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Egyptian Arabic in the seventeenth century : a study and edition of Yusuf al-Magribi's 'Daf al-isr an kalam ahl Misr'

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CHAPTER 4

The Poetry in *Daf al-iṣr*

4.1 Dialectal poetry

Al-Mağribī composed 26 *mawāwīl* for *Daf al-iṣr*.²¹⁹ A *mawwāl* is a non-Classical verse form which could be written in either Classical Arabic or the colloquial.²²⁰ It originally consisted of a monorhyming quatrain, called *rubāʿī* (i.e. comprised of four verses), although additional lines with different rhymes were added as time progressed. Al-Mağribī's *mawāwīl* all consist of four lines and contain homonymous rhyme, i.e. the rhyme word is the same in each line but is used with a different meaning. The varied use of this word sometimes leads to these poems being difficult to understand, and so al-Mağribī often deliberately wrote the meaning next to the poem.²²¹

Most *mawāwīl* in *Daf al-iṣr* were composed when an entry inspired al-Mağribī, although he tells us that the example on fol. 11b is the only one of the collection which was composed before the book was written. Olga Frolova has transcribed, translated and analyzed some of these verses in three articles.²²²

All of the *mawāwīl* in *Daf al-iṣr* are in the *basīṭ* metre,²²³ which is based on *mustafīlun fā'ilun mustafīlun fā'ilun* (- - √ - / - √ - / - - √ - / - √ -). However, they may have the following variations: the first foot can be *mafā'ilun* (√ - √ -), the second *fa'ilun* (√ √ -),²²⁴ and the final foot is always *fa'lun* (- -).²²⁵

Although al-Mağribī used some Classical Arabic vocabulary in these poems, the metre indicates that in most cases words should be read without *i'ṛāb* and *tanwīn*.

²¹⁹ Al-Mağribī uses both terms, *mawwāl* and *mawāliyā*, for this type of verse. Here only *mawwāl* will be used. Although the *mawwāl* was originally the composer of the *mawāliyā*, the term *mawwāl* is used nowadays in Egypt for the poem itself, see Cachia (1977) p. 83.

²²⁰ See *EF* VI p. 868a (P. Cachia).

²²¹ See the *mawāwīl* on fols. 51b, 52b, 57b, 69a, 74a and 94b.

²²² The *mawāwīl* on fols. 4a, 24a, 41a, 49a, 51b, 57a, 67b, 69a, 73b, 74a (Frolova 1982) and 46b (Frolova 1995 and 1997).

²²³ All of these characteristics fit the observations of Cachia (1977) p. 83, who mentions that all the pre-eighteenth century *mawāwīl* he encountered were monorhyme quatrains in the *basīṭ* metre.

²²⁴ These all are within the *basīṭ*-metre described by Stoetzer (1989) pp. 148-9.

²²⁵ Cachia (1977) p. 83 observes that the last foot is reduced to two long syllables in all pre-eighteenth century *mawāwīl*.

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Sometimes, a short vowel is needed to fit the metre, which is indicated in the transliteration by an ə. Most of the poems are love poems, and the usual vocabulary of this genre is employed: We frequently find words such as “rebuker” (*‘ādīl* or *‘adūl*), “passion” (*‘iṣq*), “moonlight” (*nūr al-qamar*), “a promise” (*wa’d*), “ardently in love” (*ṣabb*) etc.

A few examples of the *mawāwīl* in *Daf al-iṣr* are set out below. The first plays with the different meanings of the word *bāl*:²²⁶

اصبحت من عشق حبي حال مني البال
وطيب ذكره واوصافه دوام في البال
ان جا لعندي اضيفه بالحمل والبال
وان رضي بي بارضه البال يكون ذا البال

‘aṣbaḥtə min ‘iṣqə ḥibbī ḥālə minnī l-bāl
wa-tībə dīkruh wa-’awṣāfuh dawām fī-l-bāl
in ġā li-’indī uḍḍifuh bi-l-ḥamal wa-l-bāl
wa-’in riḍī bī bi-irḍa l-bāl yakūn dā-l-bāl

“my mind is busy since I fell for my darling

The scent of his²²⁷ memory and his description are always on my mind

If he comes to me, I will offer him lamb and soft bread

And if he accepts me, this would be the most wonderful thing”.

Another example of a love poem from fol. 57b (note the orthography of the colloquial *lū*):

عيون حبوبي الغزل قد حاكت
للصّبّ اكفان لما ان مشت حاكت
الفاظها في فواد الحبّ قد حاكت
ونور ضياها لمع لو الشمس قد حاكت

‘uyūnə maḥbūbatī bi-l-ġazlə qad ḥākat
li-l-ṣabbə akfānə lammā ’in maṣat ḥākat

²²⁶ Fol. 66b.

²²⁷ Of course, in this and the following poems, he/his/him can be read as she/her/her.

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alfāzāhā fī fu'ād al-ḥibbā qad ḥākat

wa-nūr dīyāhā lama' lū al-šamsā qad ḥākat

“The eyes of my beloved wove with yarn

Shrouds for the enamored, while walking gracefully

Her words left a mark on the heart of the beloved

And the light of her glow shone brightly, for him it resembled the sun”

On occasions, this playing with the various meanings of a word produces poems that sound rather far-fetched and artificial, like the following one on the word *tibn*:²²⁸

من يعذل الصب مثل العير ياكل تبين

وكل من يعذره في الحب هذاك تبين

وحق باري النسم انسان يكن او تبين

ان زرت اسقي الخلائق في قدح هو تبين

man ya'dul al-ṣabbā miṭl al-'yrā yākul tibn

wa-kullā man ya'diruh fi-l-ḥubbā ḥādāk tibn

wa-ḥaqqā bārī-l-nasam insān yakun 'aw tibn

in zurtā 'asqī-l-ḥalā'iq fī qadaḥ hū tibn

“Who blames the enamored is like an ass that eats straw

And everyone who forgives him in love is a noble chief

By the truth of the Creator of the breath of life, whether he is a human being or a wolf

If I visit (am visited?), I will give the creatures to drink from a cup which is called *tibn*”

In the following, the word قل can be interpreted in different ways: as the perfect verb *qall* “diminished”, the imperative *qul* “say!”, the noun *qull* “a small number” and the adjective *qull* “unique”:²²⁹

يا منية القلب صلني ان صبري قل

وعاذلي فيك هذا القل من القل

²²⁸ Fol. 110a.

²²⁹ Fol. 90a.

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وانت في الحسن مفرد في الحبايب قل
مهما تشا من قضايا يا حبيبي قل

yā munyāt al-qalbə ṣilnī 'innə ṣabrī qall
wa 'ādilī fika hādā l-qullə min al-qull
wa-'anta fī l-ḥusnə mufrad fī l-ḥabāyib qull
mahmā tašā min qaḍāyā yā ḥabībī qul

“O desire of the heart, keep in touch, my patience has diminished!
This person who blames me about you is the most insignificant
You are singular in beauty, unique among the beloved
Whatever you want, my beloved, just say it”

An interesting *mawwāl* is the one from fol. 99b, because the first word of the line is the reverse of the last word. Al-Mağribī himself calls it *maḥbūk al-ṭarafayn* “tightly woven from both sides”. He adds that to the best of his knowledge, nobody did this before with words consisting of four letters, but only with three letters:

من بالوصل لو عارض كما نَمَمَ
ململ فوادي ومالي الكل قد لملم
مسس حسودي بوصله لي ولو سمس
مزمز بشربه من القهوة ولي زمزم

man manna bi-l-waṣlə lū 'araḍ kamā namnam
malmal fu'ādī wa-mā lī-l-kullə qad lamlam
masmas ḥasūdī bi-waṣluh lī wa-lū samsam
mazmaz bi-ṣurbuh min alqahwah wa-lī zamzam

“The one who granted the union resisted it like he embellished/muttered(?)
He made my heart restless, and did not gather everything for me
My envier confused me with his union with me and ran to him
He sipped his drink from the coffee and murmured to me”

In 'Awwād's index (p. 314), two poems labeled *zaḡal* actually are *mawāwīl*: those on fols. 46b and 91a. The poem on fol. 11b is also not a *zaḡal*. It is in Classical Arabic, and it appears that its metre is *munsariḥ*, with an irregularity in the last foot. This

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leaves the reader with two poems by al-Mağribī which do not fit the Ḥalīlian metres and could therefore be classified as *zağal*. These are on fols. 103b and 86b.

Furthermore, we find a *dūbayt*²³⁰ on fol. 27b, which according to al-Mağribī was famous at that time. It has the usual rhyme scheme, *aaba*.

4.2 Poetry in Classical Arabic

The poems by classical authors such as Abū Nawās and al-Mutanabbī which are quoted throughout *Daf al-iṣr* mostly serve to demonstrate the use of a certain word. In view of the well-known status of these authors, these poems will not be the subject of discussion here, and the focus will instead be on Yūsuf al-Mağribī's poetry. As explained earlier, the classical poetry actually written by al-Mağribī in *Daf al-iṣr* is often composed on the occasion of an entry, just as was the case with the *mawāwīl*. These classical poems often consist of only one or two verses. The longer poems are mostly those which al-Mağribī had composed previously. For instance, there are two long poems on fols. 9b and 19b which were taken from his work *Muḍahhabāt al-ḥusn*.

Al-Mağribī often composed poems on special occasions. An interesting example is the one on fol. 99b which eventually gave *Daf al-iṣr* its title.²³¹ Before the arrival in Egypt of the new pasha,²³² 'Alī Pasha (1010/1601), a Yemeni friend of al-Mağribī's had a vision in which he saw Cairo illuminated with lamps. Al-Mağribī, therefore, composed the following verse:²³³

راوا في عالم الرويا * ضياءً منك يجلو الاضْرُ
فقلت وجأ في التاريخ * علي پاشا ينور مصر
ra'aw fi 'ālam al-ru'yā / ḍiyā'an minka yağlū l-'iṣr
fa-qultu-w ḡā'a fi l-tārīḡ / 'alī pāšā yunawwir miṣr

“They saw in a vision / a light which removed the burden from you
I said, ‘In the history / Ali Pasha²³⁴ came to enlighten Egypt”.

²³⁰ “A quatrain of a particular metre (*fa'lun mutafā'ilun fa'ūlun fa'ilun*) and rhyme scheme *aaba* (called *a'rađi*) or *aaaa*.” *EI*² VIII 582b (C.H. de Fouchecour et al.).

²³¹ See §2.3.

²³² There was always a pasha sent from Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, to rule Egypt.

²³³ The metre is *hazağ*.

²³⁴ 'Alī IV, governor of Egypt from Ṣafar 1010/August 1601 to Rabī II 1012/September 1603. See Holt (1973) p. 189. “Several pashas also held the rank of vizier”, see Winter (1992) p. 32.

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Later, Ali Pasha made some improvements in the city. He illuminated the streets, cleaned up the markets, and closed some of the shops which were selling food to reduce the amount of smoke in the air.²³⁵

Two other examples of occasional poetry in *Daf al-iṣr* are a poem written by al-Mağribī to his friend Muḥammad Riḍā (fol. 12b-13a) on the occasion of *ʿīd al-ʿaḏḩā*, and an elegy for a Turkish derwish flute player called Ğalāl al-Dīn Mullā ḩānkār (fol. 19a).

4.2.1 *taṭlīt*

There are also 18 small two-verse poems in *Daf al-iṣr*, composed on the occasion of a *taṭlīt*, i.e. a word which can be read with *fatha*, *kasra* or *ḩamma*. Al-Mağribī arranges them into quatrains in which the first, second and third hemistichs end with one of these variants. The fourth ends with another word, thus creating the rhyme scheme *aaab*. These poems are called *muṭallaṭāt*. They are all in the *rağaz*-metre, and are all dimeters (*manḩūk al-rağaz*). It will suffice to present two of them as examples. The first is from fol. 23a and plays with the words *raff* “a kiss with the tips of the lips”, *riff* “a daily drink” and *ruff* “straw”:

لذي الجمال الرف * وللعنول الرف
له يليق الرف * كالاتن او كالحمر

li-ḩī l-ğamāli l-raffū / wa li-l-ʿaḩūli l-riffū
lahū yalīqu l-ruffū / ka-l-ʿutni ʿaw ka-l-ḩumurī

“For the owner of beauty, there is a kiss / and for the critic a daily drink
Although for him straw would be suitable / like for the asses or the donkeys”.

The second example is from fol. 21a and plays with the words *kalla* “a blunt sword”, *killā* “curtain” and *kullah(u)* “everything”:

شفرة ضدي كله * والحب وسط كله
انسي اريد كله * اعني جميع الامر

šafratu ḩiddī kallah / wa l-ḩibbu waṣṭa killah
ʿinnī ʿurīdu kullah / ʿaʿnī ḩamīʿa l-ʿamrī

“the edge of my adversary’s sword is blunt / and my beloved is behind a curtain

²³⁵ See fol. 99b.

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I want it all / I mean everything”

These examples, and especially the second one, highlight that these small poems can hardly be described as sophisticated. Al-Mağribī, however, had a different opinion: “وانما نظمت مثلثات لم ينظمها احد في علمي ذلك من فضل الله” “I composed *muṭallaṭāt* which to the best of my knowledge no one else has composed. This is a gift from God”.²³⁶

4.2.2 *taḥmīs*

As we have seen in §1.4.1, al-Mağribī made a *taḥmīs* of *Lāmīyat al-iḥwān wa muršīdat al-ḥillān* by Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar b. al-Muẓaffar b. al-Wardī (689/1290– 749/1349). The definition of *taḥmīs* is as follows:

“*Taḥmīs* involves the addition of three hemistichs to each *bayt* of a given poem; the rhyme letter of the added hemistichs is determined by the first hemistich of each successive *bayt*. This extra material usually precedes the original *bayt*; however, less commonly the *bayt* may be split and filled (see Cairo, *Fihris*, iii, 49)—a process normally referred to as *taṣṭīr*. (The number of added hemistichs may in fact be more or less than three, in which case the term for the poem is variously *tarbī* [2 added hemistichs], *tasbī* [5 added hemistichs], etc.)”.²³⁷

In this case, al-Mağribī added the extra three hemistichs before the verse of Ibn Wardī. The following is a sample of this *taḥmīs*, and can be found on fol. 18a of *Daf al-iṣr*; the metre is *ramal*:

قلّ العشرة الا من حسن
وارض في الاصحاب خلّ موتمن
واذا رمت ازديارا فاسمعن
غب وزرّ غبا تزد حبا فمن * اكثر الترداد أضماه المملّ

qallil al-‘iṣrata ‘illā man ḥasan
wa-rḍa fī l-‘aṣḥābi ḥillun mu’tamin
wa-‘iḍā rumta zdiyāran fa-sma’an
ḡib wa-zur ḡibban tazid ḥubban fa-man / akṭara l-tardāda ‘aṣmāhu l-malal

²³⁶ Fol. 101a.

²³⁷ *EF* X p. 123b-124a (P. F. Kennedy).

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“Reduce socializing, except if you do it well
Only keep as friends those who are trusted
If you wish to visit then listen
Stay away and visit at intervals, so you become more beloved, because who /
passes by very often, is hit fatally by boredom”

4.2.3 Riddles

Al-Mağribī also wrote some riddles in *Daf al-iṣr*. As these were in the form of short poems, it is appropriate to elaborate on them in this chapter. The *luǧz* “riddle” or “enigma” is “generally in verse, and characteristically is in an interrogative form”.²³⁸ Inspired by the different meanings of words found in *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, al-Mağribī used the riddles to display his linguistic skills. On fol. 21b we find a riddle playing on the word *ḥarūf*, which has the well-known meaning of “sheep” but the less well-known meaning of “colt”.²³⁹

يا من لهم حسن فهم * فهم به في امان
فهل رايتم خروفا * وليس ابنا لضان

yā man lahum ḥusnu fahmī / fahhim bihī fi' amānī
fa-hal ra'aytum ḥarūfan / wa-laysa 'ibnan li-dānī

“You who have good understanding / make us understand it safely
Did you see a *ḥarūf* / that is not the son of a sheep?”

The answer, also rhyming on *-nī*, follows on fol. 22a:²⁴⁰

نعم راينا خروفاً * وليس ابنا لضان
وذلك المهر حقاً * على اشتراك المعاني

na'am ra'aynā ḥarūfan / wa-laysa 'ibnan li-dānī
wa-dālika l-muhru ḥaqqan / 'alā štirāki l-ma'ānī

“Yes, we saw a *ḥarūf* / that is not the son of a sheep

²³⁸ *EF* V p. 807a (M. Bencheneb).

²³⁹ The metre is *muǧtatt*.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

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And that is indeed a colt / used as a homonym”.

Another *luǧz* in which the writer plays with the double meaning of a word is found on fol. 129b:²⁴¹

خبروني عن صدوق صادق * وصحيح قولنا فيه افتري

ḥabbirūnī ‘an ṣadūqin ṣādiqī / wa-ṣaḥīḥun qawlunā fīhī ftarā

“Tell me about an honest man / About whom we can rightly say that he *iftarā*”

The pun here is that the word *iftarā* has two meanings: “to invent lyingly, fabricate” or “to wear a fur”.

The following riddle on fol. 124b is a pun on the word *ǧarwa*, which not only has the well-known meaning of “she-puppy” but also “cucumber”, and *ǧirwa*, which means “a short she-camel”. The joke is that carrying a puppy to prayer would invalidate the prayer, but carrying a cucumber would not:²⁴²

اجيبوا عن فتى امسى * يصلي حاملا جرّوه

ولم تبطل ووافانا * سريعا راكب جرّوه

‘aǧībū ‘an fatan ‘amsā / yuṣallī ḥāmīlan ǧarwah

wa-lam tubṭil wa-wāfānā / sarī‘an rākibun ǧirwah

“Tell me about a youth who went to pray in the evening, carrying a *ǧarwa* Which did not invalidate [the prayer], then quickly appeared in front of us, riding a short she-camel”.

The following riddle from fol. 36a plays with the inversion, *qalb* or *taqlīb*, of the word *hawf* “hot, or cold, wind”:²⁴³

هات قل لي اي لفظ * حار فيه واصفوه

يجمع الضدين فاعجب * فهو بالتقليب فوه

hāti qul lī ‘ayya lafẓī / ḥāra fīhī wāṣīfūhū

yaǧma‘u l-ḍiddayni fa-‘aǧīb / fa-hwa bi-l-taqlībi fūhū

“Come, tell me any word / about which its describers were perplexed”²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ The metre is *ramal*.

²⁴² The metre is *hazaǧ*.

²⁴³ The metre is *ramal*.

²⁴⁴ This is a pun, since *ḥārr* also refers to the “hot wind”.

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It brings together two opposites, so admire it / because inverted it means ‘his mouth’”

4.2.4 The metres of al-Mağribī’s poems

The total number of poems by al-Mağribī with a Ḥalīlian metre (including the riddles) is 104. The division of the metres is as follows: *rağaz* 38, *basīt* 27 (including 26 colloquial *mawāwīl*), *sarī* 6, *ḥafīf* 5, *wāfir* 5, *hazağ* 5, *ramal* 5, *muğtatt* 4, *kāmil* 3, *ṭawīl* 3, *mutadārik* 2, *munsariḥ* 1. Obviously, the frequent use of the *basīt* is due to the large number of *mawāwīl*, for which the *basīt* is the usual metre. The popularity of the *rağaz* is because of the large number of *muṭallatāt* in this metre. The *rağaz*, with its short lines, and especially *manhūk al-rağaz*, is a particularly suitable metre for improvised poems such as al-Mağribī’s *muṭallatāt*. Another element which could have played a role is the fact that the *rağaz* was a well-known metre amongst the reading public because of its use in the *urğūza* or didactic poetry.²⁴⁵

4.3 Non-Arabic poetry

As mentioned previously (see §1.1.2), al-Mağribī knew Persian and Turkish and translated some literary works from these languages to Arabic. The Persian poetry in *Daf al-işr* consists of three quotations from Sa’dī’s²⁴⁶ *Gulistān*,²⁴⁷ and one verse²⁴⁸ by al-Mullā Ḥāfiẓ.²⁴⁹

The only Turkish poetry in *Daf al-işr* is two poems about coffee, both on fol. 6a. The first was composed by a Turk who recited it at a *mağlis* where al-Mağribī was present.²⁵⁰

قهوه حقنده حلال اولامي دين احق
اصلي بو ندره بيلور قلب ايله اولور هو حق

²⁴⁵ See Vrolijk (1998) p. 117.

²⁴⁶ See §1.4.

²⁴⁷ On fols. 10a and 133b.

²⁴⁸ On fol. 86a.

²⁴⁹ “Šams ad-Dīn Muḥammad Šīrāzī, Persian lyric poet and panegyrist, commonly considered the pre-eminent master of the *ğazal*. He was born in Šīrāz, probably in 726/1325-6. (...) He is believed to have died in Šīrāz, in 792/1390 (or 791/1389), and his tomb is perhaps that city’s best known monument. Though credited with learned works in prose, his fame rests entirely on his *Dīwān*.” *EP* III 55a-b (G.M. Wickens).

²⁵⁰ I thank Dr. Erich Prokosch for his help with the transliteration and translation of these two poems.

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Qahvā ḥaqqında ḥālāl ola mı (?) deýen 'aḥmaq
'aşli bu: nā dersā (?), bilür qalb-ilā: olur Hübä / Hüb Ḥaqq
"Stupid is the one who asks whether coffee is allowed

In short, whatever they say, one knows that inversed it is the Truth!"

Because he thought that *qahwa* was pronounced *qahwa*, the Turk was under the impression that the word *qhwh* when read backwards was *hw ḥq* "it is the Truth".²⁵¹ Of course, this caused great merriment amongst the others present at the *mağlis*. Al-Mağribī then composed a reply in Turkish on the spot (which demonstrates his knowledge of the Turkish language):

جهله بکزر جهانده فقر اولمز * قتی یوخسل جهانده جاهل در
مال ایله ناقصی غنی صانمه * اول کشی در غنی که کامل در

Ğāhlä bāñzār ğihānda faqr olmaz / qatı yoḥsul ğihānda ğāhildir
Māl-ilā nāqıṣı ğanī şanma! / Ol kişidir ğanī ki kāmildir

"There is no poverty in the world which resembles the poverty of the mind.
Really poor in this world is the ignorant.
Do not consider him rich, who is rich, but incomplete!
Only the perfect is rich"

Al-Mağribī also provides us with his own Arabic translation of the last poem:

لیس فقر شبیه فقر الجهل * انّ ذا الجهل مملق سافل
لا نظنّ الغبی غنیّ الذات * ما غنیّ سوا الفتا الكامل

"There is no poverty resembling the poverty of ignorance
The ignorant is a miserable pauper
We do not consider a stupid person rich of personality
Nobody is rich except for the perfect youth"²⁵²

²⁵¹ The word *ḥaqq* was in *şūfī* terminology a synonym of Allāh; the two terms were used interchangeably. See Chittich (1989) p. 132b and Ernst (1985) p. 29 and 141.

²⁵² In *şūfism*, the concept of *al-insān al-kāmīl*, the "perfect man", comprises the idea that man occupies a leading position in the creation. See *Et* III p. 1239a ff. (R. Arnaldez).