibn Maʿṣūm disagrees with that in his entry of al-Najafī. Secondly, it is a way to contrast great poets with less skilled ones so the reader distinguishes between the different levels of poets, one succeeding and one failing. Thirdly, it is to argue that while others hold a certain poet him in high regard, he does not.

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\(^{452}\) “I have come across one of his writing that seems to combine the purity of Bedouin expression with the delicacy of urban expression.” Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿāṣr*, 361.


\(^{454}\) Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿāṣr*, 559.
When a poem conveys something that Ibn Maʿṣūm finds strange, he attempts to explain. For example, after citing a poem by Muḥammad Saʿīd Bāqushayr (d. 1077/1660), he calls it strange (gharība), and says that it is composed in the manner of *arbāb al-ḥāl*.

The poem begins as follows:

ربما عاكفٍ على الخندريس رافلٍ في ملابسِ التلبيس
جهذدٌ يملأ الدفاترَ عِلماً لم يَنَلْ بالتهقريرِ والتدريس

Perhaps he who busily engages with a mellowed wine,
And strutting in robes of confusion,
is [actually] a great scholar,
who fills notebooks with knowledge,
That has never been acquired by approval nor studying.

The rest of the lines Ibn Maʿṣūm quotes after these two lines reveal the same playfulness of words and expressions that do not make sense because of their twofold implications.

Yet, we know that they are composed in the manner of *arbāb al-ḥāl*, Sufis, who are capable of understanding latent meaning of wordings. Ibn Maʿṣūm does not seem to fully understand these lines. All he does is to quote a story from al-ʿĀmilī’s *Kashkūl* that is supposed to describe the double meanings of these lines. He says:

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With this story in mind, the meaning of the poem's beginning begins to reveal a combination of praise and criticism. The reason for pointing this out is that I was once asked about its meaning, and recently this occurred to me so I wrote this answer. Allāh is He who enlighten us about the truth.

The Sulāfa tends to provide literary examples with generalized comments—laudatory or otherwise and Ibn Maʿṣūm does not frequently analyze poetry in detail. However, there is an instance where Ibn Maʿṣūm analyzes a poem widely celebrated among his contemporaries. According to al-Raddādī, negative comments can provide a clearer picture of a set of poetic values amongst 11th/17th-century Arabic scholars and critics in their views of what constituted excellent poetry. For example, on the poet Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ansī (or al-Unsī) al-Yamanī (d. unknown) Ibn Maʿṣūm states:

A poet who has a good knowledge of literature. Regardless, he sometimes succeeds and sometimes fails [...] But the structure of [this poem] is awkward and its motifs vary in quality. As they say, it is [like] a pearl sitting next to baked brick, and a prostitute setting next to a free woman.

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458 Al-Raddādī, *al-Shiʿr al-Ḥijāzī*, 2: 697
Although one cannot ignore Ibn Maʿṣūm’s harsh tone, this instance is still valuable in conveying the way in which he usually analyzes poetry. First, he starts out by generally evaluating the biographee’s poetry, then starts detailing the flaws, including a weak line of poetry, a grammatical error in the verse’s second hemistich, a distasteful simile, a *sinād*, an instance of plagiarism detected in one verse that the poet failed to attribute to its original poet, and finally, criticizing the use of a motif that, despite being interesting, still lacks a proper poetic structure. After analyzing the points he found in the poem, Ibn Maʿṣūm justifies this examination by stating:

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460 Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿāsr*, 462

461 Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿāsr*, 463; Al-Muḥibbī reassesses this line, which reads as: "و والله ما مكرِ العدوِه كمكرهِ/ولكن مكراً صاغهُ فهو المكرُ (By God, not even the enemy reaches her deception/Indeed what she crafted is the deception), and argues that the only defect is the repetition of the word “makr,” but its meaning is in fact accurate. When the poet, al-Muḥibbī argues, makes the “time” as his enemy, he attributes to it the deception (*makr*), an attribution logically characteristic of an enemy. See al-Muḥibbī, *Naḥfat al-Ryhānā*, 3: 591.

462 The poet says: "فتلك الرياض الباسماتُ كأن في/عواتقها من سندس حللٌ خضرُ (making the ism of *kaʾanna* nominative (*marfūʿ*) where it is supposed to be accusative (*manṣūb*) as Ibn Maʿṣūm rightly argues. See Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿāsr*, 463.

463 The poet says: "إذا سحبت أذيالها خلت حية/إلى الماء تسعى ما لأخمصها أثرُ (When she walks arrogantly/One thinks as if a snake--whose foot is untraceable--walks to water), but Ibn Maʿṣūm does not explain why this simile is ugly or distasteful. It seems that what he rejects is the snake’s connotation, whereas the poet here is attempting to speak in a manner of *ghazal*. However, the simile can also be interpreted that the poet here is describing the danger of her walk! See Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿāsr*, 463.


466 Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿāsr*, 464; The lines read as follows: "على الناي والعود الرخيم وقهوة/يذكرها ديننا لأكاد منا العصرُ/فقتثن من ألبينا ورؤوسنا/فلن در هذ ذاك الهدى أم السكرُ (On the lute and the rich oud and coffee/He will remember that for us/Axil to Albinia and our heads/Then, will the path of guidance be or the sugar?"

I have elaborated the previous points because some contemporaries consider it of the highest class of poetry.

After giving a general evaluation of the poem as being of uneven quality, the points by which he criticizes this celebrated poem are technical. Basing his critique on technical and literary issues is necessary for exposing the poem’s deficiencies. It elucidates the centrality of this type of criticism in the Arabic tradition, as it also shows the quest of 11th/17th-century scholars to adhering to the established critical standards of the purest and proper use of language.

As such points are mostly technical and literary, Ibn Maṣūm seldom speaks of poetry in regard to its religious or doctrinal connotation. In the tradition of Arabic literary criticism, scholars discussed ethical issues regarding the poet or poetry, and most of the time, they defended the poet and poetry unless they have apparent religiously-unacceptable lines of poetry, especially in relation to something doctrinal, while topics of wine or obscenity were somehow tolerated. Ibn Maṣūm—having absorbed that—accepts lines on wine or boy ghazal, and rarely pays attention to religiously controversial poetry, but if he does, he leaves it for a reader to decide. For instance, in his entry on the originally-Tunisian Levantine poet Abū al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ab al-Salām, he holds:

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468 On the issue of ethic in poetry see Iḥsān ʿAbbās, Tārīkh al-naqd al-adabī, 669-70.

469 Ibn Maṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 389; Ibn Maṣūm does not mention the date of death of this biographee. I came across a similar name with a slight change of the biographee’s father’s name; ʿAhmad instead of Muḥammad. However, this figure died in 975/1567, in the 10th century unlike the majority of the Sulāfa’s figure who belong to the 11th century. See al-Ḥasan Muḥammad al-
I have come across two of his verses, whose beautiful rhetoric flows like a rain except it might imply “the oneness of being.” Only Allah knows the reality of his inner belief, and it is He who knows the secret of his servants. The two verses are:

As light reflects on mirror,  
and echo repeats voices,  
People realized that, in this existence,  
there is none but the precondition of self’s matters!

Here he acknowledges the rhetorical beauty of the two verses as something distinct from the religious implication they might convey. However, even if they can be understood as religiously unacceptable, their beauty is not denied, the reason being—as Ibn Ma’ṣūm elucidates—that it is not the job of a human—and here the critic—to discern what is hidden people’s heart. This is an important statement that allows us to understand Ibn Ma’ṣūm’s stance on this very issue.

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470 As I am not quite sure of what it means, I checked out the MS and found the ism maf’ūl “muqtaḍā” so I translated it accordingly. See Berlin MS 336a.


472 Ibn Ma’ṣūm in another passage defends Dāwūd al-Anṭākī (1007 or 1008/1598 or 1599) claiming that due to jealousy, he was accused of blasphemy. See Ibn Ma’ṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 420; In an another occasion, he says “Allah knows his inner belief” وَالله أعلم بسريرته. See Ibn Ma’ṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 573; The Medinan poet Muḥammad Kabrīt al-Madanī was also a subject.
In spite of the abundance of prose selections, Ibn Maʿṣūm exhibits no interest in critically evaluating prose, especially since the book claims to be on poets; all we know are indications of eloquent orators such as Quss ibn Sāʿida (d. 22 before AH/600) and Saḥbān Wāʿil (d. 54/674) that Ibn Maʿṣūm uses as models—following many authors before him—of superior eloquence. Still, there is a noteworthy instance that emphasizes the influence of the Abbasid great prose writer Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim al-Ḥārīrī (d. 464/1054) that reads as follows:

ولما سمع بعض قول السلف من حفظ مقامات الحريري نظم ونثر ما أراد. وبلغ من فنون البلاغة المراد. حفظها عن ظهر قلبه حفظا. فحسن إنشاؤه

When he (the biographee) heard of some of his predecessors’ statement that whoever memorizes al-Ḥārīrī’s Maqāmāt will compose poetry and prose whenever he wants, and will reach the goal of the sciences of eloquence, he memorized it by heart. [Consequently], his writing improved.

of accusations of blasphemy. Ibn Maʿṣūm despite deeming him high in terms of poetic talent says “ونقل عنه فلتات أشعرت بإلحاده” (suspicious words are attributed to him that might suggest his heresy). Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 257: According to al-Raddādī, Ibn Maʿṣūm was the first to accuse Kabrīt, providing no evidence. See Kabrīt, al-Jawāhir al-thamīna, 20-23.


475 Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 410, 547.
Again, this passage conveys the ongoing influence of al-Ḥarīrī even in this later age. It also confirms the significance of Abbasid literature as a model, a classic—if it is appropriate to use such a term—not only of poetry but also of prose.

3.4. Conclusion

In the previous pages, before discussing the Sulāfa, I briefly introduced Ibn Maʿṣūm as an important scholar in the 11th/17th century. Moving on from that, I discussed the importance of the Sulāfa as representative of the 11th/17th-century biographical anthologies, its title, introduction, sources, and structure. Almost half of this chapter is devoted to the section on the poetic aesthetics of the Sulāfa. As the book provides mainly literary examples, I have tried to look at lengthy entries to see how Ibn Maʿṣūm chooses poetics examples, and what poetic genres he usually includes. Of particular interest to the Sulāfa are the classical poetic themes such as panegyric, ghazal and so on that occupy the most part with lesser yet present inclusion of post-classical/pre-modern forms such as ṭārīkh shiʿrī, short poems, ijāza and so on. Prose selections are included with no critical comments, which amounts to a total absence of any criticism with regards to prose. Colloquial poetry is excluded except for a few instances. I concluded that although the book does not fully reveal the criteria employed for selecting literary examples, and since it does not claim to be a book of literary criticism, one might find aspects indicative of Ibn Maʿṣūm’s literary taste. Even though the geographical division is significant, as we learn from authors such as al-Thaʿālibī, Ibn Maʿṣūm does not explain why he begins with Hijazi poets, but after all he himself was from Hijaz thus including it as the first

476 One of the interesting example of the importance of al-Ḥarīrī’s Maqāmāt is the poem by Maḥmūd al-Mujtahid (d. 1067/1656), which he used to emulate (contrafact) lines of poetry in the maqāma 84. See al-Muḥibbī, Naḥbat al-Rayhāna, 1: 369-370.
section is reasonable. I have also illustrated that one of the useful ways for extracting the
critical and aesthetics criteria is to delve into the entries themselves, where Ibn Maʿṣūm
often comments or assesses certain poets or their poetry. Given the richness of Ibn
Maʿṣūm’s scholarship, his other works can be of great use in enhancing our
understanding of his overall critical position. While some works are not extant, there are
others which survived, such as his well-known Balāgha work Anwār al-rabīʿī fī anwāʿ al-
bāḍī‘, where he comments on his bāḍīʿiya poem, that can provide us with detailed
explanations on terms that are directly related to poetry. Looking thoroughly at how he
presents certain poets or their poetry, particularly when assessing poetry examples, can be
of essential to determining the author’s literary taste and his book’s poetics. To
accomplish this, I have divided the ‘selected’ comments into two broad categories:
technical and literary comments. Of course, some comments can be assigned to both
categories, but I chose to avoid them. I have also paid attention to Ibn Maʿṣūm’s taste and
his critical conceptualization of excellent and imperfect or weak poetry, for it gives us a
better understanding of the method he employs in the Sulāfa. One of the points I arrived
at is when a poet achieves innovative motifs, freedom from contrivance, and harmony, he
or she will achieve poetic excellence. Here not only does Ibn Maʿṣūm admire and
celebrate such poets as exceptional, but also present them in a way that allows us uncover
one Sulāfa’s poetic aesthetics.
Chapter Four: The Sulāfa’s Poetry: Two Poems as Examples

Throughout the Sulāfa, Ibn Maʾṣūm cites numerous poetic examples that to his taste are exemplary for they, inter alia, achieve qualities of innovation, freedom from contrivance, harmony, and the like. Because the tradition of books on tarājm al-shuʿarāʾ “biographical anthologies” claims to select the best poetic examples of the best poets in wide-ranging themes, it is difficult to assume one example as representative, especially since Ibn Maʾṣūm wrote his book over about a 9-year span.477 His taste might possibly have developed and changed. One useful way for arriving at Ibn Maʾṣūm’s taste is to select examples of poets he praises highly and delve into them, not only by themselves, but also within the context of their entries. I have shown earlier that poets such as Ibn Maʾṣūm’s father are represented as excellent poets, with examples ranging from classical and pre-modern/post-classical themes, and show the qualities of fluidity, freedom of contrivance, and so on. To that end, I have chosen two poems that can be considered representative of Ibn Maʾṣūm’s taste. The first is Aḥmad ibn Masʿūd ibn Abī Numayy’s (d. 1041/1631) panegyric, which he composed for the Ottoman Sultan, Murād IV (d. 1050/1640), whose help he sought to defeat his cousin and take over Mecca. In it, mādīḥ (panegyric) and the employment of classical themes such as nasīb, wine description, as well as rhetorical devices, are evident. The second one is Abū al-Baḥr Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭī al-Baḥrānī’s (d. 1028/1619) poem that narrates an incident of a fish that attacked him during a trip in the sea. It represents a unique way of approaching a theme of the hijāʾ (invective), offers an interesting narrative of the incident, and is sealed by peculiar metapoetic lines. I will take each poem individually, translating first the

477 Ibn Maʾṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 7.
entries of the poets on the *Sulāfa* and then the poems.\textsuperscript{478} In analyzing the poems, I will divide them into sections, following the method employed by Jaroslav and Suzanne Stetkevych in their works of dividing poems into themes, i.e., love prelude, journey description, wine description, main motif, etc.\textsuperscript{479} This allows us to see the trajectory of the poem and to what extent it is similar or dissimilar in its structuring and ordering of themes to what we know from classical Arabic poetry. Again, Ibn Maʿṣūm does not always analyze each example he cites, but rather leaves it open for us. However, if one uses the critical points scattered throughout the *Sulāfa*, the way Ibn Maʿṣūm chooses examples of poetry, which were all added to his important book on rhetoric *Anwār al-rabīʿ*, one can arrive at the aesthetic principles behind his choice of contemporary poetry.

\textsuperscript{478} Ibn Abī Numayy’s poem is translated by Ahmad Abahsain and is briefly analyzed. Abahsain uses the poem in the poet’s *dīwān*, which runs to 60 lines. See Abahsain, “Aḥmad b. Abī Numaī and his Dīwān,” 87-89; My translation of the poem did not use Abahsain’s as I found this source after I finished chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{479} Jaroslav Stetkevych, "A *Qaṣīdah* by Ibn Muqbil: The Deeper Reaches of Lyricism and Experience in a Mukhaḍram Poem: An Essay in Three Steps," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37, no. 3 (2006): 317, note 28. This division, which goes back to Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), was believed by major orientalists to be arbitrary or conventional, but Suzanne as well as Jaroslav Stetkevych claim that it is paradigmatic and conveys meaning. My indication of these themes is no so much interpretative, but rather to get a clear picture of how the poet leads us through his poem.
4.1. Notes on Edition and Translation

As noted earlier, the *Sulāfa*, even after the relatively recent edition (2009), still awaits a proper edition. In the poems chosen in this chapter, I lightly edited the Arabic version using the Tehran reprint (1970) as the original and read it against the Berlin manuscript, as well as other sources, that cite the poems, such as al-Muḥibbī’s *Naḥḥat al-Rayḥāna* and al-Khaṭṭī’s edited *dīwān*. It is noteworthy that it was not my original intention to edit the poems, but I was compelled to do so as some of the passages and lines of poetry were unclear to me due to printing and scribal corruption (*taṣḥīf*). In translating the Arabic into English, I composed a straightforward translation, eschewing hyperboles and tropes that are originally written in Arabic but cannot be effectively rendered in English.

4.2. The Meccan Poet and Prince Ḍḥmad ibn Masʿūd Ibn Abī Numayy (d. 1041/1631)

Ibn Maʿṣūm regards this poet as an excellent one, who also possesses a remarkable character. Previously, we learned that the presentation of poetic genres can be defined by the biographee’s personal experience, as exemplified in the case of this particular poet, who spent many years pursuing his dream to become the ruler of Mecca.

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480 Again, I refer to it as MS Berlin and “a” for the right page and “b” for the left page. For the digital version please see: https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN768212847&PHYSID=PHYS_0001&DMDID=


482 For a detailed account of Ḍḥmad ibn Masʿūd Ibn Abī Numayy, see Abahsain, “Aḥmad b. Abī Numaī and his Dīwān,” 11-17.
As will be shown shortly, this dream—or as the poet expresses it hope (tarajī)—compelled him to traverse sand and sea, making it the ultimate goal for which to sacrifice himself. Introducing this exceptional personality, Ibn Maʿṣūm states:


This half line is from a well-known poem by the Andalusian poet Ibn Hāni’ al-Andalusī that became a favorite poem among 11th/17th Hijāzī poets. See al-Raddādī, *al-Shīr al-Ḥijāzī*, 2: 756-65.


This is a second hemistich of a line from a famous poem by al-Mutanabbi and the first hemistich, which reads: “وَحَدَّى مِنْ الْخَالِقِ فِي كُلِّ بَلَدٍ” See ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Barqūqī, *Sharḥ diwān al-Mutanabbi* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1986), 1: 393.
The nobleman [or al-Sayyid] Aḥmad ibn Masʿūd the son of the Sultan of the respected Mecca al-Sharīf Ḥasan ibn Barakāt al-Ḥasanī, The poetic genius (nābigha) of the clan of Banū Ḥasan, clever in eloquence and elucidation. He drags the tails of eloquence over Saḥbān (outrushed him). His actions and sayings journeyed with caravans (i.e., became widely popular). He was one of the noblemen, who reported the sayings of noblemen from his forefathers. And he was one of those leaders.

For whom the smell of war was like ambergris

So they plucked the blossoms of honor from the meadow of the flourishing decency, and harvested the fruit of events fresh with victory from the black leaves of iron. He had an ambition that competed with heavenly spheres, and dominated over kings. He kept estimating what he could not obtain of [the support of] men and tools, and what destiny could not supply him of help and time. So he marched via sea and land. By his praise poetry, he adorned many kings with a necklace. Yet, nobody helped nor saved him.

Surely when the quest is immense, the help becomes little.

He entered Shahāra, a town in Yemen at the year of 1031 [AH], and praised its ruler Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim with a poem that made the mouth of panegyric [poems] smile. He asked him for help to remove [the current ruler] of Mecca. […] He returned with nothing except what [al-Qāsim] rewarded him of gifts and favor.

Ibn Maʿṣūm only cites a few lines of the poem mentioned here. However, for the following poem composed in praise of the Ottoman Sultan Murat IV, the subject of our chapter, he first sets the context before proceeding to cite it in full.488

Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 22-3.


488 Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 22-3.
So he (the poet) returned to the noble Mecca in the year 1039 [A.H], and stayed there for two years after which he headed to the land of Rūm [Anatolia], aiming towards its king the Sultan Murād Khān in mid Rabīʿ al-Thānī in the year 1041[A.H]. He met him in the great Constantinople, the seat of his realm. After that, he praised him with a remarkable poem in which he asked to be appointed governor of Mecca. [The poem] was recited before the Sultan at the end of Shawwāl in the year 1041, and it reads as follows:

[...]

1. ألا هتي فقد بكز الندامي ومج المرج من ظلم الندى ما
2. وهينمت القبول فضاع نشر روی عن شيخ نجد والخزامي
3. وقد وضعت عذارى المزن طلبا بمهد الروض تغدوه النعامى
4. فهبي فامزجي خمرا بظلم لتحبي من أمتٍ يا أمامًا
5. فكم خفر الفوارسن في وطيس فتى منا وما خفر البدام
6. وأعطينا على جدب هجامًا واعطينا على جدب هجامًا
7. وكم جدنا على قل بوفر وكم جدنا على قل بوفر
8. فحن بنو الفواطم من قريش وقادت الهواشم لا هشاما
9. برانا الله للدنيا سناء وللاخرى إذا قامت سناما
10. وخص بفضله من أم منا ملكيأ كان سابرا هماما

489 As in Berlin MS 18a. In Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 23. "الندامي"
490 In Berlin MS 18a. "أمتي.
491 As Berlin MS 18a. It is not in Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 23.
يخف فيه للائمئة ملاما

نفسه عندها قل المحاما

يجود إذا شكي المخ الركاما

وينتهي سيفه موتا زواما

بها أمر الصواعق والسجاما

فيمنحه الخواعمع والرجاما

وأجلسهم على العليا مقاما

وأجلسهم على العليا مقاما

وحاوي ملكها يمنا وشاما

ولا قودا يخف ولا أثاما

إذا بانت ملكهم نياما

إله جموها طوعا زماما

فقد شملت مكارمة الكراما

كذا مرماه يسمو أن يراما

ويظم أن يزامي فيرميه

وترفَّع كمه عن لم ملك

ولا يسفح عنه شاك ضعيف

لا يسطيع جبار سلاما

بغانية ولا ضمت مداما

له يد ماجد لم تله يوما

أغر سديد ضخم المساعي له يرئ به السهما

492 As in Berlin MS 18a. and it is more appropriate as it alludes to the Qur’anic verse 5:54. In the printed edition “يخف من فضل خالقه ملاما” Ibn Ma’sum, Sulafat al-aṣr, 23.

493 As in Berlin MS 18b. “يراما” in Ibn Ma’sum, Sulafat al-aṣr, 23.
ودينَ الله والبيتَ الحراما ولا عذراً أسوقُ ولا احتشاما
بمنزلة الرجال من الأيامِ الدواَما لا نفارقها دواما
إلى أن صرنَ من هزل الياما
ونلنا الصبر من جوع طعاما
تكون بنورك العلَّي سلامة
حسبناه على البيدا أكاما
ونأمل منك آمالاً جساما
ومن قصد الأمير غدا أميراً
نرد بغلةٍ عنه حياما
وقد وافاك عبد مستميحٌ
وقد نزل ابن ذي يزن طريداً
وأنت أجلًّ من كسرى مقاما
وعسمو عظامي ً عظامي
ويخدم قبرَ طه بالمواض٢
إذا قويست لم أنزلك فيهم
إلى جدواق كلفنا المطايا
وجبنا يا ابن عثمان الموامي
وذقنا الشهد في معنى الترجي
صلينا من شموع القيظ ناراً
وحضا البحر من لج إلى أن
نوم راحبك الفيح اشتيقاً
ومن قصد الأمير غدا أميراً
على ما في يديه ولن يضاما
نرد بغلةٍ عنه حياما
وقد وافاك عبد مستميحٌ
وقد نزل ابن ذي يزن طريداً
وأنت أجلًّ من كسرى مقاما
وعسمو عظامي ً عظامي
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ومن قصد الأمير غدا أميراً
على ما في يديه ولن يضاما
نرد بغلةٍ عنه حياما
وقد وافاك عبد مستميحٌ
وقد نزل ابن ذي يزن طريداً
وأنت أجلًّ من كسرى مقاما
وعسمو عظامي ً عظامي
ويخدم قبرَ طه بالمواض٢
إذا قويست لم أنزلك فيهم
إلى جدواق كلفنا المطايا
وجبنا يا ابن عثمان الموامي
وذقنا الشهد في معنى الترجي
صلينا من شموع القيظ ناراً
وحضا البحر من لج إلى أن
نوم راحبك الفيح اشتيقاً
ومن قصد الأمير غدا أميراً
على ما في يديه ولن يضاما
نرد بغلةٍ عنه حياما
وقد وافاك عبد مستميحٌ
وقد نزل ابن ذي يزن طريداً
وأنت أجلًّ من كسرى مقاما
وعسمو عظامي ً عظامي
ويخدم قبرَ طه بالمواض٢
إذا قويست لم أنزلك فيهم
إلى جدواق كلفنا المطايا
وجبنا يا ابن عثمان الموامي
وذقنا الشهد في معنى الترجي
صلينا من شموع القيظ ناراً
وحضا البحر من لج إلى أن
نوم راحبك الفيح اشتيقاً
ومن قصد الأمير غدا أميراً
على ما في يديه ولن يضاما
نرد بغلةٍ عنه حياما
وقد وافاك عبد مستميحٌ
وقد نزل ابن ذي يزن طريداً
وأنت أجلًّ من كسرى مقاما
وعسمو عظامي ً عظامي
ويخدم قبرَ طه بالمواض٢
إذا قويست لم أنزلك فيهم
إلى جدواق كلفنا المطايا
وجبنا يا ابن عثمان الموami
وذقنا الشهد في معنى الترجي
صلينا من شموع القيظ ناراً
وحضا البحر من لج إلى أن
نوم راحبك الفيح اشتيقاً
ومن قصد الأمير غدا أميراً
على ما في يديه ولن يضاما
نرد بغلةٍ عنه حياما
وقد وافاك عبد مستميحٌ
وقد نزل ابن ذي يزن طريداً
وأنت أجلًّ من كسرى مقاما
وعسمو عظامي ً عظامي
ويخدم قبرَ طه بالمواض٢
إذا قويست لم أنزلك فيهم
إلى جدواق كلفنا المطايا
وجبنا يا ابن عثمان الموامي
وذقنا الشهد في معنى الترجي
صلينا من شموع القيظ ناراً
وحضا البحر من لج إلى أن
نوم راحبك الفيح اشتيقاً
ومن قصد الأمير غدا أميراً
على ما في يديه ولن يضاما
نرد بغلةٍ عنه حياما
وقد وافاك عبد مستميحٌ
وقد نزل ابن ذي يزن طريداً
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نرد بغلةٍ عنه حياما
وقد وافاك عبد مستميحٌ
وقد نزل Ibn Ma’sūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 24.
495 As in Berlin MS 19a. In Ibn Ma’sūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 24, “وقلنا,” which is a scribal corruption (taṣḥīf).
496 This is my reading as in both the print edition and the MS the word is ice, which is odd, and the more suitable usage would be the turbulent waves, unless the poet alludes to ice during winter, which is also possible. See
وحيدرة الذي فاق الأناما
فاطمة ونجليها وطه وحيدرة الذي فاق الأناما

يكون لنشرها مسكا ختاما

ولا بدع إذا وافاك عاف فعاد يقود ذا لجب أهام

بقربي منك فيه لن أسامى فخذ بيدي وسنمني محلا

فخذ بيدي وسنمني محلا بقربي منك فيه لن أسامى

ويجب لي منصبي لتنال أجري وشكرى ما بقيت له لزاما

ويجب لي منصبي لتنال أجري وشكرى ما بقيت له لزاما

45. بفاطمة ونجليها وطه وحيدرة الذي فاق الأناما
46. عليهم رحمه تهدي سلاما
47. ولا بدع إذا وافاك عاف فعاد يقود ذا لجب أهام
48. فخذ بيدي وسنمني محلا بقربي منك فيه لن أسامى
49. وهب لي منصبي لتنال أجري وشكرى ما بقيت له لزاما
1. O girl! Rise up [Umāma], for the drinking companions have woken early, and from the white teeth of the dew, the meadow has spit water.

2. The east wind prevailed as fragrance spread That comes from a wormwood and lavender from Najd.

3. The virgins of clouds bore a baby In the cradle of the meadow nourished by the South Wind.

4. O girl! Rise up and mix wine with water/ice, So it revives those who you have killed, O Umāma.

5. How many a man of ours has protected the knights in battle, But has never violated a covenant.

6. However little we have, we give generously, And in drought, we have given away the best milk camel.

7. How many days have we driven horses back and forth [in battle] Striking them on their rumps.

8. We are the sons of the Fāṭimas from [the clan of ] Quraysh, And we are the leaders of the Hashemite not of Hishām (i.e., Ibn ʿAbd al-Malik).

9. Allāh created us as a light in this life, And as the topmost (lit. camel’s hump) in the afterlife, when it comes.

10. Allāh bestowed on us as a special honor, to lead us, A king, who has been a Sābūr⁴⁹⁸ and heroic leader,

11. The man of the fight, Murād of the truth, who, Fearing [Allāh] fears no blame from a blamer,⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁸ Sābūr or Shābūr is a name of several Persian kings, especially Shāpūr I, son of Ardāshīr Pāpakān (r. 239 or 241 to 270 or 273), who is “credited by Arab geographers and historians with the founding of various cities and towns of Persia, with compound names which included his own, such as D̲j̲undīsh̲āpū̲r...” See, C. E. Bosworth, “Shāpūr,” in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs; “s-b-r,” Lisān al-ʿArab.

⁴⁹⁹ This alludes to a Qur’anic verse “men who struggle in the path of God, not fearing the reproach of any reproacher.” The Qur’an, 5: 54.
12. The handmill of war when unprotected souls
    Scatter, fearing wars,
13. And a raincloud whose drops are silver and gold,
    He is generous when draught complaints to the piled up rain.
14. His gift turns back an impending drought
    And his sword averts instant death.
15. In his lips are destinies and livelihood,
    By them, he commands the bolts of lightning and raincloud
16. Against him arrogant kings lead an army.
    In return, he gives them hyenas and graves.
17. But if they come to him seeking [peace], he’ll make them rich and happy.
    And he’ll seat them in a place that is lofty.
18. He is a king of the earth and all its kings,
    He is their owner in the north or south.
19. He makes flow a sea of his enemies’ blood
    And he never fears retaliation nor misdeed.
20. When their kings spend the night sleeping,
    He spends the night taking care of his people.
21. He mounted the withers of the world’s camel,
    [like a] restive mount, then, after defiance,
    it threw its reins to him in obedience.
22. If his care includes the despicable man,
    His kindnesses surely include the noble men.
23. His rank is too sublime for poetry to express,
    For his reach is beyond what can even be desired.
24. And he’s far beyond the reach of the obstinate man
    Who aims for him, but can never hit the mark.
25. His sleeve stays aloof from the kisses of kings,
    But the weak and orphans kiss his sleeve.
26. Before him, a poor man complains freely
    But a tyrant does not dare to greet him.
27. He has the hand of a glorious man that never plays with a mistress,  
   Nor does it hold a wine cup.
28. A generous brave man of great endeavors,  
   His sound judgment can turn back the arrows [of war].
29. With cutting swords, he serves the grave of Ṭāhā [the Prophet],  
   The religion of Allāh, and the Holy Mosque.
30. “O king of kings” I say it without fear,  
   Nor do I need to provide an excuse or feel ashamed,
31. When you’re compared with kings,  
   Your rank among them is higher than men among widows!
32. To your gifts, we urged our mounts continually,  
   And we will never part ways from them [your gifts].
33. O descendant of ʿUthmān! We have traversed the deserts  
   Until [our mounts] became thirst-crazed and jaded.
34. We tasted the honey in the meaning of hope,  
   We took patience over hunger as our food.
35. We have been burned by the fire of the noontime sun,  
   But because of your high light it becomes [cool] and does not harm us.\textsuperscript{500}
36. And we waded into the sea of troubled waves/ice  
   Until we thought of it was sandhills in the desert.
37. We aim at your spacious palace longingly,  
   And of you, we hope huge hopes.
38. He who heads to the prince will surely become a prince  
   Over what he has in his hands, and he will never be wronged.
39. Far be it from your overflowing sea [of generosity]  
   That we return from it thirsty and unquenched.
40. A servant came to you,  
   Seeking your generous hands and noble qualities.
41. Just as Ibn Dhī Yazan, who, after being expelled,

\textsuperscript{500} This alludes to the verse “We said: O fire, be coolness and peace for Abraham.” Sura 21:69.
Alighted at Khosrow’s place and was shown great honor.\textsuperscript{501}

42. Alone he came, but returned leading an army
   That covers the hills and sands with horses.

43. He preserved forever the good repute [of Khosrow].
   Still, your status is higher than Khosrow’s.

44. And Sayf [Ibn Dhī Yazan] is beneath me in rank, for I am
   A self-made noble man and exceed him in nobility.

45. By Faṭīma, and her two sons, and Ṭāḥā
   And Ḥaydar [ʿAlī], who exceeded all men.

46. Upon them [God’s] mercy that brings them peace,
   Sealed with the redolence of musk.

47. It is no wonder if a man seeking help arrives in your presence
   And returns leading a clamorous and voracious army.

48. Take my hand and place me in a high position;
   So close to you that no one can reach me.

49. Give me my position so you will obtain my reward
   And my gratitude, indebted to you as long as I live.

\textsuperscript{501} Or a mountain in Yemen.
Beginning with a conventional *nasīb* (amorous prelude), the poem uses conventional motifs such as the wine-drinking scene and addressing the beloved (i.e., Umāma), but is limited to a few lines, making it somewhat of a threshold for the next section. The beginning lines recall the famous *muʿallaqa* “alā hubbī bi-saḥniki fa-ṣbiḥīnā” of the renowned ʿAmr ibn Kulthūm especially the allusion to its wine lines. In these lines, one notices the metaphorical use of images, such as meadow spitting water and clouds compared to virgins giving birth to a babies. The latter metaphor signifies how rain revitalizes a desolate land, and how combining that with drinking wine revitalizes the soul. In this setting, the poet addresses the beloved Umāma. Especially important is the evocation of Najd and its fragrant flowers. The place of Najd has frequently been evoked by poets as a poetic symbol rather than the actual place, especially since the Umayyad poets used it to emphasize the nostalgic mood and the remembrance of the lost abode.\(^{502}\) In this poem, the poet imagines a fragrance brought by the wind of *ṣabā*—another reoccurring word in Arabic poetry’s *nasīb*—to spread an aromas associated with Najd such as *shīḥ* and *khuzāmā*.\(^ {503}\) In his *Anwār al-rabī‘*, Ibn Maʿṣūm quotes the first three lines of this poem as examples of excellent use of metaphor.


\(^{503}\) J. Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd*, 125.

\(^{504}\) This, too, is a name that is recurrent in love lines, and it signifies the atmosphere of the spring-like love interaction and the abode around which the memory of love is retrospectively revived. In an amusing portrayal of the flower *khuzāmā*, the preacher and Sufi Ibn Ghānim al-Maqqīsī (d. 678/1279) speaks of its indication (*ishāra*) as a plant that comes from Najd, feels at ease in open spaces such as desert, and stays aloof from urban environment, where sins are usually committed; namely of drinking wine! See ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām al-Maqqīsī, *Kashf al-asrār fī ḥikam al-tuyūr wa al-azhār* (Cairo: Dār al-Faḍīla, n.d.), 69-70.
(istiʿāra), but leaves them unexplained. However, his peer Muḥammad Faḍl Allāh al-Muḥibbī in his Nafḥat al-Rayḥāna attempts to explain the metaphor in the third line by saying:

The word “baby” here means the vegetation. The metaphor is an application of the image of a nursing mother to clouds as found in a poem of al-Bākharzī [which reads]:

The delicate grasses grew in it,
Nursed by the morning cloud.

[This metaphor] comes from the prelude of the poem by Yaḥyā ibn Hudhayl al-Tuǧibī al-Maghribī:

The baby plant slept on south wind’s lap,
Because of the dew rocking in the cradle of the Lavender.

Not only does al-Muḥibbī explain these metaphors—albeit briefly—but he also informs the reader of the existence of similar use in al-Bākharzī’s poem. In other words, it is an excellent use of metaphor, but not particularly innovative. Based on al-Muḥibbī’s comment, one might be under the impression that this poem was preceded by a poem that influenced it; namely the one by al-Maghribī, but it is not quite evident as the meter and theme are different, despite the fact that the rhyme is the same.

506 Al-Muḥibbī, Nafḥat al-Rayḥāna, 4:20.
Furthermore, in the first line, not only do we find the use of a different kind of *jinās* in the examples of *al-nadāmā* (drinking companions) and *al-nadā māʾ* (dew turned water), but practically throughout the poem (i.e., in lines 9, 18, 20, 23, 24). In his *Anwār al-rabīʿ*, Ibn Maʿṣūm seems to champion *jinās* by virtue of devoting some time describing the different kinds of *jinās* that occupy over 100 pages in the print edition. In this line, the *jinās*, which belongs to *jinās tāmm* (perfect) is called *murakkab* (conjunct),\(^{507}\) which in Ibn Maʿṣūm’s definition, is when its two parts consist of one word and the other of two words.\(^{508}\)

5-9

The poet then transitions to a new section of *fakhr* (self-praise/boast), using the pronoun “we” to lay out the virtues of the poet’s clan. Not only do they protect and shield men, but they also keep the covenant and never break; thus achieving two major qualities: bravery and morality. Especially at times of despair when most men could not preserve such qualities, the poet’s clan remains resilient. The poet continues to boast about himself and his descent from the noble Meccans, essentially as coming from a family of princes and governors. Moreover, the Ashrāf, the descendants of the family of the Prophet had governed Hijaz for centuries. Though the Ottomans controlled it, Hijaz was left to be governed by its locals—in this case the Ashrāfs and other groups, such as Aghawāt—who mainly guarded the Two Holy Sanctuaries, but were immensely

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\(^{507}\) Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician*, 22.

\(^{508}\) This *jinās* has three types: *maqrūn* (joined) in which its two parts agree in pronunciation and writing—as is the case in this line—; *mafrūq* (separated) in which its two parts only agree in pronunciation; and *marfū* (patched) in which its first part is independent and its second consists of another word. Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Anwār al-rabīʿ*, 1: 98, 103, 111; See Also Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician*, 22.
influential to the point of even overpowering the Ashrāfs.⁵⁰⁹ In addition to descending from an honorable family, this very family possesses sacred characteristics and also leads Muslims in the afterlife. This is further illustrated in lines 8 and 9, where the poet sheds light on religious motifs and presents himself as a descendant of the Prophet’s daughter. Confirming this sacred lineage, the poet argues that his family/clan is the light in this life and of high rank (the hump) in the afterlife. In terms of jinās, one sees a valuable and significant use in the cases of Hawāshim, Hishām, sanāʾ and sanām, skillfully done to present a contrast between ‘allegedly’ legitimate and illegitimate camps, truth and deception, and ultimately, good and evil. In this use of jinās, we have also the contrast between life and the afterlife, in both of which the status of poet’s family, the leaders, is reemphasized to present the patron with more reasons to support the poet’s request to govern the holy city of Mecca. As Mecca is a holy city, the poet sees himself as the legitimate governor of it for the reasons he laid out in this section.

10-29

Coming to the madīḥ (panegyric) section, one notices the idea of divine appointment, which goes back to the Umayyad period, and to a lesser extent to pre-Islamic poetry.⁵¹⁰ However, there is a tricky use of the pronoun “we.” One wonders if the poet here means governors, princes, or those in authority, or more appropriately, all Muslims. The problem arises when the poet connects the lines of self-praise (fākhr) that are filled with the “we” to the praise of the Sultan (in the third person) without


interruption. By virtue of employing “we,” the poet also aims to join the patron to himself, especially given his political ambition. In this transition from *fakhr* to *madīḥ*, the poet has now begun enumerating the virtues and heroism possessed by the Sultan.

One of the interesting metaphors are in lines 13 to 15, where the poet compares the Ottoman Sultan to a rain whose drops are silver and gold to help and give people what they wish for, notably in times of drought and hunger. Another aspect of the virtues of the Sultan is that despite his kindness to all people, he will turn to cruelty against those attacking him or his people. His generous rain/gift turns back drought, and his sword defends those he protects from being killed by the enemy. This way of contrasting two images is very dominant in praise poetry, such as the lines by the Umayyad-Abbasid poet Ibrāhīm ibn Harma al-Qurashī (d. 167/792):\textsuperscript{511}

\begin{quote}
كریم‌دِی وجوهان ووجه لدى الرضا
طَلیق ووجه في الكربیة باسلٌ

[...]

له لحظات عن جفاَقیِ سریره
إذا كرَّها فيها عقَب ونائلٌ
فَااما الذي أمَّنَت آمنةُ الردى
وأمَّ الذي أوعدت بالثُّكل ناكل
\end{quote}

A generous [man] with two faces:
cheerful but fearless at war.

[...]

On both sides of his throne, he has glances:
Once he uses them, they bear punishment as well as reward.
Whoever you promise to protect,
will be protected from death,
But the mother of those you threaten with bereavement,
will be bereft.

In this way of contrasting the two sides of the Sultan, one sees a balance between mercy and steadfastness. By emphasizing this almost Godlike power, the poet builds a cosmic image of the Sultan’s two lips by which life and destinies are determined and by which he commands and has power over thunder (to mean strength and fear) and raincloud (to mean fertility, growth and to a certain extent mercy). In lines 16 and 17, the poet again contrasts war and peace, extending the might of the king to overpower other kings, calling him the “malik al-mulūk (king of kings)” reiterating the then-prevalent Persian-Indian epithet that applies extravagant terms to leaders and princes. The importance of jinās does not end here, since the poet continues in lines 23 and 24 to maintain that poetry is incompetent and incapable of accurately portraying the Sultan just as all men are incapable of reaching his status. Neither poetry nor men are able to approach the virtues of the Sultan; he is transcendent. Quite delicately, the poet uses four words derived from similar root; we have “r-m-y” and “r-w-m.” The words marmā (reach/aim) yurāmā (desired), and in the next line we have yarmīh (aim at him) and yurāmā (cannot be hit) with alif maqṣūra. This again confirms the poet’s excellence in using rhetorical devices for poetical purposes that are not merely decorative, but especially significant.

This section contains several themes including raḥīl (journey theme), madīḥ, and fakhr switching back and forth, all with emphasis on the importance and virtuosity of the patron, and on the qualities of the poet to become a governor. A number of lines deserve

512 This tradition seems to continue in the post-classical/pre-modern periods. Al-Qalqashandī in his Šubh al-aʿshā indicates not only an exaggerating epithet but many that are used to describe the virtue of a prince or a sultan such as Muhammad ibn Qalāwūn who is called among many things “al-sulṭān, al-malik, and nāṣir al-dunyā wa al-dīn (protectors of life and the afterlife).” See Bāshā, Tārīkh al-ʿadab al-ʿArabī: al-ʿāṣr al-Mamlūkī, 536-7.
to be taken into consideration for their rhetorical and poetical ends. A crucial one is line 30, where the poet changes unexpectedly from third to second person, using rhetorical tool called ʾiltifāt (redirection) which is “intended to reawaken interest and revive attention.” It also helps to transition from madīḥ to rahīl. Line 32 conveys a recurrent theme of journeying to the patron—an actual journey that the poet embarked upon after his journey to Yemen. According to Huda Fakhreddine, in High Abbasid poetry the rahīl section constitutes a metaphorical journey that was often manipulated by poets to serve meta-poetic purposes. Interestingly, this poem records an actual journey but does not necessarily dispense with meta-poetic connotations. However, this could be applied to the way which the poet endeavors to arrive at the perfect praise poem. Throughout the Sulāfa, and as discussed earlier, examples of what we could call meta-poetic lines are evident. To further complicate the journey, the poet describes his ever-exhausting journey, traversing through desert and sea (or ice) to finally arrive in Istanbul. Again, one finds a contrast between heat, cold and fire and peace. For example, in line 35:

We have been burned by the fire of the noontime sun,
But because of your high light,
it becomes [cool] and does not harm us.

Through the expression “bardan wa-salāman (cool and safe)” the poet alludes to the Qur’anic story of Abraham, that when he was thrown into fire, God made it cool and safe. Here, the poet uses the story of the prophet Abraham as an allegory for his long, exhausting and excruciating journey across desert and sea to reach the patron whose light

513 Cachia, The Arch Rhetorician, 106.
514 Fakhreddine, Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition, 134.
515 “We said, ‘O fire, be coolness and safety for Abraham!’.” The Qur’an, 21: 69.
516 See for example Ibn ʿĀshūr, al-Tahrīr, 17: 106.
is the equivalent of the safety and coolness that God provides Abraham in the Qur`anic story, and who is the poet’s utmost hope for attaining his sought-after goal.

Of interest is the antithesis (or muṭābaqa) that reveals itself in almost every line. The poet is from an honorable family compared to others, superior to other relatives, who were taking control of Mecca, and the Sultan is his superior and his opposite in terms of power. It seems that this poem rests on this contrast as it is ultimately composed by the inferior, who seeks help from the superior from whom people, including the poet, seek help. More lines reemphasize this muṭābaqa, as in the lines 18, 25, 26, 35, 36, and 39 where he contrasts between the Sultan with other kings, fire with peaceful cool, war and peace, and even at the metaphorical level; namely when he contrasts sea with desert, and thirst and quench.

In line 38, the poet expects the Sultan to return the favor or sets the poem to become a “political negotiation,” as S. Stetkevych would term it.517 Moreover, it evokes two great Arabic poets; Imru’ al-Qays and al-Mutanabbī, both of whom traveled to officials and asked for either help or governance. In a similar vein, al-Mutanabbī speaking to Kāfūr al-Ikshīdī (d. 357/968 ) says:518

ويرجع ملْكاً للعراقيين والياً ويرجع ملْكاً للعرائض والياً

So it’s not strange for a man to come to you on foot And return king of the two Iraqs

517 S. Stetkevych, The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy, xi.
And a governor.\textsuperscript{519}

Ironically, all three of these poets failed to attain their goals. In evoking the pre-Islamic figure Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan, who went for help to the Persian king Khosrow and was answered, the poet still deems the Sultan better than the Persian king and himself, the poet, better than Sayf in terms of character and lineage, and thus more legitimate and deserving to be granted his request. Abahsain in his study of the poet’s \textit{dīwān} suggests al-Shārīf al-Raḍī was also dear to Ibn Abī Numayy, a fact confirmed by the report in al-Muḥibbī’s \textit{Khulāṣa} that on his way to Istanbul, the poet lectured on the poetry of al-Shārīf al-Raḍī and recited a great deal of it.\textsuperscript{520}

With regard to the poem’s success, Ibn Maʿṣūm says, rather vaguely, that the poem was well-received but the poet died before returning to Mecca:

فيقال أنه أجابه إلى ملتمسه ومراده. وأرعاه من مقصده أخصبُ مراده. ولكن مدت له يد الهلك قبل نيل الملك. وقيل بل أجل صلته فقط. فقدَ طمعه عما تمناه وقطأ. ولم يعد إلى مكة شرفها الله تعالى وتوفي في تلك السنة أو التي تليها والله أعلم.\textsuperscript{521}

It is reported that he [the Ottoman Sultan] gave him what he sought, and granted him most abundantly what he had wished for. But, the hand of death reached him before he took power. However, it was also reported that the Sultan gave him only a generous reward which satisfied his desire for what he had wanted (or cut off his greed). He never returned to Mecca—May Allāh the Exalted ennoble it. In that year or the following one, he died. And Allāh only knows.


\textsuperscript{520} Abahsain, “Aḥmad b. Abī Numaī and his Dīwān,” 15.

So why did Ibn Maʿṣūm choose this poem? Generally speaking, Ibn Maʿṣūm does not indicate why he picked this poem nor the criteria on which he relies. However, as I have argued in the previous chapter, for Ibn al-Maʿṣūm, there are three general characteristics that define good poetry and a good poet. These are: innovation (ibtikār), freedom from contrivance “bidūn takalluf”, and harmony/fluidity (insijām). As we have touched upon the use of jinās, for instance in more than one occasion proves that it is done delicately and in a poetically purposeful way. The poem is easy and fluid despite being complicated and loaded with multiple themes, historical and religious references. Added to it is the smooth meter and the rhyme, which can easily be categorized in Ibn Maʿṣūm’s eyes as. As the poet uses the meter wāfir, which according to ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṭayyib is a rapid meter that propels the poet to intensify his praise in constant and fast motions.522 Furthermore, panegyric is a favorite theme for Ibn Maʿṣūm, as we see that, in his Sulāfa, the first poem, which belongs to his father, is a lengthy poem in praise of Quṭb Shāh. More complexity reveals itself when reading the poem in depth, which, even to our modern sensibility, is a good poem to navigate through, especially since it possesses both historical and poetic dimensions.

4.3. Abū al-Baḥr Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭī al-Baḥrānī (d. 1028/1619)523

Unlike Ibn Abī Numayy, this poet’s collection of poems has been edited more than once, and his poetry has been the subject of several studies in Arabic.524 Although I have

522 Al-Ṭayyib, al-Murshid, 1: 359.
523 For a detailed biography of this poet, see al-Khaṭṭī, Dīwān Abī al-Baḥr (2005), 1: 51-53.
not been able to acquire all of these materials, those to which I could gain access offer information on his poetry, especially this poem, which one scholar deciphers as an allegory of political situation in the eastern Arabian Gulf in the 11th/17th century. Ibn Maʿṣūm in his travelogue, which he wrote about a decade earlier before the Sulāfa, celebrates al-Khaṭṭī as an excellent poet, and reiterates his judgment in the Sulāfa too, as the following passage elucidates:

أبو البحر جعفر بن محمد حسن بن علي بن ناصر بن عبد الإمام الشهير بالخطي البحرياني العبدي أحمد بني عبد العظيم بن شر بن أبي أحمد بن عبد الله تعالى ناهج طرق البلاغة والفصاحة. الزاخر الباحة. الرحمن الساحة. البديع الأثر والعيان. الحكم الشعر الساحر البيان. تفقت بالبراعة قداحه. وأدار على السامع كروسه وأقادحه. فأتي بكل مبتدع مطرب. ومخترع في حسن مغرب. ومع قرب عهده فقد بلغ ديوان شعره من الشهرة المدى.

وسار به من لا يسير مشمراً
وعنى به من لا يغني مغرداً

وقد وقفت على فرانده التي لمعت. فرأيت ما لا عين رأت ولا أذن سمعت. وكان قد دخل الديار العجمية فقطن منها بفارس. ولم يزل بها

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527 Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 524.
528 “أفصى” is one of the poet’s grandfathers. See al-Khaṭṭī, Dīwān Abī al-Bahr (2005), 1: 51.
529 As in Berlin MS 452a, and in Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 524.
530 As in Berlin MS 452a. Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 524.
531 As in Berlin MS 452a. Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 524.
532 As in Berlin MS 452a. Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 524.
 وهو لرياض الأدب جان وغازَر. حتى اختطفته يد المنون. فعرَس ب芬اء الفناءً وخلد عرايس الفنون. وكانت وفاته سنة ثمانٍ وعشرين وألف رحمه الله تعالى.

Abū al-Bahr Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad Ḥasan ibn Ḥālī ibn Ṭāhir ibn ʿAbd al-Imām, known as al-Khaṭṭī, al-Baḥrānī, al-ʿUbaydī, one of the descendants of the clan of ʿAbd al-Qays ibn Shann ibn Afṣā ibn Daʿmā ibn Jadīla ibn Asad ibn Rabīʿa ibn Nizār ibn Maʿn ibn ʿAdnān. May Allāh have mercy on him. He walks on a path of eloquence and rhetoric whose entrance hall is thronged and whose courtyard is spacious. He is of a splendid repute and presence. His poetry is wise and his eloquence is magical. He straightened his arrow shaft with excellence and passed around his glass and drinking cup to the hearer. He came up with everything that is innovative, moving, and his novelty is astonishing. Despite being recent, his poetry collection gained wide reputation;

Recluses rush out
to bruit it aboard:
With it the tuneless rise their voice
in song.536

I have come across his shining pearls, which no eye had ever seen and no ear had ever heard. He entered the non-Arab lands and stayed in Persia. During his stay, he kept sowing and reaping the meadow of literature until the hand of death snatched him, so he entered the space of nonbeing, leaving behind the brides of the arts. His date of death was in the year of 1028 [A.H.]—may Allāh have mercy on him.

After introducing the poet with a passage imbued with deference and admiration, Ibn Maʿṣūm cites some of the poet’s poems and verses, but when he introduces this poem, he declares:537

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534 As in Berlin MS 452b, and Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 524. "فغرس الفناء".
535 As in Berlin MS 452b, and Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 524. "الفناء".
536 Suzanne Stetkevych’s translation. See S. Stetkevych, Poetic of Islamic Legitimacy, 191.
537 Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 529.
Also among his finest poems is the one in which he describes his state after being struck in the face by a fish known as Subayṭiyya, which injured [his face] as he was departing from a village called Mīrrī [...] when accompanied by his son ʿHasān, he was passing between two seas one called al-Bilād and the other Tūbālī. Whoever examines this poem will surely recognize the extent of his eloquence, his ability to grab speech by the neck and to play with the most beautiful [poetic] devices and motifs:

1. برغم العوالي والمهندة البَئْر
2. أمّا قد جَنِى بحر البلاد وتُوبِلي
3. فويل بني شنّ ابن أفقي وما الذي
4. دمّ لم يرقّ من عهد نوح ولا جرى
5. تحامته أطراف القنا وترعَّضت
6. لعمر أبي 540 الأيام إن باء صرفها
7. فلا غرو فالآيام بين صروفها
8. ألا أبلغ 541 الحيين بكراً وتغلبًا

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538 According to al-ʿAwwāmī, the scientific name for this fish is: “Shol sciana bleikeri.” It is one of the known fishes in the Persian Gulf and can be as big as 1 meter and half. See al-Khaṭṭī, Dīwān Abī al-Bahr (2005), 2: 45-6.

539 These two locations are in the north of present-day Bahrain.

540 As in Berlin MS 456b and Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 529. "العمرِ أبي الاليام".

541 As in Berlin MS 456b. In Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 529. "فابلغ".
وأيّ امرئ للخير يدعى وللشر
ويجري على غير المُنقفة السُّمْر
أخو الحوت عنه دامي الفم والأَمْر
يرد شرح هذا الحال ينظر إلى شعري
من الأرض إلا قد تخلَّلها ذكري
بريد اشتِهار في مُناكِبها يسري
لجري صروف الدهْر إلا على الخُر
توجهٌ من مرى إلى العلقم المُر
وشبلي معي والماء في أول الجزر
من الحوت في وجهي ولا ضربة الفهر
وقعت لها دامي المحيا على قطر
ولقد شق يمنى وجنتيه بنطحة
وفي الباء في الظُّهر
وقدي بلغت سكينةُ ثغرة النهر
نزيف طلا مالت به نشوة الخمر
وراح موشي الجيب بالنقط الحمر
يقل أوهذا جاء من ملتقى الكرُ

9. أبريِّمكَما أن امرأٌ من بنيكما
10. يُراق على غير الطبْا دم وجهه
11. وتنبّو نيوب الليلّ عنه وينبّى
12. ليقض امرأو من قصتي عجبا ومن
13. أنا الرجل المشهور ما من محلة
14. فإن أمر في قطر من الأرض إن لي
15. تولعُ بي صرف القضاء ولم يكن
16. توجّهت من مرى ضحى فكأنما
17. تلْجِجت خور القريبين مشمراً
18. فما هو إلا أن فجئت بطافر
19. لقد شبى يمنى وجنتي بنطحة
20. فخيل لي أن السماوات أطبقت
21. وقامت كهدي ندى من يد ذابح
22. ببطوحي نزفت الدماء كأني
23. فلن لامي لا يلبس الوضي قد غدا
24. وواصلت بيتي ما رأني امرؤ ولم

545 As in Berlin MS 457a and the edited dīwān Dīwān Abū al-Bahr, 48. In Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 530.
كما اعترضت في الطرس إعرابةُ الكسر
بمقدار أخذ المحو من صفحة البدر
على العتق ما لاحت به سمةُ الأثر
على سائر الشجعان بالفتكة البكر
والسرم لا تهزن يوما إلى صدر
رجال يخوضون الجمام إلى نصري
لإدراك ثأري منه ما مد في عمري
 بكل شرود الذكر أعدى من العر
وأبلّى على الآذان من عارض الوقر
وليس بمأمون على سالك الضر
وترسو رسو الغيص في طلب الدر

فها هو قد أبقى بوجهي علامةً
فإن يمح شيئاً من محياي أثرُها
ولا غرو فالبيض الرقاق أدلُها
وقل بعد هذا للسبيطيهة افخري
وللسمر لا تهززن يوما إلى صدر
وقل للظُبى مهلا إليك على الطُّلى
رجال يخوضون الحِمام إلى نصري
فلو هم غير الحوت لي توثبت
فأما إذا ما عز ذلك ولم يكن
فلست بمَولى الشعر إن لم أزجهه
أضرَّ على الأجفان من حادث
العمى
يحف على من يركب البحر شرَّها
تجوس خلال البحر تطفح تارةً

547 As in Berlin MS 457a and the edited dīwān Dīwān Abū al-Bahr, 48. In Ibn Maṣūm, Sulāfāt al-ʿaṣr, 530. "بالبيض".
550 As in Berlin MS 457b.
551 As in Berlin MS 457b and Dīwān Abū al-Bahr, 48. In Ibn Maṣūm, Sulāfāt al-ʿaṣr, 530. "العسر".
553 As in Berlin MS 457b and the edited dīwān Dīwān Abū al-Bahr, 48. In Ibn Maṣūm, Sulāfāt al-ʿaṣr, 530. "الغيض".
وتدرك دون القعر مبتدَر القعر

36 لعمر أبي الخطي إن بات ثاره لدى غير كفؤ وهو نادرة العصر

37 وأعقبه ثار الحسين لدى شمر وثالث عالي بات عند ابن ملجم

38 فثار علي بات عند ابن ملجم

554 As in Berlin MS 457b and the edited dīwān Dīwān Abū al- Bahr, 49. In Ibn Ma'ṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 530. "بصيحة"
1. Despite the tall spears and cutting Indian swords,
   
   [My] blood was shed by the Subayṭiyya of the sea.

2. It is the seas of al-Bilād and Tūbalī that committed
   
   Against me a crime that land couldn’t do.

3. Woe [to us] the sons of Shann ibn Afṣā,
   
   And the wrong the hands of fate have done to us.

4. For such blood had never been shed since the time of Noah,
   
   And had never run on the edge of the enemy’s tooth or nail.

5. Spears’ tips protected themselves from it; yet the fish attacked him!
   
   How miserable are events and time!

6. By my father’s life, if the passing of days
   
   [fails to] avenge a man possessed of a wealth of every virtue.

7. It’s no wonder since the days are forever at war with important men.

8. Tell the two tribes of Bakr and Taghlib,
   
   For there is no help except from Taghlib and Bakr:

9. “Are you content that a man from among you,
   
   Or any man, who is called upon for good and bad,

10. Had the blood of his face shed by something other than swords?
    
    And flows out on something other than the straightened brown [spear]?

11. And the lion’s teeth have glanced off him,
    
    While the fish turned from him with its mouth and teeth red with his blood?”

12. Let a man be astonished by my story,
    
    And whoever wants an explanation will find it in this poem.
13. I’m a famous man, whose reputation

Has reached every place on earth.

14. If I arrive at evening at any place in the earth,

my fame will surely have a messenger traveling across its highland.

15. Hard fate became infatuated with me,

For surely the vicissitudes of fate strike only noble men.

16. From Mirrī, I headed at forenoon

As if I were heading from Mirrī to bitter colocynth.

17. Prepared, I embarked upon the depth of the two villages’ inlet,

Accompanied by my son, as the water was beginning to ebb.

18. Suddenly I was startled by a fish

leaping at my face, striking me harder than a fihr.\(^{555}\)

19. It wounded my right cheek with a blow,

that knocked me down and filled my face with blood.

20. It seemed to me that sky was falling

and I saw the stars at noon!

21. I stood up like a beast that is about to be slaughtered

But flees from the butcher’s hand when the knife has reached its throat.

22. I swayed from the loss of blood as if I were

A drunk reeling from intoxicating wine.

23. Who will help a man,

who goes out in the morning not wearing an embroidered robe,

\(^{555}\) Fihr is a stone used for crushing. See “f-h-r,” Lisān al-ʿArab.
But returns in the evening with his collar embroidered with red spots?

24. Every man who saw me coming back said:
   “Has he come from a war?”

25. For there [on my face] it has left a mark
   Like the sign for kasra that stands out on a sheet of paper.

26. If its scar has defaced my features
   As much as the black spots deface the surface of the full moon,

27. It’s no wonder, for the slender white [blades ] that point most clearly at excellence,
   Are those that have chinks from battle.

28. Say, then, to the Subayṭiyya, “Boast to all the other brave ones
   Of the unique blow [with which you struck me].

29. Say to the swords, “Stay away from necks!”
   Say to the spears: “Don’t ever quiver with desire for a chest.”

30. For if anything other than the fish were to think of attacking me,
   Men who wade through death would leap to protect me.

31. And if that proves too difficult and
   No one avenges me on [the fish] as long as I live

32. Then I’m not the master of poetry unless I mount on its spear’s bottom
   Every runaway meaning more contagious than mange,

33. More harmful to the eyelid than being struck with blindness,
   More troubling to the ears than being struck deaf.

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556 Zuji literally means an iron mounted on the butt of the spear, and sinān on the top of the spear. See “z-j-j,” Lisān al-ʿArab.

557 This is a common skin disease that afflicts camels. See “ʿa-r-r,” Lisān al-ʿArab.
34. Its evil is feared by those that ride the sea,

And from it even those who travel by land will not be safe.

35. It prowls the sea, surfacing at times,

Then diving deep like a diver searching for pearls.

36. It catches what swims to the surface

And seizes what rushes to the bottom before it can reach it.

37. If despite his being the phenomenon of the age

Al-Khaṭṭī’s revenge must be exacted from an inferior,

38. So too the revenge of ʿAlī had to exacted from Ibn Muljam,\textsuperscript{558}

Followed by the revenge of al-Ḥusayn from Shimr.\textsuperscript{559}


The poem starts with a compelling tone of defeat and loss. The poet’s honorable blood was unexpectedly shed by an inferior creature, that is, a fish, where it should have only been shed by an equal and in situations such as war or battle. In this very line, we are informed that what happened was not ordinary; it was disastrous. Not only was he affected by it, but his tribe as well, whose blood had never been shed. It is thus scandalous, shockingly unforgettable, and deserving to be immortalized. To further dramatize the scene, the poet accuses everything of causing what had happened to him, especially the two seas where his boat was sailing. He blames time for harming honorable people (i.e., him) and burdening them with hardship. Accusing the days, that is, fate, of causing an unfortunate event is used for exaggeration or dramatization. As the poem plays with especially the theme of invective (hijāʾ), it follows the norm of beginning with ‘itāb (reproach/admonition), which according to Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr (d. 637/1239), is a proper way to open an invective. However, the poem blames and attacks not an enemy warrior, but something different: a fish. Consequently, the invective theme becomes quite peculiar.\(^{560}\)

Although he was struck by a fish, a fact he finds both humiliating, astonishing and funny, he argues that even being attacked by a lion, which to him is a sign of bravery and strength, had never happened and should never happen. Here he evokes the sign of bravery of a man whose blood is never shed except in war. Of importance is a case of

inter TEXTUALITY in which the poem evokes the famous line by the Jāhilī Jewish-Arab poet al-Samaw’al ibn ʿĀdiyā, who says: 561

تسيل على حد الطُّباب نفوسنا ولا تسل على غير السيف تسيل

Only on the edge of swords our souls are shed,
And it shall not be shed but upon swords.

*Jinās* comes effectively into play in line 11, when the poem uses the word *tanbū* (glanced off) as well as *nuyūb* (teeth) to reflect upon the dramatic and strange event. Furthermore, the contrast between the two animals, the lion and the fish, emphasizes this strangeness; the fish, though weak and unassociated with any theme of bravery, attacks the poet and returns back with his blood, while the lion—despite being strong and courageous, and of course a common metaphor used by Arab poets to portray the heroic warrior,—could not even touch him, rather its fangs glance of him. There is thus a certain disgrace, and also an irony, that the heroic poet who is unscathed by the vicious lion falls victim to a mere fish.

12-31

Before he proceeds to describe the fish attack at length, the poet reaffirms his self-praise. After all, his mission to immortalize this shocking event subsumes immortalizing himself, or more precisely his poetry. Such emphasis on the self dominates the entire poem, specifically at the end when the poet speaks of the influence of his poetry. Hence we realize that despite the *hijā’* (invective) against the fish, the poem also intends to showcase the poetic talent of the poet.

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The dominant presence of jināṣ is significant as we learned from the previous poem, for it conveys deeper meaning relevant to a given poem. For example, in line 16 the poet uses the name of the village from which he sailed (Mirrī) and metaphorically suggests that his trip turned out to be the bitter colocynth (al-ʿalqam al-murr). Playing with jināṣ accurately delivers the image of the aftermath of what was supposed to be a normal trip but devolved into disaster; hence the image of bitter colocynth.

Similarly, the poet in line 26 plays with the root “m-h-w”, which means erase. The jināṣ here comes to argue that even if the fish’s strike marked his face and thus erased some of his face’s features and left traces on it, his wound is nevertheless similar to traces of the moon “a-th-r” in the lines 26 and 27, where the marks of the moon correlate with a human face (i.e., the poet) that has been struck and upon which traces are left. The poet compares the wound on his face to the metaphorical wound—so to speak—of the moon, which is a sign of beauty, and to the chinks on a sword, which signify bravery. Defacing on one hand is as beautiful as the moon. On the other hand, the dots and marks in the face are similar to the great sword which is used to kill many. Put differently, even though the fish had left an unsightly wound or scar on his face, the poet consoles himself by comparing two things that epitomize two merits: beauty and bravery.

In line 22 simile and metaphor that come into play when the poet compares his state of dizziness after being struck by the fish to a state of a drunk man reeling from wine. The phrase ‘nazīf ṭilā’ (became intoxicated) is used punningly to convey an intensified image of the poet’s condition after being hit by the fish. In Arabic poetry, the wine theme is evoked to describe the poet’s reveling with his companions or to enter
upon the love scene with the beloved. Here the basis for the comparison is altogether novel. The poet is staggering from the attack of the fish, not from imbibing fine wine. In a somehow similar way, we find, for example, in al-Akhtal’s famous poem “the tribe has departed” (khaff al-qaṭīn), describing his shock as the she-camel, which carries his beloved, leaves:

And I, on the day fate took them off,
   was like one drunk
On wine from Ḥimṣ or Gadra
   that sends shivers down the spine,

The novel use of similes and metaphors continues in line 23, when the poet compares his shock at the red spots of blood on his body, including his face, to that of a wounded man who suddenly finds his plain garb covered with red dots like a richly embroidered robe. Again, these novel images dramatize the event and allow the hearer to experience the poet’s shock. As he takes a classical theme and plays with it in the previous line (22), he does so again in this line, and will do more in the metapoetic lines at the end of the poem (32-36). After repeating some of his heroic qualities as well as his misery due to this unfortunate event in number of lines, the poet produces a transitional line (32) in which he declares that he will never be avenged unless by his own poetry. But will poetry be enough?

563 S. Stetkevych, Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy, 89.
True, the poet acknowledges that the fish is not his equal nor does it bear a lineage nor heroic virtues. But still he emphatically states that “I am not the master of poetry unless I mount upon the spear’s bottom/ every runaway meaning more contagious than mange,” to lampoon the fish. Why does he do this? Of course, the fish will not be affected by the lampoon, but the purpose is rather to recoup the lost status and dignity of the humiliated poet through a display of his poetic powers.

Of interest is the idea that poetry here resemble famous metapoetic lines, such as that of Ibn Muqbil, Abū Tammām, and even 11th/17th century poets; it is a contagious disease (al-‘urr), more harmful than blindness or deafness, and it is feared in both the sea and the land. To compare one’s poetry with a contagious disease is quite strange and striking, but it seems the poet is trying to praise the quick and immediate ‘negative/harmful’ effect his poetry will achieve.

In a strikingly innovative passage, his poetry appropriates the very properties of the enemy he lampoons—the fish: it swims through the sea, surfaces like a diver searching for pearls, and seize other fish that rush to the bottom before they can reach it. It seems as though his poetry becomes as predatory as the fish. Since the incident is strange and shocking, everything, including poetic themes in the poem is turned upside down; physical bleeding becomes drunkenness, poetry becomes predation, and the meaning of poetry becomes uncanny. On the surface at least, the novelty of the event seems to have sparked innovation in poetry.

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564 Fakhreddine, Metapoesis, 87, 88,
As in the inability of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his son al-Ḥusayn to be properly avenged by the slaying of someone of equal status—because there was no one who could match their status, the poet, too, feels that no proper vengeance can be achieved from the fish. However irreverent the comparison may appear, at the same time the unexpectedness of the comparison of the relatively trivial to the sacred creates a sense of novelty.

In terms of its reception, Ibn Maʿṣūm, cites a taqrīṭ (lit., commendation, acclaim) by a contemporary poet, which—despite being conventional—conveys the exceptional quality of this poem. Of its reception by one of the poet’s contemporaries, Ibn Maʿṣūm, quoting al-Sharīf Mājid ibn Hishām al-Bahrānī, states:

When this poem was presented to the nobleman and the well-versed Mājid ibn Hishām al-Bahrānī, may Allāh sanctify his soul, he wrote commending it: I have looked into its words and meanings and have given much reflection upon its corners and bases. [As a result,] I have found it a delight to the eye of innovation, and a joy to the heart of

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565 Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 531.
566 As in Berlin MS 457b. In Ibn Maʿṣūm, Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr, 531.
originality. And thus truth should be followed. Praise be to Allāh that signposts of literature have been renewed after they had vanished, and the banner of eloquence has been raised after it had been lowered to the ground. And that the uniqueness of eloquence has been returned to its birth-place and its desolation has been removed so it is inhabited once more. This is what Mājid al-Baḥrānī wrote.

The importance of this passage lies in the qualities stressed as the statements indicate that this poem is a “delight to the eye of innovation [...] a joy to the heart of originality,” and that because of it “signposts of literature have been renewed after they had vanished.” Despite the fact that the poet is portrayed as possessing qualities of a great poet as argued by Ibn Maʿṣūm, there is no explanation regarding how this poem is innovative. Nevertheless, the poem appears to be "parodic" or "mock-heroic" as it applies the traditional serious heroic elements of the poetry of boast and invective and the themes of blood-vengeance and honor, to the preposterous situation of the poet attacked by a fish. So is it really a “straight” “serious” poem of hijāʾ and vengeance toward a fish? Or is it a post-classical parody of the classical poetic tradition. Or is it intended as both? A further question is whether the poet is really composing a poem about this particular humiliating incident, or is he using it as a metaphorical or allegorical representation of other personal or political humiliations he has suffered at the hands of unworthy rivals or enemies?

One way to attempt to approach it is to use the binary-opposed jidd (earnest) vs. hazl (jest), which according to Ḥāzim al-Qarṭājannī (d. 684/1285), are the two main modes of Arabic poetry.567 In his study “Mixtures of Jest and Earnest in Classical Arabic Literature,” G. J. van Gelder points out that especially in motifs such as love poetry and

invective, the mixture of earnest and jest is more likely to occur.\textsuperscript{568} Although this poem employs invective that most appropriately fits the category of mixing the two modes, one still finds it hard to grapple with. This is why we find different interpretations of it. For example, ʿAdnān al-ʿAwāmī in his preface to the edition of al-Khaṭṭī’s \textit{dīwān} speaks of it as a “manifestation of the fun and jest,” and in thematically categorizing his poetry places this poem under \textit{hazl}.\textsuperscript{569} However, Naṣr Allāh reads it as a serious poem. He notes that especially when the poet speaks of the calamities of days in line 15, he may be invoking his region Baḥrayn, which had been attacked by Portuguese, Bedouin, and manipulated by the Ottomans.\textsuperscript{570} Aḥmad al-Rubayʿī studies al-Khaṭṭī’s collection of poems and finds that he often uses it classical motifs conventionally. However, in love poetry or description poetry, he shows signs of innovation “\textit{tajdīd},” especially in the way in which the poet incorporates many description of his nautical environment.\textsuperscript{571} In addition, he quotes this very poem as part of descriptive poetry that has attained some originality, but does not explain why; he merely paraphrases some of the lines and cites the comments by Mājid al-Baḥrānī translated above.\textsuperscript{572} The very statement by Mājid al-Baḥrānī emphasizes nothing but the novelty of the poem with no indication of whether it belongs to to \textit{jidd} or \textit{hazl}.

Moreover, the overlap of \textit{jidd} and \textit{hazl} can also be read as a parody. The term is absent in classical and post-classical Arabic literary criticism. However, Sinan Antoon

\textsuperscript{568} Van Gelder, "Mixtures of Jest and Earnest," 94.
\textsuperscript{569} Al-Khaṭṭī, \textit{Dīwān Abī al-Baḥr} (2005), 1: 91, 2: 45.
\textsuperscript{570} Naṣr Allāh, “Qirāʾah Ūlā,” 247-9.
contends that “[the] parasitical function of hazl here seems to be very close and almost identical to parody.”

Similar to poets such as Ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 391/1001), who takes a conventional them or a poem such as Imruʿ al-Qays’ and plays with it to achieve a jesting end, al-Khaṭṭī’s poem as it stands in the poet’s oeuvre subsumes an opportunity to address a pristine subject by using an already existing themes and motifs. The way by which it challenges “the tradition” is by taking the theme of invective and manipulating it to achieve several objectives, to wit: to dramatize a simple event, to come up with something new, and to shock the listener, or, as classical Arabic critics would prefer calling, to attract the listener’s attention. But as the fish left a lasting mark on the poet’s face, which means it became immortal, this poem is attempting to find an equivalent way for immortalizing al-Khaṭṭī’s poetry; the fish left indelible mark and the fish poem left a mark, yet in a positive way. In a short hazl poem, al-Khaṭṭī recalls the incident of the fish by saying:

بنا خير ما يجزي على الخير منعمُ
فما طلَّ من عند نصرته دمُ
فخاض إليه البحر والبحر مُ
فعمُ درى أن عند الحوت بعض دمائنا
May Allāh reward Zāhir greatly for what he did [for us]:
Tracking the farthest of our revenge and striking it,
to leave our blood finally avenged.
He knew that the fish has our blood, so he waded the sea,

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574 Antoon, The Poetics of the Obscene, 49-56.
while the sea was flowing. Clearly this example supports the argument that this poem is intended to be mock-heroic and parodic, although its strangeness and peculiarity makes it a good example of a poem that is open to various interpretations.
Conclusion

The growing studies in the past couple of decades that have challenged the classification of centuries as a period of decline (inḥīṭāṭ) have allowed this dissertation to appear. The inḥīṭāṭ paradigm however, continues to predominate. To this date, the bulk of the study of Arabic literature intentionally overlooks this middle period as usually determined “post-classical or pre-modern” or Mamluk and Ottoman periods and focuses instead on either classical or modern Arabic literature. For example, at Umm al-Qura University, I currently teach a course called “Arabic literature in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods.” Despite the length of these periods that together span seven centuries, the course carries only two credits, while modern Arabic literature has five credits and Abbasid, Umayyad, pre-Islamic and Andalusian literature have over twenty credits. Moreover, over 80% of theses and dissertations until 2015 at Umm al-Qura university are not on post-classical Arabic literature. At the beginning of writing this dissertation and throughout, I found only a few sources that deal with major authors such as Ibn Maʿṣūm, al-Muḥibbī, and al-Khafājī. The poets recorded in their works have seldom been studied even though in the 11th/17th century Arabic literature witnessed a florescence as al-Ḥulw back in the 1960s and al-Raddādī back in 1980s have argued, and as I argue in this very study. My first chapter aims at this direction, providing various sources that have dealt with inḥīṭāṭ, how and why it prevailed, and how the revisionist movement in Arabic and Islamic studies has come to reject it in the last couple of decades. The rest of this dissertation adds to these studies by focusing on a genre of tarājim al-shuʿarāʾ as in their

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576 This is according to Dr. Muḥammad al-Qarnī, the head of the department of Arabic literature at Umm al-Qura University.
presentation of the best example of literary productions and also their critiquing apparatuses. As it preserves a wide range of knowledge, the genre of tarājim al-shuʿarāʾ “the biographical anthologies” has its share when it comes to literature, and one cannot begin to understand the literary view without immersing oneself in the way those scholars such as al-Thaʿālibī, al-Bākharzī, al-Kātib al-Iṣfahānī, and later with al-Khafājī, al-Muhibbī, and Ibn Maʿṣūm created their works on contemporary poets. The latter’s book has been the subject of this study. I have attempted to read Ibn Maʿṣūm’s Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsin al-shuʿarāʾ bi-kull miṣr closely and especially provide the argument of how its author understood literature and reflected his perception of excellent and weak literature (poetry) throughout the book. To accomplish this, I investigated his remarks pertaining to judging poetic examples of being excellent or imperfect and why to then contrast them with what could be found in Ibn Maʿṣūm’s other books that are related to poetry. Placing the Sulāfa and Ibn Maʿṣūm’s other works within the context in which they operated is essential to better understand the overall aesthetics of Ibn Maʿṣūm and his Sulāfa. This dissertation ends with two examples of the Sulāfa’s poetry in an attempt to delve more into Ibn Maʿṣūm’s selection of what he deems as great examples of poetry. What remains unsaid, however, is far greater than what has been already said. Many issues are still to be discussed and many examples of poetry are still to be taken into consideration. For example, as I did in the second chapter, one could compare and contrast many literary examples in the 11th/17th-century biographical anthologies. Additionally, one could study all three authors in term of their poetic aesthetics and to what degree do they agree or disagree. Manuscripts of poets’ dīwān Ibn Maʿṣūm includes in his work are still out there waiting for someone to blow the dust off them and bring them into light. What I hope I
have accomplished in this dissertation is to be part of a few previous works on literature that awaits generations of specialists to accord it its rightful place. Those authors who did an extraordinary job at preserving a great deal of literature will one day be appreciated by their successors, and courses on their literature will multiply.

الحمد لله رب العالمين، والصلاة على خير المرسلين، وبعد

تم هذا السَّفر الذي "طالما سهرت من أجل طوال الليالي" ومضدت بيد الأماني في روض ثمره أطناب الأمالي* وها أقول لأمالي ولا أبالي:

ما يعرف الشوق إلا من يكابدُه ولا الصبابة إلا من يعانيها

وكان الفراغ من هذه الرسالة يوم السبت غرزة ربيع الثاني من سنة ألف وأربعمئة وثلاثة وأربعين الموافق السادس من شهر نوفمبر (تشرين الثاني) من سنة ألفين وواحد وعشرين، وكان الفراغ من نسختها الأخيرة المحررة يوم السبت لأربع بقين من شهر جمادى الآخرة، الموافق للتاسع والعشرين من شهر يناير (كانون الثاني) من سنة ألفين وأثنتين وعشرين.

وَلله ولي التوفيق.


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