

## **MUWASHSHAH TERMINOLOGY – A JOURNEY THROUGH ARABIC REFERENCES**

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Defining literary terminology is never an easy matter, particularly in the case of Arabic literary terms, given the historical and geographic spread of the cultures that generated them. In addition, where efforts have been made to furnish comprehensible terminology they are generally relatively limited to linguistic dictionaries and encyclopedias.

The problem is particularly evident when one reviews writings that have dealt with the art of *muwashshahāt* (strophic poetry, just one of the many forms of Arabic verse that have evolved) since the birth of the *muwashshah* in Andalusia more than a thousand years ago.

The significance of the *muwashshah* in general, in addition to the fact that it is the most developed and sophisticated form of Arabic poetry, is what prompted us to choose its terminology as the subject of our study. The *muwashshah* is, additionally, the most branched-out variety of what are known as the “seven arts” (*al-funūn al-sab‘a*), and also presents problems related to its etymological origins, not to mention differences of opinion as regards its meaning and applicability.

The study of the *muwashshah* is also important because it has stimulated researchers to examine similar poetic forms that appeared in early European literature, particularly in relation to troubadour poetry. The relationship of troubadour poetry to Arabic poetry has been the focus of hundreds of studies, and is considered one of the most intriguing subjects ever in the field of comparative literature. On this matter, there is more or less a general consensus that:

“The average number of stanzas used by troubadours is seven, which is the characteristic number in the *muwashshah* or *zajal* [popular poetry in the strophic form]. Each stanza has aspects corresponding to the *ghuṣn* and *qufl* [envoi] in Arabic *muwashshah* and *zajal*; the former is known in Spanish as *mudanza* and the latter as *vuelta* (Fr. *tornade*). The latter rhymes with its counterpart in each stanza, as is the case in the Arabic *muwashshah* and *zajal*, but it is has no precedent in European poetry. It is true that one hardly finds in troubadour poetry the equivalent of the *matla‘* or *markaz* – known in Spanish as *estribillo* – but one should remember that some *muwashshahāt* and *azjāl* may exist without *matla‘* as well. For Arab critics in modern times the *kharja* is the fulcrum of the *muwashshah*.

Its corresponding item in each stanza is the *qufl*, to which the troubadours gave great attention. The rhyme follows a stanza-by-stanza schema in troubadour poetry analogous to corresponding schemas in the *muwashshah* and *zajal*, for example the *aaab* schema in both. This general similarity, which has no precedent in European poetry prior to that point, is enough to prove the Arabic impact on rhyme patterns. The similarity is more marked in the poetry of the earlier troubadours, which, eventually, departed from Arabic rhyme patterns as troubadour poetry developed its own structures. The *ghuṣn* and *qufl* constitute together what is called in troubadour poetry *bayt* [line], which has the same designation in the *muwashshah* and *zajal*.<sup>2</sup>

The study of the *muwashshah* and its structure is usually coupled with the examination of another literary genre, the *zajal* (pl. *azjāl*), which also originated in Andalusia.

While the designation of the various constituent parts of the *muwashshah* is a controversial matter between scholars – as will be seen in what follows – the word *muwashshah* itself is also fairly contentious. It has a general connotation denoting embellishment, but it also has a number of terminological connotations related to the art of rhetoric. However these are irrelevant to our present study of the *muwashshah* – namely as a specific form of poetic expression consisting of a number of stanzas with a multi-rhyme scheme, a defined pattern and the possibility of variants.

What is clear is that there are shortcomings and a general confusion as regards the treatment of *muwashshah* terminology in the source works – both manuscripts and printed books – whether Andalusian, Maghribi, or occidental. This applies as much to works in the history of literature and biographies as it does to the major collected volumes of *muwashshahāt*.

It is only to be expected that the confusion in the source works ends up being replicated in modern writings on the *muwashshah*. Indeed we barely find two authors agreeing on a single definition for a given term; on occasion the same author may even use the same term in different places with different meanings. Therefore it would seem sensible to begin with an examination of the key source texts which provide terminological evidence, in order to arrange them, analyse them, and finally specify the points of agreement and disagreement between the various contending views.

The first key document is the statement of Ibn Bassām al-Shantarīnī addressed to ‘Ubāda b. Mā’ al-Samā’, a *muwashshah* poet of the fifth century after the Hijra. This is considered to be the earliest source statement defining the terminology of the *muwashshah*. It attributes the creation of the genre to Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Qabrī al-Darīr who, we are told:

- Usually chose the neglected and less frequently used metres.

- Took dialectal and non-Arabic phrases and called them the *markaz*.
- Built the *muwashshah* upon the *markaz* without *taḍmīn* (see below) or *aghṣān*.
- Al-Ramādī followed him and was the first to use *taḍmīn* excessively in *marākiz*, that is to say to use *taḍmīn* in every *mawqif* [caesura] especially in the *markaz*.
- ‘Ubāda succeeded him to bring about an evolution by determining the places of *mawāqif* in *aghṣān* and use *taḍmīn* in them, as did al-Ramādī in the *markaz*.

Ibn Bassām’s passage was reprised in an abbreviated form in *Fawāt al-wafayāt*<sup>3</sup> by Ibn Shākir and some of his words were altered, as for instance the term *taḍmīn*, which has come down to us in three terms through three different scholarly readings: *tadfīr*, *taṣbīr*, and *taṣghīr*.

The usage of the term *markaz* (pl. *marākiz*) is not free from ambiguity either (a fact which has led most modern authors of studies on the *muwashshah*, if not all of them, to avoid reference to it). It is most likely that within the context of Ibn Bassām’s statement it is simply equivalent to *kharja*. He tells us that the old form of the *muwashshah* “took dialectal and non-Arabic phrases and called them the *markaz* upon which the *muwashshah* is built”. This description does not apply except to the *kharja*, which is the essence of the *muwashshah* structure, where vernacular and non-Arabic words are accepted, or rather preferred. Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk describes the nature of the *kharja* thus: “It should come to the mind previously and be adopted by the *muwashshah* poet from the very beginning, before he is bound by any metre or rhyme.” He also states that the *kharja* is the *asās* [basis],<sup>4</sup> whereas Dr Mohamed Ghounemi Hilāl considers the *markaz* to be the *matla’* of the *muwashshah*, equivalent of the *estribillo* or opening lines in the lyrics of the troubadours.

We now come to the *Dār al-Tirāz* of Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk. This book is highly significant, in part for its being the work of an Egyptian and “Eastern” writer, but also, and more centrally for our study, in being wholly dedicated to the art of the *muwashshah*, unlike the text of Ibn Bassām al-Shantarīnī, which treated the subject only briefly.

Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk states: “The *muwashshah* is a poetic expression with a specific metre. It consists of six *aqfāl* and five *abyāt* at most and at least from five *aqfāl* and five *abyāt*. The former is known as the *tāmm* [“complete”], and the latter is labeled the *aqra’* [“bald”]. The *tāmm* is the *muwashshah* that starts with *aqfāl* and the *aqra’* is the one which opens with *abyāt*.”

It should be noted that all the terms used by Ibn Bassām are mentioned in *Dār al-Ṭirāz*, but do not appear again in *al-Dhakhīra*. Continuing:

The *qufl* consists at least of two divisions, and up to eight. On occasion, albeit rarely, it may be found in nine to ten divisions. I could not find a single trustworthy instance of a Western Arab author having done such a thing, therefore I have not given an example of it.

The *bayt* [line] consists of three divisions at least. In rare cases the parts may be two in number, and the maximum is five.

The division of the *qufl* has to be simple, whereas that of the *bayt* may be either simple or compound. The compound division comprises a maximum of two to three *fiqar* ["sections"]. In some irregular *muwashshahāt*, exceptions to the rule, the *aqfāl* can have a variable number of divisions.

The *kharja* is the last *qufl* in the *muwashshah*. In order to be sound, it has to be argumentative and should follow the dialectal style of Ibn Quzmān. It should be fervent, fiery, intense, well-developed, and inspired by the tongue of the common people as well as the elite. If it consists of Arabic words and follows the pattern of the preceding lines and *aqfāl*, then it is no longer a *muwashshah* (unless it is a panegyric, where the name of the person to be praised appears in the *kharja*). The *kharja* may sometimes be in inflected Arabic, but its words must be very lyrical. However this is hard to come by – indeed, we only have two or three *muwashshahāt* in this form.

It is agreed, or rather required, that the shift to the *kharja* should be digressive, should quote somebody (whether the voice in the poem or other voices), and may have a variety of purposes and themes. The line preceding the *kharja* has to contain the words "he/she said" or "I/he/she recited". It may consist of non-Arabic words as long as it remains also nonsensical, dark and sharp.

Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk furnishes us with extensive material on the Andalusian *muwashshah*, although he does not provide references for the sources that he consulted. It seems that he may have relied on verbal sources, which he does not specify. His life and work would merit a thorough study, but that is beyond the scope of the present paper.

We can say that *Dār al-Ṭirāz* is the primary source for *muwashshah* terminology as far as terms such as "*muwashshah tāmm*" and "*muwashshah aqra'*" are concerned. The work's pre-eminence is undeniable, given that most of its content is unequalled in other sources, whether occidental, Maghribi or Andalusian. As stated above, the book deals with the structure of the *muwashshah*, with patterns of *aqfāl*, *ajzā'*, and other related terms. It deals with the final *qufl* designated as *kharja*, which Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk precisely defines as a *faqra* with special features. On the one hand, it is "the statement of a quoted statement [of the voice of the poem]". On the other

hand, it has a unique linguistic structure driven from Arabic or non-Arabic words. The usage of non-Arabic expressions remains ambiguous for Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk, who did not hesitate to compose *muwashshahāt* with Persian *kharajāt*, and who had no equal but Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī. He does not indicate whether the non-Arabic means the language spoken by the people of Andalusia, or the Romance language, or a mixture of Latin and some local Iberian dialects. It seems that Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk does not pay any attention to the statements of Ibn Bassām mentioned above, or to what is reported in *al-Dhakhīra*.

There remain no further references to consult for the art of the *muwashshah*. Other works such as *Al-Muqtataf min azāhir al-turaf* by 'Alī b. Sa'īd al-Maghribī give historical rather than terminological insights, while Ibn Khaldūn's *Al-Muqaddima* ("Prolegomenon") mostly quotes what is reported in *Al-Muqtataf*, with a few additions. However, the *Al-Muqaddima* does furnish new terms – for instance where it says that *muwashshahāt* are composed in successive *asmāt* and *aghṣān*. The former term is unparalleled in earlier works. Ibn Khaldūn's statements regarding *aghṣān* and *abyāt* conform with the works of Ibn Bassām and Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk.

Examination of other works on the *muwashshah* adds nothing new to the field of terminology. Anyone embarking on a study of the field would be entitled to ignore all other works with titles denoting the study of the *muwashshah*, since they furnish nothing that is profitable or reliable. Perhaps the final significant addition to the terminology is to be found in the book *Rayḥān al-albāb wa ray'ān al-shabāb* by Ibn al-Mawā'īnī,<sup>5</sup> written in the middle of the sixth century after the Hijra. The author tackles *tadmīn*, using the plural form *tadīmīnāt*, which corresponds to what Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk discusses under *ajzā'*. From this text we get a clearer sense of the meaning of *tadmīn*, which leads us to think that the intended meaning is probably that the *qufl* contains a number of *ajzā'* or *aqsām* (or *tadīmīnāt*).

It now remains only to note three small source-material contributions to *muwashshah* terminology. First, the *dīwān* of Ibn 'Arabī<sup>6</sup> is noteworthy in that it provides classificatory headings for the *muwashshahāt* contained therein. The *dīwān* uses the term *mā lahu ra's* [headed *muwashshah*] which is evidently equivalent to Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's *muwashshah tāmm*. In Ibn 'Arabī the term may appear in other forms, such as *al-tawshshih al-mar'ūs* and *al-tawshshih dhū l-ra's*. The term *mar'ūs* is considered by some modern Moroccan scholars an Andalusian-Maghribi formula. They have called for it to be adopted in place of the "Eastern" formulas coined by Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk.

Secondly, Darwīsh al-Talawī al-Dimashqī in *Sānihāt dumā al-qasr fī mutārahāt banī al-'aṣr*<sup>7</sup> uses the expression *muwashshah al-mardūf*. He defines the word *mardūf* as follows: "It is what follows the first line in each stanza and has a word adhering to the same rhyme."

Thirdly, al-Ibshihī, author of *Al-Mustatraf min kull fann mustazraf*,<sup>8</sup>

generally uses the term *dawr* as an equivalent to Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's *bayt* in conjunction with the following *qufl*. However in one of his examples (the *muwashshah* of Shams al-Muḥayyā Umm al-Qamar, which he also attributes to Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk) he introduces a new term, namely the *silsila*. Here the structure of the *muwashshah* is irregular in various respects, since it has the following schema:

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-----A-----A
-----A-----A
-----B
-----A-----A
-----A-----A
-----A-----A
-----C
-----A-----A
-----D-----D
-----D-----D
-----E
-----A-----A
    
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This schema differs from the traditional structure of the *muwashshah*, where the *aqfāl* are mixed with *aqṣām*. As a term, however, the *silsila* designates a specific type of poetry that appeared in later ages. This is not unusual, since there is much terminological confusion in modern references – to such an extent that a review of ten separate works may produce ten different concepts.

At a certain point, the discrepancies in terminology and meanings became so widespread that it began to affect academic books and the educational curriculum as well. It became apparent that there was a need for agreement on terminology and a unification thereof. Dr Mostafa Awad-al-Karim took the first step with his book *Fann al-tawshshih*. He was supported by Dr 'Abbas al-Jirārī and Dr Enani with their publications of *Muwashshahāt maghrībiyya* and *Al-Muwashshahāt al-andalusiyya* respectively. Through their joint studies the structure of the *muwashshah* was resolved to have the following pattern:

- *Qufl*: an adaptation of Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's definition with the acceptance of designating the last *qufl* as the *maṭla'*, or *madhhab* as it appears in late writings.
- *Bayt*: a term which appears frequently in *Dār al-Ṭirāz*. The general trend nowadays is to use the term *dawr* to refer to what Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk labels as *bayt*, as the *bayt* consists of the *dawr* and the following *qufl*.
- *Aghṣān* and *asmāt*: these two terms are not mentioned at all in *Dār al-Ṭirāz*. The view nowadays is that the *aghṣān* represent the totality of

the *ajzā'* constituting the *qufl*, whereas the *asmāt* are the totality of the *ajzā'* constituting the *dawr*.

- *Tadmīn*, *tadfir* and *tasghīr*: these terms first emerge in the *al-Dhakhīra*. It is difficult to specify what exactly Ibn Bassām meant by the three terms. The most common meaning of the term *tadmīn* is a literary quotation, but in Ibn Bassām it refers to rhyme.

The dilemma becomes more acute as another term, *tadfir*, is used in al-Kindī's *Khabar šinā'at al-ta'līf*. The ambiguity and complexity of al-Kindī's account of the *muwashshah* led a critic of his musical works to deduce a definition of the *muwashshah* as follows: it is "a type of melody composed in a certain manner that was known in Iraq in his [al-Kindī's] time as *tadfir*". Such a statement is rather channeled to questions pertaining to the Andalusian origins of this art, a topic that has been clarified by scholars, and not to the study in hand, of the terminology of *muwashshah*.

It would seem appropriate at this point to mention the term *al-mukaffir* [expiatory], since it comes within the terminology of the *muwashshah* and is considered to be a distinct form of it. This term too has been subjected to attempts to determine its meaning, departing from the accuracy aimed at by Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk. A development took place in the form of *al-mukaffir* with the composition of expiatory *muwashshahāt* by late poets without any justification for its employment in the subject matter of the poem. Another form was created by the poets of Andalusia and Maghrib, the most renowned of them being the Sufi Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh al-Judhāmy<sup>9</sup> who followed the pattern of the Andalusian *muwashshahāt* having worldly themes, as if through his poetry he were able to expiate the sins of others.

To conclude, the Andalusian *muwashshah* constitute a remarkable deviation from the archetypal oriental poem and departure from its general frame. It is a genuinely Andalusian development which sprang from the necessities of time and place. It manifested itself in three interconnected levels: musical, linguistic and moral. However, our present study has chosen to focus solely on terminology, excluding matters such as metrics, inner music, language etc. Furthermore, space constraints mean that we have not tackled topics related to the art of *tawshīh* except through brief and limited quotations. Its deep impact on the *muwashshah* and its evolution through the ages merit a separate and more thorough study.

## NOTES

1. See al-ʿĀṭil al-Ḥālī, ed. Hönerbach, Wiesbaden, p. 7; H. Naṣṣār, Cairo, p. 2; and Modern Studies in M.Z. Enani's introduction to the *muwashshah* and *zajal*, *Madkhal li-dirāsāt al-muwashshah wa-al-azjāl*, Alexandria, 1982.

2. M. Gh. Hīlāl, *Al-Adab al-muqāran*, Beirut, 1981, p. 274.

3. Ed. I. Abbās, part I, vol. 2, p. 469, 1st ed., Beirut, 1978; Ed. I. Abbās, vol. 2, p. 149, Beirut, 1974.

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4. Introduction to *Dār al-Ṭirāz*, ed. M.Z. Enani, Beirut, 2001, p. 43.
5. *Rayḥān al-bāb*, ms., in 'Abbās al-Jirārī's *Muwashshahāt maghribiyya*, 1st ed., Casablanca, 1973, pp. 19-20.
6. *Dīwān Ibn 'Arabī*, Cairo ed., 1994, see pp. 217, 219, 235 etc.
7. *Sānihāt dumā al-qaṣr fī mutārahāt banī al-'aṣr*, ed. M. Mursī al-Khūlī, Beirut, 1983.
8. *Al-Mustatraf*, Beirut ed., vol. 2, p. 207.
9. *Dīwān Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh*, ed. M.Z. Enani and A. Sunūsī, Cairo, 1999, pp. 135-210.