

Literary Conviviality and Aesthetic Appreciation of *Qasa'id Ashriyyah* (Decaodes)

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Abstract: The thrust of this paper is to analyse the poetic structure on “al-‘ashriyyat”. Like any other work of medieval period, “al-‘ashriyyat” is similar in contents and poetic themes to other Arabic works. Nevertheless, “al-‘ashriyyat” is different in its style and poetic techniques adopted by the authors. This paper, therefore discusses the poetic techniques of the work. The paper provides the biographical notes on the authors of “al-‘ashriyyat”. It brings into fore the locations and sources of “al-‘ashriyyat” in the local and foreign libraries and Archives. The paper discusses further the format and structural arrangement of the works. Out of numerous manuscripts of al-‘ashriyyat which are mentioned in this work, only four manuscripts were used, marked as manuscripts A, B, C and D respectively and the descriptions of the manuscripts are given accordingly. The paper is rounded off with observations and conclusion.

I. Introduction

Al-‘ashriyyat is a literary work of two scholars of remarkable standing, Al-Fazazi (1145 -1230C.E) and Abdullahi b. Fudi (1766-1829C.E). The original work was composed by Al-Fazazi in verses and at later period, ‘Abdullah b. Fudi wrote the pentastich⁽²⁾ (*Takhmis*) on the original work in about (1230 A.H / 1820 C.E.).⁽³⁾ Al-Fazazi divided his work, “al-ashriyyat” into twenty-nine chapters and named them after Arabic alphabets based on Western format. Every chapter of the work consists of ten verses. Each verse has two lines (couplets), while each line is made up of two hemistiches. The total hemistiches in each chapter is twenty, while the total stanza is 290. Therefore, the work consists of 580 hemistiches (or lines). In the later period, ‘Abdullah b. Fudi (d. 1829 C.E) added new three hemistiches to each original verse of al-Fazazi and rendered it from verse or couplet to pentastich (*Takhmis*). The number of hemistiches in each chapter became fifty while the total stanza remains 290, but the whole work consists of 1,450.

‘Abdullah b. Fudi wrote a commentary on the work titled *Nafhat al-Bishriyyat ‘ala Qasa'id al-ashriyyat*. This success of ‘Abdullah on *Ashriyyat* served as an encouragement to later scholars like Muhammad Bello and Shaykh al-Hassan b. Hamma b. Malik. Muhammad Bello titled his work *Takhmis al-ashriyyat*,⁽⁴⁾ while the work of Shaykh al-Hassan b. Hamma b. Malik was entitled *Sharh ‘ala takhmis qasidah lil-Fazazi*.

Locations and Sources of the manuscripts of Al-‘ashriyyat

It is important to note that some manuscripts relating to the text of “al-‘ashriyyat” were collected from different libraries and Archives in Nigeria, such as the National Archives, Kaduna, libraries of the universities of Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello Zaria, and institute of African studies University of Ibadan, etc. The following manuscripts of catalogue number MSS 82/163 82/163, 82/27, 82/308, (UIL) M 82/210 (UIL) 82/47, 182/27, 82/27 (UIL) Kaduna (NA) F/AR 1/8, L/ARI/2-3, 29/1; Kano (BU), AF, 4/106, AF, 13/613, Legon, 34 369, 282. Sokoto (CIS), 2/2/17, 2/10/137, Sokoto SHS, 2/40/174, 4/38/107, Zaria, 29/2, 58/7, 145/2, MAH, 2/12 and N.H.R.S, P. 58/7, P. 29/2, P.28/2,3,4 were consulted and studied.

However, out of the manuscripts of catalogue numbers listed above, only four of them were used in addition to the text of the “al-‘ashriyyat” in circulation.⁽⁹⁾ Therefore, the manuscripts were grouped into A.B.C and D.

Manuscript (A) ⁽¹⁰⁾

Title: *Takhmis al-qasidah al-‘Ashriyyat*.
Author: ‘Abdullah b. Fudi
Copied: 1230/1820, recopied 1321/1903-4
Theme: *Tasawwuf, Zuhd, Wa‘z, Ir’shad*
Size: 21*6cm, 75 Folio, 487 *Takhmis*

Manuscript “A” is an old copy, unvocalised, but rubricated and damp, stained and brittle at the edges. It was written in brown ink with clear and readable hand writing. The name of the copyist is not mentioned, but the dates of copy and recopy were cited.

Manuscript (B) ⁽¹¹⁾

Title: *Al-Qawli 'ala Hizab al-juz'm, Al-kabir al-kitab al-'ashriyyat.*

Author: Al-Fazazi, Abu Zayd 'Abd Rahman

Size: 81 FF.

The above manuscript is a fairly old text, rubricated without vocalization. No date of compilation. Neither the name of the copist nor the date of copying is mentioned.

Manuscript (c) ⁽¹²⁾

Title: *Takhmis al-qasa'id al-'ashriyyat*

Author: 'Abdullah b. Fudi

Original: Copied in 1321 A.H.

Size: 17*13cm, 75 folio, 6 lines per page.

Manuscript "C" is a very old copy, fray at edges, copied on trellune paper in brown ink. The date of copying is not mentioned, however, the manuscript was rubricated, well vowelled, but not vocalized.

Manuscript D ⁽¹³⁾

Title: *al-Qasa'id al-'ashriyyat Wal-Hukm az-zudiyat (sic) ma' sharh li Muhammad as-Za'iri bi Mustapha al-Ghamari*

Author: Al-Fazazi, Abu Zayd 'Abd Rahman

Size: 17*23CM, 75 Folio

The above manuscript is fully vocalized and rubricated, written in brown ink on Trellune paper with clear and legible handwriting. But neither date of copying nor the name of the copyist is given. No date of compilation also is mentioned. However, this copy is very important to this work. It was printed by *Dar illya al-kutub 'li-arabiyat*, Beirut. It was also printed in Damascus with extensive inter linear comments of al-Ghamari.

The Format of al-'ashriyyat

Al-Fazazi divided his work into chapters and named them after the twenty-nine Arabic alphabets.⁽¹⁴⁾ Every chapter consists of ten *stanzas* (*Decastich*). Each *stanza* has five lines called *takhmis* (*pentastich*). The total hemistiches in each chapter are 50, while the total stanza is 290. Therefore, the whole work consists of 1,450 hemistiches. The following method was adopted by al-Fazazi in the chapterization of *al-'ashriyyat*

1. *Bab al-Alif*
2. *Bab al- Ba'*
3. *Bab al-Ta'*
4. *Bab at-Tha'*
5. *Bab aj-Jim*
6. *Bab al-Ha'*
7. *Bab al-Kha'*
8. *Bab ad-Dal*
9. *Bab adh-Dhal*
10. *Bab ar-Ra'*
11. *Bab az-Za'*
12. *Bab al-Ta*
13. *Bab az-Za'*
14. *Bab al-Kaf*
15. *Bab al-Lam*
16. *Bab al-Mim*
17. *Bab an-Nun*
18. *Bab as-Sad*
19. *Bab ad-Dad*
20. *Bab al-'Ain*
21. *Bab al-Ghain*
22. *Bab al-Fa'*
23. *Bab al-Qaf*
24. *Bab as-Sin*
25. *Bab as-Shin*
26. *Bab al-Ha'*
27. *Bab al-Waw*
28. *Bab al-Lam-alif*
29. *Bab al-Ya'*

Alphabetical table of Arrangements & Grouping of Arabic Letters ⁽¹⁵⁾

Eastern Arrangement

ض	ص	ش	س	ز	ر	د	خ	ح	ج	ث	ت	ب	ا
ى	لا	و	هـ	ن	م	ل	ك	ف	ق	غ	ع	ظ	ط

Western Arrangement

ل	ك	ظ	ط	ز	ر	ذ	د	خ	ح	ج	ث	ت	ب	ا
ى	لا	و	هـ	ش	س	ق	ف	غ	ع	ض	ص	ن	م	

Analysis and Structure of the Work:

Al-Fazazi, the original author of "*al-ashriyyah*" organized his work into conceptual structure; he divided "*al-ashriyyat*" into twenty nine chapters and named them after Arabic alphabets.

Forms of Letters: There are seventeen basic forms from which the twenty-nine letters named after chapters of "*al-ashriyyah*" are derived.

They are *al-Alif*, *al-Ba*, *al-jim*, *al-Dal*, *ar-Ra*, *as-Sin*, *as-Sad*, *at-Ta*, *al-ain*, *al-Fa*, *al-Kaf*, *al-lam*, *al-min*, *al-Nun*, *al-Ha*, *al-Waw* and *al-Ya*. The others (the remaining twelve) are those which resemble some among the seventeen and are differentiated from them by signs for example *ta* is differentiated from *ba* by two dots underneath and *tha* by three above. Similarly the difference between *kha* and *Jim* is that the dot of *kha* is placed above it, while that of *jim* is placed in its hob. The difference of *Ha* from these (*kha* and *jim*) is the absence of a dot on it. This is the pattern how others followed till the end of the alphabets. However, *lam-alif* is added to make a total of twenty nine letters which the chapters of "*al-ashriyyat*" are based. It is true that the basic Arabic letters are twenty-eight, but al-Fazazi added *lam-alif* as supplementary letter and raised the number to twenty nine. The above arrangement of Arabic alphabet which "*al-ashriyyat*" is patterned and structured is based on the method of western arrangement as shown in the table two.

Differences between Western and Eastern tables of Arabic alphabets

It is noted from the above tables that the Eastern and the Western arrangements differ from one and other. However there is an agreement between the two, from letter *Alif* to letter *Dal*. After that, they differ in arrangement to letter *Shin*, in the western pattern and letter *Nun* in eastern format and agree with each other again till the end of the last letters. It is also noted that Eastern table consists of twenty-eight letters, while Western table consists of twenty-nine. On this development letter ذ is omitted in Eastern. The alphabets are grouped into chapters and the whole work contains twenty-nine chapters. This shows that al-Fazazi adopted Western pattern in the chapterization of his work *al- 'ashriyyat*.

Poetic Structure of Al- 'ashriyyat

Al- 'ashriyyat of al-Fazazi has special method and approach in structural arrangement. The structural arrangement of the work makes it unique and different from the work of other scholars. Nevertheless, *al- 'ashriyyat*, is based on ten stanza, while the last consonant of every hemistich is identical to each other in the manner of structural arrangement of *al- 'ashriyyat*, al-Fazazi organized his work into conceptual structure. He composed his poetical verses and grouped them into chapters in accordance with Arabic alphabetical order of Western format. Every chapter contains ten odes, (*asharat*) hence the title *al- 'ashriyyat* given to the work.

The work opens thus:⁽¹⁶⁾

أجدت بك الأيام والنفس تهراً
كأنتك من خطب المنون مبراً
أمنت الليالي وهي أغدر صاحب
فكن حذرا إن النوائب تفجأ
أما لك من فقد الأحبة واعظ

و لا فرق إلا أن سيرك أبطأ

- i. *The days of life renewed themselves with you and the soul is tattering*
- ii. *As if you are immune from the cause of death*
- ii. *You feel secured (with passing of) the night, not knowing that it is a perfidious partner*
- iii. *Be cautious, death will suddenly come*
- i. *Is it not enough for you as admonition, the death of the beloved ones?*
- ii. *No difference (between you and the dead) except, that your own journey is delayed*

'Abdullahi b. Fudi, built his own new three hemistiches on the original verse of al-Fazazi and rendered it to become *Takhmis* as follows:⁽¹⁷⁾

أهمك مرعى في مريبك يمرأ
أجدت بك الأيام والنفس تهراً

أيا غافلا و الموت بالقرب يطراً
أجدك لم تعمل بما كنت تقرأ

- i. *O, the heedless one, death shall come very soon unexpectedly*
- ii. *The food, which moves smoothly through your throat, which, you enjoy, disturbs you*
- iii. *By Allah, you do not work with what you read*
- iv. *The days of life renewed themselves with you and the soul is tattering*
- v. *As if you are immune from the cause of death*

The verse of the poem by al-Fazazi, which comprises the fourth and fifth hemistiches of the first stanza and the last consonants are *Hamzah*, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet. This system is used throughout the ten couplet of the first chapter. The couplet called *Bait* is regarded as a unit of composition. This is made up of two hemistiches; the rhyme is enunciated and maintained throughout the poem.

Al-Qasa'id al-'ashriyyat has many identical rhymes in their sequence. The rhymes of the poem are usually masculine, but at times feminine. In composition of the *takhmis*, 'Abdullahi b. Fudi takes the final consonant of Al-Fazazi's first hemistich and rhymes all three of his own hemistiches with it and rendered it to what is technically called *takhmis* (pentastich).⁽¹⁸⁾

An example:

بالبله تهدي إليك مذلة
ببت لك أعلام المنون مظلة

بلاؤك مال ترتجي منه بلة
بخلت بما يفنى ويرجع جلة
ونورك قد يخبو ونارك لا تخبو

- i. *Your calamity is wealth; you sustain hope in it*
- ii. *Its anxiety will lead you to disgrace*
- iii. *You are ungenerous with what will dwindle and become a waste*
- iv. *The sign of death appears and over-shadows you*
- v. *Your good work is diminishing and your bad work is increasing*

'Abdullah had a wonderful skill in applying metaphorical allusion full of rhetorical embellishment. He adopted al-Fazazi's style of beginning each verse with rhyme consonants, each verse begins and ends with the same letter. 'Abdullah followed this difficult style from the beginning to the end. The successive agreement of the consonants appear perfectly natural, the rhyme is so enunciated and maintained throughout the poetry. The success of Abdullah b. Fudi in the composition of *Takhmis* on *al-'ashriyyat* reflects his capability in the construction of verses and cultivation of the art of expression. It is also an evidence of his mastery of Arabic language. Hence, Hiskett was right when he observed thus: *The composing of Takhmis or quintains on the verse of others was an intellectual exercise in which 'Abdullah excelled*⁽¹⁹⁾. For example⁽²⁰⁾ 'Abdullah exhibited his mastery of Arabic language. His linguistic superiority to Ibn Muhib can be marked from the following verses in *al-'ashriyyat*.

عدوك شيطان عن الدين كايد
عناء شديد في هلاكك كايد
عتيد له في كل فعل مكاييد
عنانك في كف الهوى وهو قايد
إلى منهل يظما عليه المطالع

- i. *Your enemy is Satan, it deceives you about resurrection.*
- ii. *He strives hard to plot for your destruction*
- iii. *He is always with you, with his intrigues in any of your actions*
- iv. *Your control is in the hand of desire, it is the one pulling you.*
- v. *To a pool (spring) that is thirsty upon by the seer.*

All hemistiches of 'Abdullah start with the same consonant letters of al-Fazazi, both at the beginning and at the end. This is an evidence of his extra ordinary knowledge of Arabic language.

II. Conclusion

We conclude this paper with the acknowledgement that Abdullah b. Fudi (1245A.H/1829CE) is a scholar of remarkable standing. 'Abdullah had a wonderful skill in applying metaphorical allusion full of rhetorical embellishment. He adopted al-Fazazi style of beginning each verse with rhyme consonants, each verse begins and ends with the same letter. 'Abdullah followed this difficult style from the beginning to the end. The successive agreement of the consonants appear perfectly natural, the rhyme is so enunciated and maintained throughout the poetry. The success of Abdullah b. Fudi in the composition of *Takhmis* of *al-'ashriyyat* is an indication of his capability in the construction of verses and cultivation of the art of expression. It is also an evidence of his mastery of Arabic language. Hence, Hiskett was right when he observed thus: *The composing of Takhmis or quintains on the verse of others was an intellectual exercise in which 'Abdullah excelled*.⁽²¹⁾

In conclusion, 'Abdullah has the honour of polishing the language of *al-'ashriyyat*, a form of composition which is very difficult to compose by ordinary person. Considering the contents and sequence of its parts, the uniform manner, which the themes of the poems are composed, is highly orderly. The paper and the text of "*al-ashriyyat*" are recommended to modern Arabic poets in imitation of the style of the authors of "*al-ashriyyat*" in their literary exercises and engagements. Reading the text of "*al-ashriyyat*" will stimulate the reader and increase his power of vocabulary building. It will also assist to trace the root of words to the original source.

Notes And References

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- [20]. Al-Fazazi: *al-Qasa'id al-ashriyyat* pp. 214-215.
- [21]. Abullah b. Fudi: *Tazyin al waraqat* edited and translated by Hisket, Ibadan 1963, P.6.

in their communities which they lived and outstanding scholars of all ages their work *al-'ashriyyat* constitutes a link between al-Fazazi (627 A.H/1230 CE) and Abdullah b. Fudi (1245A.H/1829CE). This development constitutes a literary invitation of poets from classical period. Despite the fact that the dual authors lived in different communities and periods, their ideas and thoughts are same, the style of Abdullah matches the style of al-Fazazi there is thematic linkage between the two. Their work *al-'ashriyyat* is an eloquent evidence of the literary culture of the communities which they lived and their mastery of Arabic Language.