Antonella Ghersetti
Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia

On Mamluk Anthologies Again: The Case of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Waṭwāṭ and His *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ al-Wāḍihah wa-ʿUrar al-Naqāʾiḍ al-Qābiḥah*

Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Yaḥyá ibn ʿAlī al-Anṣārī al-Kutubī, known as al-Waṭwāṭ,[1] has been somewhat neglected in modern scholarship, with a few exceptions.[2] He is not listed among the great Mamluk writers, and does not receive an entry in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* nor in the *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature.* This article is in some ways an attempt at remedying this lack of interest, as well as a contribution to evaluating his literary output in the genre of literary anthologies.

1. Life and Social Relations

Despite the lack of esteem he has been given in modern scholarship, al-Waṭwāṭ was held in high regard by such a severe and exacting critic as al-Ṣafadī, who counted him among "the great *adīb*s and the intelligent personalities"[3] of his time. His family was, al-Ṣafadī informs us, of eastern origin from the town of Merw,[4] but he was born in 632/1230 in Egypt, where he died in 718/1318. He did not belong to the circle of the Mamluk administration (this was also the case for other writers of his era), but earned his living as a stationer and bookseller *(warrāq/kutubī)* and practiced this profession all his life. This was likely to have been a profitable occupation; Mamluk scholars were fond of buying books and the book trade in

This article was first presented in Chicago, Illinois, at the International Conference on Mamluk Literature, April 25–27, 2012. I would like to thank all the colleagues who made useful remarks during the conference.

[1] Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur* (Leiden, 1949), 2:67; idem, Supplementband 2 (Leiden, 1938), 53–54; ʿUmar Riḍá Kaḥḥālah, *Muʿjam al-Muʾallifīn* (Beirut, n.d.), 3:22; Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *Al-Aʿlām* (Beirut, 1995), 5:297.

[2] Muhammad ʿAbd al-Munʿim al-Khafājī, *Al-Ḥayāh al-Adabīyah fī Miṣr: al-ʿAṣr al-Mamlūkī wa-al-ʿUthmānī* (Cairo, 1404/1984), 20.

[3] Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr wa-Aʿwān al-Naṣr,* ed. ʿA. Abū Zayd et al. (Beirut-Damascus, 1998), 4:202. The biographical details given in what follows are based on the biography of al-Waṭwāṭ in ibid., 4:201–7.

[4] But cf. Jurjī Manāsh, "Al-Manāhij fī Waṣf al-Mabāhij," *Al-Mashriq* 10 (1907): 721–29 and 774–86, reprinted *in Studies on Al-Watwat (d. 1318), Ad-Dimasqī (d. 1327), Ibn al-Wardī (d. c. 1446) and al-Bakuwi (15th cent.),* collected and reprinted by Fuat Sezgin (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 723 (repr.=3), who states that he was of Maghribi origin.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

those times was very brisk,[5] since "book collecting was an expensive yet widespread hobby of cultured Mamluks."[6] Notwithstanding the liveliness of the book market, the wide circulation of books, and the profitability of a career as a bookseller, *wirāqah* does not seem to have been counted among the most prestigious careers by contemporary social commentators. Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) and Ibn al-Ḥājj (d. 733/1333) harshly rebuke all those who were involved in the "art of the book." Stationers, booksellers, and copyists were accused of circulating books that were "useless to people," even "frivolous"; the *Sīrat ʿAntar* is offered as an example.[7] The low social status of booksellers, which is attested in the works of these authors, probably contributed to the fact that, as we will see, al-Waṭwāṭ was never accepted in the circles of the intellectual elite to which he aspired. Apparently al-Waṭwāṭ practiced his job with great skill: he knew the value of books, was well-informed as to what was available on the market, had good taste and wide professional expertise, and also collected precious books. From this viewpoint, al-Waṭwāṭ's expertise regarding the value of books seems to qualify him as something more than a simple bookseller and clues suggest he must also have been a bibliophile. His job no doubt gave him the opportunity to handle a wide range of books, which doubtless he also consulted and from which his literary activity benefitted. Al-Waṭwāṭ was known in his time for both his encyclopedia and his anthology, works belonging to two genres considered typical of Mamluk literature.[8] He was both a brilliant anthologist, gifted in choosing the best pieces, and a sophisticated prose writer. If we trust his biographers, in particular al-Ṣafadī, he was an outstanding prose writer who could write well on whatever subject he wanted. He mastered the art of *inshāʾ*, but he had no gift for poetry, and al-Ṣafadī categorically states that he was not able to write one single verse.[9]

In spite of the fact that almost all the sources mention that he suffered from an ophthalmic affliction that made light painful for him, his nickname (al-Waṭwāṭ, which means "the bat") probably has nothing to do with his habit of avoiding sunlight as a consequence of the disease.[10] This nevertheless offered others the

[5] Muḥammad Zaghlūl Sallām, *Al-Adab fī al-ʿAṣr al-Mamlūkī* (Cairo, n.d. [1971?]), 1:120–21.

[6] Ulrich Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamluks and Their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33 (1988): 93. On this point see also Robert Irwin, "Mamluk Literature," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 7, [no. 1] (2003): 2.

[7] Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Muʿīd al-Niʿam,* ed. D .W. Myhrman (London, 1908), 188; for al-Subkī and Ibn al-Ḥājj on this matter see Giovanni Canova, "Libri e artigiani del libro: le raccomandazioni dei giuristi musulmani," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 12 (2012): 235–63; also Irwin, "Mamluk Literature," 22; Sallām, *Adab,* 1:120–21.

[8] Ḥannā Fākhūrī, *Al-Jāmiʿ fī Tārīkh al-Adab al-ʿArabī* (Beirut, 1986), 1031.

[9] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr,* 4:202.

[10] Al-Waṭwāṭ was also the nickname of the famous prolific writer Rashīd al-Dīn (d. ca. 578/1182–83) who wrote in Arabic and Persian. Like Jamāl al-Dīn he was of Eastern origin; he lived in Gur-

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

opportunity to make puns at his expense, playing on his habits and on the meaning of his nickname. Al-Waṭwāṭ's illness and his consequent lifestyle are often recalled in the literature of his time, and particularly in his contemporaries' poetry. In one of his poems Ibn Dāniyāl, the famous ophthalmologist and man of letters, speaks of him in these terms:

> I did not deprive al-Waṭwāṭ of his kohl out of avarice
> And I'm not one who is annoyed by frequent visits in a day
> But his eyes dislike the sun
> How can I be able to help him when he's sore eyed?

Some verses of Shāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī (d. 730/1330),[11] the nephew of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, who will be mentioned in further detail later, also allude to his habits:

> You always walk with people in the dark
> And these are the habits of the bat *(al-waṭwāṭ)*

and:

> They say: you see al-Waṭwāṭ extremely tired and distressed
> and I say: this is his constant habit, he runs from night to night[12]

Our author is also recalled, even if indirectly, in a jocular *taqlīd* "*ʿalá sabīl al-mudāʿabah*" written by the famous qadi, prose writer, and poet Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (d. 692/1292),[13] with whom "the poor al-Waṭwāṭ," as al-Ṣafadī calls

---

gandj, the capital of Khwarazm. His biographies bear no mention of an eye disease, which could point to the fact that this nickname was perhaps customary in the eastern part of the Muslim empire without necessarily implying any reference to a physical trait. The nickname could derive from our author's intense nocturnal activity (Roger Maury, "Ğamâl al-Dîn al-Waṭwâṭ: libraire et auteur égyptien (7/13ème s.)," *Revue de l'Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes* 46, no. 152 (1983): 229.

[11] A historian of Mamluk Egypt; he served as a clerk and had to retire after he had been blinded by an arrow. After having retired from his job at the *dīwān al-inshāʾ,* al-Shāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī became a man of letters and wrote among other things several *adab* works mentioned by al-Ṣafadī. He also was a bibliophile and a collector of books, and Ibn Shākir mentions that he had eighteen libraries full of precious volumes of *adab.* From this viewpoint he could in principle be considered a sort of colleague of al-Waṭwāṭ, in that they shared their literary activity as authors of *adab* works and their expertise in books, notwithstanding the fact that al-Shāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī was a collector while al-Waṭwāṭ was a bookseller. He left numerous writings in prose and poetry, among which is a biography of Baybars that was covertly critical of the late sultan and his previous biographer, the author's uncle Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (P. M. Holt, "Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 9:180–81; Sallām, *Adab,* 2:53–55).

[12] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr,* 4:204.

[13] Administrator and head of the chancery in Egypt and Syria; he wrote the histories of three sultans. His pieces are written in an elaborate *sajʿ* in the style of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil *(al-ṭarīqah al-Fāḍilīyah).* He became himself an authority and many formulas he elaborated were later used

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

him, apparently had a long-lasting enmity. The sources do not give us further details on this, except to comment that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir hated him and constantly belittled him.[14] This famous *taqlīd,* whose text is reproduced in full in *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr,* is addressed to Ibn Ghurāb ("the raven's son") who was appointed *wālī* (governor) of the "the birds' species" (*ajnās al-ṭayr*).[15] It is a witty and very elaborate piece of *inshāʾ,* known under the name of "Al-Inshāʾ al-Sulaymānī" after Solomon (Sulaymān), who features as the authority issuing the document. It opens with praise of the beautiful qualities of birds: the beauty of their feathers and their colors, the sound of their harmonious voices, their utility as messengers, and so on.[16] Suddenly the honey-sweet tone turns to a somber one, and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir launches into the description of a being black in the face and body, despised, miserable, intimately connected with death and darkness, which lives like a parasite, stealing and destroying. This creature is similar to birds but is not a bird; it ejaculates and gives birth as humans do but is not a human. All these traits confer it such an ambiguous and disturbing nature that it could be likened to a metamorphosed devil. In addition this miserable creature is depicted as pernicious for its neighbors, since its presence is an unfailing sign of ruin and destruction. In brief, it is the most contemptible being God has ever created. In the end, after this climax of disgusting descriptions, the horrible creature is openly mentioned and we discover that it is the bat (al-Waṭwāṭ). The *taqlīd* goes on describing the many flaws of the beast and stressing its complete uselessness, be it living or dead, and invites people not to show any respect to it. The unaware reader could always take the words at face value and interpret the entire piece as the satire of a bat, but this naive interpretation based on the surface meaning must be discarded. Al-Ṣafadī and the other biographers direct the interpretation towards the person of our al-Waṭwāṭ, leaving no room for doubt. The bitter criticism of this poor beast, described as completely useless, is in fact addressed to our author, whose long-lasting "accident" with Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is constantly recalled in the sources.[17] The acid tone of this *taqlīd* aroused the sympathy of al-Ṣafadī, which is revealed by the attribute *miskīn* that he uses to refer to al-Waṭwāṭ.

---

by his followers. He also wrote poems in honor of his sovereigns (see J. Pedersen, "Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir," *EI2,* 3:679–80; Shawqī Dayf, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-ʿArabī,* vol. 5, *ʿAṣr al-Duwal wa-al-Imārāt* [Cairo, 1991], 415–20; Sallām, *Adab,* 2:45–52).

[14] Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi-al-Wafayāt=Das biographische Lexicon des Ṣalāḥaddīn Ḫalīl ibn Aibak aṣ-Ṣafadī*, ed. Sven Dedering (Istanbul, 1949), 2:17 (no. 267).

[15] Mentioned also in Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah fī Aʿyān al-Miʾah al-Thāminah,* ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Jādd al-Ḥaqq (Cairo, n.d.), 3:386; al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī,* 2:17 (no. 267).

[16] He also wrote *Tamāʾim al-Ḥamāʾim*, about carrier-pigeons (al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ,* in Pedersen, "Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir," 679).

[17] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr*, 4:204.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

The chronic enmity to which this document clearly testifies was not the only unfortunate episode in al-Waṭwāṭ's life; apparently he was not on good terms with legal authorities, as attested by another misunderstanding with the chief judge Ibn al-Khuwayyī (d. 693/1293), himself a good prose writer.[18] The two were friends, and when Ibn al-Khuwayyī was appointed chief judge, al-Waṭwāṭ thought he could somehow take advantage of his friend's new position. He was bitterly disappointed when he received a totally negative reply to his requests. He tried after that to obtain a fatwa against him, and to this end he wrote to the most eminent personalities of Egypt, among them Athīr al-Dīn (the master of al-Ṣafadī, who relates the story), Ibn Dāniyāl, and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir. But he collected only refusals or negative answers. This *futyā* and the relevant answers, all of them evasive but drawn up in laudatory terms,[19] became a book, whose wide circulation is also attested in the Maghrib. Al-Ṣafadī saw it and copied it in the twelfth volume of his *Tadhkirah,* which as far as we know is not extant.[20] The book was known by the title of *Fatwá al-Futūwah wa-Mirʾāt al-Murūʾah,* with some minor variants.[21] Due to his illness and the enmity of the powerful personalities who apparently did not hold him in great esteem, al-Waṭwāṭ most probably had a hard life. A direct hint at his misery and distress can be found in the epilogue of his anthology *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ,* which is in fact a long prayer where he confesses his weakness and implores God to grant him his livelihood and remove his poverty. Even if these are no doubt commonplace in this literary genre, one is under the impression that in his case these invocations are more sincere and more truthful than usual.

It is perhaps worth underlining that Ibn Dāniyāl, al-Shāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī, and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, those who mentioned al-Waṭwāṭ in their works, were also accomplished and appreciated poets and, in a period in which communication in verse was commonly practiced among the intellectual elite, they were more in tune with the literary trends than him, as he did not write poetry. It is worth highlighting al-Waṭwāṭ's inability to compose poetry, which was something that was noticed in the biographical sources. In the Mamluk period, poetry became a pre-eminent means of both public and private communication and was also considered, along with flawless mastery of Arabic grammar, as a mark of distinction.[22] Poetry also

[18] Al-Dhahabī, *Al-ʿIbar fī Khabar Man Ghabar,* ed. Abū Hajar Muḥammad al-Saʿīd ibn Basyūnī Zaghlūl (Beirut, 1985), 3:380.

[19] Ḥājjī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Ẓunūn ʿan Asāmī al-Kutub wa-al-Funūn,* ed. Şerefettin Yaltkaya and Kilisli Rifat Bilge (Istanbul, 1972; repr. Beirut, n.d.), 2:col. 1241.

[20] On al-Ṣafadī's *Tadhkirah* see Frédéric Bauden's article in this volume.

[21] *Fatwá al-Futūwah wa-Mirʾāt al-Murūʾah:* Ḥājjī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Ẓunūn,* 2:col. 1241; *ʿAyn al-Futūwah wa-Mirʾāt al-Murūʾah,* Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah,* 3:386.

[22] Thomas Bauer, "Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9, no. 1 (2005): 105–32; see esp.108–10.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

became more and more widespread in fields traditionally associated with prose, like the sciences, history, and enigmas, both in the form of versification properly speaking and the use of poetic ornamentation.[23] A lack of poetic talent thus must have been a remarkable shortcoming, and no doubt precluded the individual from any access to the intellectual elite. For this reason al-Waṭwāṭ was probably considered somebody on the fringe of that circle. If we go by the definition of *adīb* given by Ibn Nubātah (d. 768/1366), according to whom the man of letters must be skilled in poetry as well as the fields of linguistic exegesis of canonical texts and *inshā'*,[24] al-Waṭwāṭ was only half an *adīb*. Reading his biographies, one is under the impression that he was somehow marginalized from the elitist group of men of letters; al-Waṭwāṭ must have been considered part of that "broadened layer of people with a more or less superficial scholarly training"[25] that the high-brows did not recognize as equals, and as a member of that "partially educated, urban middle class, consisting of people such as craftsmen, traders and minor ulama"[26] that was of enormous importance for the cultural life of that time. Unlike al-Damīrī, who started as a tailor and ended up as a *faqīh*, thus demonstrating that in principle "the life of an alim was a career open to all the talents,"[27] al-Waṭwāṭ was not able to climb the social ladder and—as far as we know—remained a bookseller all his life. Al-Waṭwāṭ, in his contemporaries' opinion, was an accomplished *adīb* and a good writer of *inshā'*, but by no means a perfect and complete man of letters.

2. Literary Output

In spite of this ambiguous assessment of his status as a man of letters, al-Waṭwāṭ's literary and scientific outputs are of considerable interest as examples of both the cultural tendencies and the literary standards of his time. The bibliography of al-Waṭwāṭ represents the major trends in the literary output of the period, characterized by the composition of a huge quantity of anthologies, compilations, and encyclopedic works such that "it seems to have been a point of pride to write upon any and every topic."[28] He wrote on science, literature, and also on history. The sources inform us that he made a copy of Ibn al-Athīr's *Al-Kāmil* with his own notes and comments, with the aim of criticizing that author and proposing his own corrections; this annotated copy was possessed by al-Ṣafadī.[29] The notes

[23] Al-Khafājī, *Al-Ḥayāh al-Adabīyah,* 145 ff.

[24] Bauer, "Mamluk Literature," 119.

[25] Bauer, "Mamluk Literature," 110.

[26] Bauer, "Literarische Anthologien," 269.

[27] Irwin, "Mamluk Literature," 17.

[28] Ibid., 14.

[29] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr*, 4:204; al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī*, 2:17.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

are quoted in the sources as "*ḥawāshin mufīdah ʿalá* Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh."[30] His *risālah Fatwá al-Futūwah wa-Mirʾāt al-Murūʾah* is mentioned in laudatory terms for its fine prose by both Ibn Ḥajar and Ḥājjī Khalīfah, who reports that it was an object of praise on the part of his contemporaries. But his renown is connected in particular to *Mabāhij al-Fikar wa-Manāhij al-ʿIbar* (Delights of thoughts and means of edification), a huge encyclopedia of the natural sciences, which served as the basis for al-Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-Arab.*[31] Al-Ṣafadī, who refers to it as *Manāhij al-Fikar wa-Manāhij al-ʿIbar,*[32] describes it as a work in four volumes, very demanding in terms of work, well done and without shortcomings.[33] A summary of this encyclopedia probably circulated under the title *Nuzhat al-ʿUyūn fī Arbaʿat Funūn:* some sources cite this title as an independent work,[34] but this seems contradicted by the description of a Syrian manuscript given by Ghazzī, where the table of contents is identical to that of *Mabāhij al-Fikar.*[35] This well-known encyclopedia has a double focus on both scientific and literary matters, as in addition to the purely scientific data, it contains many quotations from literary and philological sources, among which are *ʿUyūn al-Akhbār* by Ibn Qutaybah, *Al-Mujmal* by Ibn Fāris, and *Murūj al-Dhahab* by al-Masʿūdī.[36] This dual focus gives the work its special flavor and testifies to al-Waṭwāṭ's literary taste and to his wide and complex cultural background. A further title is ascribed to al-Waṭwāṭ, *Al-Durar wa-al-Ghurar,* but the sources do not agree on this title nor on its existence as

[30] Ḥājjī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Ẓunūn*, 2:col. 1380, and Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah,* 3:386.

[31] *Encyclopaedic Historiography of the Muslim World,* ed. A. Samiuddin and N. K. Singh (Delhi, 2003), 716. On the influence of *Mabāhij al-Fikar* on *Nihāyat al-Arab* see Elias Ibrahim Muhanna, "Encyclopaedism in the Mamluk Period: The Composition of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī's (d. 1333) *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2012), 160–84.

[32] The title is also mentioned with minor variants (Kaḥḥālah, *Muʿjam al-Muʾallifīn*, 8:222, who seems to split up the compound title into two separate titles, and cites separately a *Manāhij al-ʿIbar*); cf. Ḥājjī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Ẓunūn,* col. 1846 and 1579/2; Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 3:386; see also Manāsh, "Al-Manāhij," 722.

[33] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr,* 4:204; idem, *Al-Wāfī bi-al-Wafayāt,* 17=267.

[34] ʿAlī al-Riḍá Karabulūṭ and Aḥmad Ṭūran Karabulūṭ, *Muʿjam al-Tārīkh* [sic] *al-Turāth al-Islāmī fī Maktabāt al-ʿĀlam* (Qayṣarī, Turkey, n.d.), 1:2459; Manāsh, "Al-Manāhij," 722 (repr. =2).

[35] Kāmil Ghazzī, "Kitāb Nuzhat al-ʿUyūn fī Arbaʿat Funūn," *Revue de l'Académie Arabe de Damas* 9 (1929): 681–87, reprinted in *Studies on al-Waṭwāṭ,* ed. F. Sezgin, 24–30. Al-Ḥarbī, in his partial edition of *Mabāhij* (Jamāl al-Dīn al-Waṭwāṭ, *Mabāhij al-Fikar wa-Manāhij al-ʿIbar,* ed. ʿAbd al-Razzāq Aḥmad al-Ḥarbī [Beirut, 1420/2000], 89), confirms that *Nuzhat al-ʿUyūn fī Arbaʿat Funūn* is nothing other than a summary of *Mabāhij al-Fikar.*

[36] It is "important for the art of writing because its encyclopedic wealth is presented in literary format …the book is an excellent example of the aesthetic principles of the era, challenging negative verdicts on the cultural climate of the period." Muhsin Musawi, "Pre-modern belletristic prose," in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period,* ed. Roger Allen and D. S. Richard (Cambridge, 2006), 131.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

an independent work.[37] To top it all, we owe to our *muṣannif* a literary anthology, *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-Wāḍiḥah wa-ʿUrar al-Naqā'iḍ al-Qābiḥah* (The blazes of bright qualities and the shameful things of ignominious defects or, briefly, "Of Virtues and Vices"),[38] upon which we shall dwell in this article. This anthology was apparently rather successful: three epitomes are mentioned in the bibliographies, respectively under the titles of *Maḥāsin al-Ghurar, Khaṣā'iṣ al-Ghurar,* and *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb Ǧurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ,* plus an epitome devoid of a specific title.[39] Th text has been published approximately six times, and the latest edition is very recent.[40] The number of epitomes and of manuscripts preserved, and the several modern editions, are to be taken as an indication of the keen interest aroused by the work in the past and to the present day.

3. *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ:* A Presentation of the Work

3.1: Overview

The literary output of al-Waṭwāṭ seems to reflect that miscellaneous slant that is a typical feature of Mamluk literature,[41] and to fit well within the encyclopedic spirit of his times. But, contrary to the general tendency shown by the great encyclopedias such as *Nihāyat al-Arab*, *Masālik al-Abṣār,* or *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshá* that aim to treat *de omni re scibile,* al-Waṭwāṭ splits his body of knowledge into two separate works: the scientific part of al-Waṭwāṭ's project is represented by *Mabāhij al-Fikar* and the ethical part by *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ*. The first, dedicated to natural sciences, is rich both in terms of contents and literary materials and, offering knowledge

[37] Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah,* 3:386; mentioned as *Al-Durar wa-al-Ghurar fī Shuʿarā' al-Andalus* by Kaḥḥālah, *Muʿjam al-Muʾallifīn*, 3:42, on the basis of Ḥājjī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Ẓunūn*, col. 248 (erroneous attribution to the author) and Ismāʿīl Bāshā al-Baghdādī, *Hādiyat al-ʿĀrifīn* (Istanbul, 1951; repr. Beirut, n.d.), 2:col. 144; no mention in Karabulūṭ, *Muʿjam al-Tārīkh al-Turāth,* 1:2458–59; mentioned by al-Ṣafadī as *Al-Durar wa-al-Ghurar wa-al-Dirar wa-al-ʿIrar* (*Al-Wāfī bi-al-Wafayāt,* 2:17; idem, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr,* 4:204, identified by the editor as an uncorrected form of *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ,* 204, n. 1).

[38] Bauer proposes "Über Tugenden und Laster" (Thomas Bauer, "Literarische Anthologien des Mamlūkenzeit," in *Die Mamlūke: Studien zu ihrer Geschichte und Kultur: Zum Gedenken an Ulrich Haarmann [1942–1999],* ed. Stephan Conermann and Anja Pistor-Hatam [Hamburg, 2003], 111 n. 2).

[39] *GAL,* 2:67; S2:54; Karabulūṭ, *Muʿjam al-Tārīkh al-Turāth,* 1:2458.

[40] Jamāl al-Dīn al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-Wāḍihah wa-ʿUrar al-Naqā'iḍ al-Qābiḥah,* ed. Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn (Beirut, 2008), unfortunately a non-critical and non-scholarly edition, with a very brief introduction and no indexes of sources, proper names, and authors. See also Reinhard Weipert, *Classical Arabic Philology and Poetry: A Bibliographical Handbook of Important Editions from 1960 to 2000* (Leiden, 2002), 661.

[41] "Mamluk literature is fascinating because it transcends boundaries…" (Bauer, "Mamluk Literature," 130).

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

in a literary form, it transcends boundaries between scientific and literary production. However, the literary aspect is far more prominent in the second work, dedicated to ethics. Here al-Waṭwāṭ's declared purpose is to compose a discourse on a universal theme like that of "virtues and vices," which regards without distinction elite and common people *(al-khawāṣṣ wa-al-ʿawāmm).* As usual with many works of that period, the book is intended to be comprehensive and to constitute the "gentleman's best friend," thus "exempting the intelligent from the company of a bosom friend and intimate."[42] This recalls the definition proposed by al-Jāḥiẓ in his famous piece in praise of the book,[43] and is anyway a rather common topos in the introductions of anthologies. The target intended by al-Waṭwāṭ seems to be the educated and intelligent man who seeks perfection and who is in a position to appreciate the lesson of ancients and moderns; this kind of ideal audience must be kept in mind to appreciate the philosophical slant of some passages of the work, grounded in the Greek heritage. Well in accordance with the moralizing tones of some intellectuals of his period, the main aim of al-Waṭwāṭ is the call to practice virtue and to avoid vice, and in fact the introduction to *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* takes a strongly parenetic slant just after the first lines. The author addresses his readers, inviting them to exert every effort to achieve perfection and not to succumb to mere instinct, which would render them similar to animals; in this perspective he sets out to present in detail the essence of morals *(akhlāq),* their true meanings and their different manifestations, and to do this he has recourse to the discourses of wise men, philosophers *(ḥukamāʾ)* as well as sharp-witted men *(ūlū al-baṣāʾir wa-al-aḥlām).* Clearly, the *dicta et facta* (sayings and doings) of men of virtue are thoroughly exploited as exemplars to show the way to perfection. *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* mainly consists of quotations and reported materials, but contrary to its literary models and specifically the anthologies of Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī (d. 429/1038), and if compared with other great anthologies, it contains a relatively large amount of prose written by the *muṣannif* himself: a long introduction, a long epilogue, and several comments in the text. The liminal parts of *Ghurar,* those that delimit the boundaries of the book and thus constitute a kind of frame, are drawn up in a refined and precious style, closely recalling the *inshāʾ* used in epistolography. This is not devoid of significance, since the two major prose styles of the time were typically used in different kinds of works. Artistic prose, typical of the chancellery's clerks and practiced by professionals of writing, was characterized by a massive use of rhetorical devices *(badīʿ).* This style, sanctioned by al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil and called *al-ṭarīqah al-Fāḍilīyah,* was used for epistolography

[42] Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 7.

[43] Abū ʿAmr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān,* ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (repr. Cairo, n.d.), 1:50–51, where he alludes to the book as a *ṣāḥib,* a *rafīq,* etc. On this see N. Anghelescu, *Linguaggio e cultura nella società araba* (Torino, 1993), 40–50 (trans. of *Limbaj şi cultură în civilizaţia arabă* [Bucharest, 1986]).

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

and *maqāmāt*. A plainer prose, *adab* style, characterized by a less extensive use of rhetorical devices and a greater attention to contents, was mostly used for literary anthologies and encyclopedias.[44] The choice of a more refined style in the introduction and epilogue of his work not only confirms the fame of al-Waṭwāṭ as a sophisticated prose writer and a master of *inshā'* as acknowledged by al-Ṣafadī, but could also be taken as a hint at his desire to show his literary skills and his ability to reach the highest literary standards. The contents of the main body of *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ,* framed by the introduction and epilogue, were also in principle conceived as a demonstration of the author's erudition and his literary taste: aphorisms, wise sayings, verses of poetry, anecdotes and jokes, Quranic quotations, and hadith are chosen with the utmost accuracy and exhibit a remarkable familiarity with the cultural heritage and the literary patrimony.

3.2: Arrangement

Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ is organized around eight ethical cores, represented in the layout of the work according to the eight virtues and their opposites; this makes sixteen ethical features—and sixteen chapters—in all. The pairings of virtues and vices are the following: magnanimity/meanness; intelligence/stupidity; eloquence/inarticulateness; mental acuteness/carelessness; liberality/avarice; courage/cowardice; forgiveness/vengeance; fraternity/seclusion. Virtues and vices are presented and discussed respectively in two consecutive chapters, the first of the two dealing with the virtue and the second of the two dealing with the vice: for instance, chapter one is devoted to nobility *(karam)* and chapter two is devoted to meanness *(lu'm),* while chapter three treats intelligence *('aql)* and chapter four stupidity *(ḥumq),* and so forth. Each chapter treating virtues contains in turn three sections: (1) praise of the virtue, (2) narrative materials and passages in prose and poetry featuring people who possessed or became famous for that virtue, and (3) censure of the virtue. Chapters on vices are organized similarly, subdivided into three sections: (1) censure of the vice, (2) narrative materials and passages in prose and poetry featuring people who possessed or became notorious for that vice, and (3) praise of the vice. There is only one exception to this arrangement, which is otherwise very regular: the third section of the last chapter, that on seclusion, is not in praise of this vice but consists instead of an invocation to God, in the form of a sophisticated prayer. The criteria at the basis of this judgment of value can be pinpointed in the works of such a fierce defender of the Arabic qualities as Ibn Qutaybah,[45] and the catalogue of virtues and vices included in many anthologies, and in *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ* as well, remains astonishingly stable over the centu-

[44] Sallām, Adab, 2:41–3 and passim

[45] Ibrahim Geries, *Un Genre littéraire arabe: al-maḥâsin wa-l-masâwî* (Paris, 1977), 68.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

ries.[46] They are mostly based on the conflict between Arabs and Persians during the *shuʿūbīyah*: Arab ethical values like generosity and magnanimity *(jūd, karam)* are stressed, while typically *shuʿūbī* shortcomings, for instance avarice and envy *(bukhl, ḥasad),* are regarded with contempt. Eloquence *(faṣāḥah),* opposed to inarticulateness *(ʿīy),* has a place of honor as a typical Arab virtue. Intelligence *(ʿaql)* and mental sharpness *(dhakāʾ)* also find their place in *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ,* exactly like in almost all the great anthologies and works of an encyclopedic character, where they usually rank first as signs of God's favor towards human beings.

By way of an example, let us briefly present chapters three and four, respectively on intelligence *(ʿaql)* and on silliness *(ḥumq);* these feature among the top subjects, immediately after magnanimity and meanness. Chapter three opens with a standard topic of Arabic *adab* literature: traditions and aphorisms in praise of the intellect and its excellence. More theoretical considerations regarding the essence of intellect as well as its seat follow this first section: intellect is divided into two types, innate (a gift of God) and acquired, and two possible seats are indicated, heart and brain. This is reminiscent of the debate on the essence and place of intellect whose echoes can be found in *adab* literature of the earlier periods, where it is often combined with two other notions, *ʿilm* and *adab*. In the literary treatment of this matter the practical side of *ʿaql* predominates over the theoretical side, and the description of the features, behavior and deeds of the intelligent person is given much more space than a purely theoretical description of the notion itself. This is also a peculiarity of *adab* literature, where virtues or vices are often described through their realization and their existence in human beings: *ʿaql* and *ḥumq*, *karam* and *luʾm,* for instance, are spoken of through the description of their concrete manifestations, or through examples featuring men behaving with intelligence, silliness, magnanimity, or meanness. A perfect example of this style is the trilogy of the polymath Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 571/1201), who deals with crucial themes like intelligence and stupidity (adding refinement, "*ẓarf,*" to this couple) in a collection of anecdotes featuring intelligent, silly, and refined people aimed at educating his addressees: *Akhbār al-Adhkiyāʾ,*[47] *Akhbār al-Ḥamqá wa-al-Mughaffalīn,*[48] and *Akhbār al-Ẓurafāʾ wa-al-Mutamājinīn*. Al-Waṭwāṭ

[46] For an assessment of the significance of Ibn Qutaybah's output and a quick survey of encyclopedic works in the wide sense of the word and see Charles Pellat "Les Encylopédies dans le monde arabe," *Cahiers d'Histoire Mondiale* 9, no. 3 (1996): 631–58, reprinted in idem, *Études sur l'histoire socio-culturelle de l'Islam* (London, 1976).

[47] On this see Antonella Ghersetti, "La conception d'intellect dans le Kitāb al-aḏkiyāʾ par Ibn al-Ǧawzī," Quaderni di Studi Arabi 10 (1992): 63–73.

[48] On this title see Katia Zakharia, "Le Savoir et ses dupes dans *Les Histoires des Idiots et des Sots* d'Ibn al-Ǧawzī," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 47 (1995): 217–33. A direct dependence on the two works of Ibn al-Jawzī, *Akhbār al-Adhkiyāʾ* and *Akhbār al-Ḥamqá wa-al-Mughaffalīn,* is not easily identified; neither the author nor the titles are mentioned by al-Waṭwāṭ, and as far as we could

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

also adopts this format: he minimizes any theoretical treatment of the matter, instead focusing on the concrete signs of intelligence through the description of intelligent people and their deeds. In this perspective, intelligence is identified with behaviors that demonstrate the ability to employ stratagems *(ḥiyal),* for example in order to get out of difficulty. In comparison with preceding *adab* anthologies, in the case of *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ* a stronger emphasis is placed on the ethical aspect of intelligence; among the signs of intellect are listed moderation, mildness, endurance, and even an ascetic attitude. Rather oddly, the third section of the chapter on intelligence, devoted to its blame, is limited to a single topic: slips of the tongue made by people of great intellect. These are fraught with several sorts of danger, from the risk of death to the risk of being more or less bitterly criticized. This restriction imposed on the flaw of intelligence is probably grounded in a crucial theme in Arabic literature: the relationship between intellectual faculties and speech. In the narratives and in literary representations of intelligent people, an appropriate utterance, for example, can rescue one's life and an inopportune utterance can, on the contrary, bring death. The very same theme (speech as a sign of intellectual faculties) is also represented in chapter four, "on silliness." This chapter has a marked humoristic flavor; it contains numerous jocular anecdotes on different categories of people who are deemed stupid: schoolteachers, women, eunuchs, weavers, and so on.[49] Many of the stories contain puns and witticisms, like this one:

> Hārūn al-Rashīd asked Bahlūl who was the dearest person to him; he replied, "The one who sates my stomach." Al-Rashīd then said: "I shall sate your stomach: do you love me?" and Bahlūl promptly answered: "Love is not on credit."[50]

Some minor subsections even carry a formal title clearly referring to jokes, humor, and pleasantries. Here also the point remains that speech is one manifestation, though perhaps not the most important one, of intellectual faculties, meaning both intelligence and the lack thereof, i.e., silliness.

---

ascertain there is no verbatim quotation from these books. Nevertheless, some notions and some elements of the arrangement do recall them. Al-Waṭwāṭ probably knew both, and loosely drew inspiration from them.

[49] On the literary representations of stupid schoolteachers see Antonella Ghersetti, "'Like the Wick of the Lamp, Like the Silkworm They Are': Stupid Schoolteachers as a Literary Topic in Classical Arabic Sources," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 10 (2010): 75–100.

[50] Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 165.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

3.3. Autobiographical References? The Theme of *Ḥirfat al-Adab*

The theme of speech and its utmost realization, eloquence *(faṣāḥah),* is also at the core of the following chapter, number five, devoted to eloquence *(faṣāḥah* and *balāghah).* One section in this chapter is particularly worthy of note both for how it illustrates this theme and for its possible connection with some autobiographical elements.[51] It deals with *ḥirfat al-adab,* an expression that could be translated as "the misery of the profession," often used "to express the disappointment felt by a poet when he leads a life of poverty and full of uncertainties."[52] Even if mostly mentioned in connection with poets and poetry, this expression is also used with reference to professional secretaries or grammarians. In this sense it seems a fitting expression for all the categories of men of letters or of professionals of the "art of the word," but nowhere in the sources so thoroughly perused by S. A. Bonebakker does the "misery of men of letters" appear to be connected with booksellers and stationers *(warrāqūn).* This is, however, precisely what happens in this section of *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ,* in which al-Waṭwāṭ specifically discusses the "misery of the profession" as it affects *ahl al-wirāqah,* the profession held by al-Waṭwāṭ himself. Notwithstanding the absence of any direct hint at his personal situation, in light of the biographical details given in the sources one cannot escape the impression that this part of the book was informed by al-Waṭwāṭ's personal experience. The section, entitled "Sometimes the misery of the profession affected the booksellers, and because of it the clouds of poverty and deprivation cast a shadow on them," contains a large number of verses and sayings alluding to the low standard of living for *wirāqah* professionals. A short story in particular depicts this, through the use of interesting puns pivoting on the comparison between the standard of life and work tools:

> Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḥabīb, known as Abū Haffān, narrates: I asked a bookseller "How are you?" and he replied: "My life is narrower than an inkwell, my body is thinner than a ruler *(miṣṭarah),* my rank is more fragile than glass, my fortune is darker than oak apples mixed with vitriol, my misfortune is more stuck to me than resin, my food is more bitter than aloe, my drink is muddier than ink, and anxiety and pain flow in my heart's blood clot like ink in the pen nib." When I exclaimed: "My friend, you mentioned one affliction after the other!" he recited:
>
> Money hides every defect of men//money raises every scoundrel who is falling

[51] Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 207–9.

[52] Seeger A. Bonebakker, "The Misery of Men of Letters: Some Quotations from Their Poetry," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 19 (2001): 147.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

You must have money! Seek to make money//and hurl the book of science against a wall.

The core of the question seems to be the difficulty of earning one's living by means of culture and knowledge. What is new in al-Waṭwāṭ's treatment of the commonly discussed topic of the underestimation of knowledge in this earthly world is his attempt to associate it with the profession of *wirāqah*. In this context *wirāqah* represents obviously much more than simple book trade or paper making: it has to do more with the immaterial side of books than with their material, physical side. The *warrāq* is depicted not as a skilled craftsman but rather as a man of letters and a cultivated member of society, a viewpoint still more explicit in these verses:

Practicing *wirāqah*, studying and occupying oneself with knowledge,
begets humiliation, difficult financial straits, disgrace and afflictions

Seemingly, *ahl al-wirāqah,* like many other men of letters, often were not comfortably off, nor did they hold a high rank, and this uncomfortable situation is represented in still more crude terms in the following piece of poetry:

As for *wirāqah,* it is the most unhappy profession//its branches and fruits are deprivation
The one who practices it is comparable to the tailor's needle//that clothes the naked but is itself nude

Eloquence and the mastery of the art of the word *(faṣāḥah, balāghah)* had been for a long time, and still were, a means of social promotion and a way to obtain a high rank, even for people of inferior birth. In the light of this we can appreciate how disappointing it was for al-Waṭwāṭ to see that writing good prose and mastering the art of *inshāʾ,* rightly considered a branch of *faṣāḥah*, was not even enough to earn one's living, to say nothing of wealth and honors. The inclusion of *wirāqah* in the wider field of "the art of the word" is the interesting element in these passages, and can be taken as a hint at the aspiration of the members of a "middle class" to gain social promotion by means of culture.

3.4. Criteria of Selection and Composition

The criteria for the selection of the materials and the composition of *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* are briefly outlined in the introduction: the thorough perusal and assessment of the sources precedes the selection of their best parts, in which loftiness of content must be associated with excellence of form and rhetorical value. Quality

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

and variety seem to be the criteria used to select the library from which materials are drawn. The alternation of jest and earnest *(al-jidd wa-al-hazl),* the principle of *adab* considered the prominent feature of the best literary discourse, is also recalled as a criterion guiding the author, together with the criterion of pertinence, on which basis materials are included or excluded. Both prose and poetry alternate, just like stringed pearls *(durar manẓūmah),* and "refined verses" are put side by side with narrative materials and humorous stories and jokes *(akhbār, nawādir, fukahāt).*[53] Al-Waṭwāṭ clarifies that he intentionally excluded from the book some suspicious genres, namely *khurāfāt* and *asmār,* fables and tales told in the course of night-time conversations. The openly fictional nature of these genres must have played a role in the decision to discard them, and even if he states that these are excluded to avoid the reader's boredom with useless prolixity,[54] we must keep in mind that this kind of narrative was the target of bitter criticism on the part of the guardians of orthodoxy. We cannot avoid recalling the words of Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī and Ibn al-Ḥājj, who directed slings and arrows against booksellers and copyists suspected of diffusing dangerous and immoral stuff of this sort. Al-Waṭwāṭ must not have been indifferent to this trend of his time: the moralizing tone present in the introduction and in the epilogue of *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ,* which surfaces from time to time throughout the text, and the pious tones of the fervent prayer he addresses to God by way of conclusion, constitute obvious hints at his deep religious feelings and at his sensitivity to ethical themes. Perhaps they also are to be taken as a token of his desire to comply with orthodoxy, in view of his admission to the circle of the intellectual élite.

Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ is composed after the pattern of the great literary anthologies of the golden age, which aimed at offering the readers a choice of prose and poetry they could exhibit during literary gatherings to show their refinement and good taste. Irwin says that Mamluk literature often has a "backward looking flavor,"[55] and al-Waṭwāṭ seems to be a fitting example of this "antiquarian" slant of Mamluk writers, both in the way he conceives his anthology and in the choice of his materials and sources. Al-Waṭwāṭ by far prefers to look backwards and derive his material from the past rather than presenting the contemporary literary production: the anecdotes he relates are mostly set in Umayyad or early Abbasid times and political personalities like ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, Ziyād ibn Abīhi, al-Ḥajjāj, Hārūn al-Rashīd, and al-Muʿtaṣim feature alongside poets and men of letters like Abū Nuwās, Dhū al-Rummah, and even the pre-Islamic past is well represented with great names such as Alexander the Great, Chosroes I Anūshirwān,

[53] Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 8.

[54] A further hint at the necessity of synthesis to avoid boredom and to help memorization and repetition (al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 611, 607) has been postponed to the epilogue.

[55] Irwin, "Mamluk Literature," 9.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

and Ardashīr ibn Babek. As usual in this genre of works, the material contained in the book is almost exclusively based on quotations, excepting the liminal parts framing the book (introduction and epilogue) and some brief interventions and comments in the text. Some of these are particularly significant in order to comprehend the authorial work, in that it is there that the writer expresses his opinions and clarifies his choices, like the criteria of composition or his assessment of famous authors and their literary output. Some intra-textual authorial interventions aim at explaining the reasons for the exclusion of certain materials: for instance, the passage where al-Waṭwāṭ accounts for the need to skip some amusing stories about Mānī (a famous "intelligent madman"), which are omitted for the sake of brevity and pertinence.[56] Some other interventions are less neutral in that they express bitter criticism against morally suspect behaviors. A case in point is the comment on al-Mutanabbī, whose verses lampooning Kāfūr are quoted in a section on eunuchs. Al-Waṭwāṭ, after having cursed the poets for their hypocrisy, recalls al-Mutanabbī's panegyrics of Kāfūr and then himself severely reproaches the poet: in the crudest terms, he accuses him of being self-serving and false for having first praised and then satirized his patron.[57] While a sophisticated sample of artistic prose, this passage still remains rather unpleasant in tone and one has the impression that now and again the author felt the need to take a stand in line with what the moralists would have expected.

3.5 Sources

In general, al-Waṭwāṭ says almost nothing about the sources upon which he relies; in his introduction they are only described in terms of quality, being "good books collected in various branches of culture"[58] from which he picked the best. The modality of citation is rather loose; verses of poetry, for example, are often anonymous and simply introduced by *qāla al-shāʿir.* With respect to aphorisms and sayings, he sometimes mentions the personality to whom a certain saying is attributed, but much more often he has recourse to generic expressions like *al-ḥukamāʾ, baʿḍ al-ḥukamāʾ, baʿḍ ahl al-tajārib, baʿḍ al-bulaghāʾ,* or simply to one of the *verba dicendi,* like *qālū* or *qīla.* Anecdotes and stories are almost always introduced in this way, by means of *ḥukiya, mā ḥukiya*, *min al-maḥkī*, or by a generic label like *nādirah* or *min aẓraf mā qīla;* sometimes there is no introductory formula at all and the narration begins abruptly. When existing, reference to the sources in *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* is generally made in two different ways: quotation of titles and, much more frequently, quotation of authors' names devoid of any refer-

[56] Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 171.

[57] Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 159.

[58] "*Ḥisān al-kutub fī ḍurūb al-adab"* (al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 7).

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

ence to a specific title. Another kind of source could also be singled out: works that are the point of reference of *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* and constitute its formal and thematic model, but are not overtly mentioned.

As we have already stressed, citations of precise titles are quite scanty; in over six hundred pages of text we could spot only twenty:[59]

Shuʿab al-Īmān of Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) (quoted in the chapter on *karam*)

Kitāb al-Aghānī of Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 363/972) (quoted in the chapter on *ʿaql*)

Al-Hafawāt al-Nādirah of Muḥammad ibn Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ, known as Ghars al-Niʿmah (d. 480/1088) (quoted in the chapters on *ʿaql* and on *ʿafw*)

Manthūr al-Ḥikam (better known as *Mukhtār al-Ḥikam*) of Mubashshir ibn Fātik (fifth/eleventh century) (quoted in the chapter on *ḥumq*)

Kitāb al-Amthāl of Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maydānī (d. 518/1124) (quoted in the chapter on *ḥumq*)

ʿUqalāʾ al-Majānīn of Ibn Ḥabīb al-Nīsābūrī (d. 406/1015–16) (quoted in the chapter on *ḥumq*)

Kitāb al-Bayān wa-al-Tabyīn of al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868) (quoted in the chapter on *faṣāḥah*)

Risālah fī Madḥ al-Kalām (?) of al-Babbaghāʾ (d. 398/1008) (quoted in the chapter on *faṣāḥah*)

Yatīmat al-Dahr of al-Thaʿālibī (d. 429/1038) (quoted in the chapter on *faṣāḥah*)

Akhbār fī Wulāt Miṣr (?) of Abū Muḥammad Ḥasan Ibn Zūlāq[60] (d. 386 or 387/996 or 997) (quoted in the chapter on *ʿīy*)

Kitāb al-ʿUmdah of Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 456 or 463/1063 or 1071) (quoted in the chapter on *ʿīy*)

Badāʾiʿ al-Badaʾih of ʿAlī ibn Ẓāfir ibn al-Ḥusayn Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan al-Azdī (d. 623/1226 or 613/1216) (quoted in the chapter on *ʿīy*)

Al-Mathal al-Sāʾir fī Adab al-Kātib wa-al-Shāʿir of Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 637/1239) (quoted in the chapter on *ʿīy*)

Al-Zāhir fī Maʿānī Kalimāt al-Nās of Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328/940) (quoted in the chapter on *dhakāʾ*)

[59] An index of names would have made it much simpler to assess the frequency of the occurrences of each name and title; unfortunately the edition we have consulted lacks this kind of tool and, to the best of my knowledge, an edition meeting academic standards is not available yet. The following list is thus based on perusal of the whole work, but some titles could have escaped our attention. The titles are listed in order of their appearance in the text.

[60] Erroneously mentioned as Ibn Dhūlāq in the edition we consulted. The right title is probably *Akhbār Quḍāt Miṣr*.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

Sirr al-Faṣāḥah of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Khafājī al-Ḥalabī (d. 466/1074) (quoted in the chapter on *taghafful*)
Kitāb al-Wuzarāʾ wa-al-Kuttāb of Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdūs al-Jahshiyārī (d. 331/942–43) (quoted in the chapter on *sakhāʾ*)
Zahr al-Ādāb wa-Thamar al-Albāb of Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥuṣrī (d. 413/1022) (quoted in the chapter on *shajāʿah*)
Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ (?) of Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿImrān al-Marzubānī (d. 384/994) (quoted in the chapter on *ʿafw*)
Al-Tadhkirah al-Ḥamdūnīyah of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn Ḥamdūn (d. 562/1102) (quoted in the chapter on *intiqām*)
Bulghat al-Ẓurafa fi Tārīkh al-Khulafa of al-Rūḥī[61] (quoted in the chapter on *intiqām*)

Some of these titles deserve particular attention. The first is a treatise in praise of speech *(Risālah fī Madḥ al-Kalām)* attributed to the poet and man of letters of Naṣībīn Abū al-Faraj al-Babbaghāʾ al-Makhzūmī (d. 398/1008). A fervent admirer of al-Mutanabbī, he was part of the entourage of Sayf al-Dawlah and lived in Aleppo for a while. His works, which at the end of the fourth/tenth century included three hundred pages of poetry, only survive in the anthologies of al-Thaʿālibī, who also quotes long and significant passages of his letters.[62] In the bibliographical sources we did not find any reference to a treatise entitled "*Fī Madḥ al-Kalām*," nor is any similar title mentioned by al-Thaʿālibī in the long section of his *Yatīmat al-Dahr* dedicated to the best of al-Babbaghāʾ's poetry and prose ("Fī Dhikr Abī al-Faraj ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Babbaghāʾ wa-Ghurar Nathrihi wa-Naẓmihi"). A quick survey of the sources did not help in identifying the sentence quoted by al-Waṭwāṭ and attributed to al-Babbaghāʾ. This approximate quotation, in this and in other passages as well, could be taken as a hint at the fact that al-Waṭwāṭ quotes by heart or in any case does not care for quoting accurately.

The second is *Bulghat al-Ẓurafa fi Tārīkh al-Khulafa* of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Rūḥī (d. after 648/1250), a book of history presenting information on the Islamic dynasties starting from Muḥammad and extending to his successors, from *al-khulafāʾ al-rāshidūn* up to al-ʿĀḍud li-Dīn Allāh.[63] Brockelmann, Ziriklī, and Kaḥḥālah bear no information on this al-Rūḥī, nor have we been able to trace any details on his life and works elsewhere. The only piece of information we could obtain from

[61] Erroneously mentioned as al-Dawḥī in the edition we consulted.

[62] *GAL,* 1:90, S1:145; R. Blachère, "al-Babbaghāʾ, " *EI2,* 1:845–46.

[63] In the introduction the author lists the kind of information that he plans to give for each personality as follows: *nasab*, *asmāʾ*, *ṣifāt*, *nuʿūt*, *ummuhātuhum*, *awlāduhum*, *muddatuhum fī-al-wilāyah* (Abū al-Ḥasan al-Rūḥî, *Bulghat al-Ẓurafa fi Tārīkh al-Khulafa,* ed. Muḥammad Z. M. ʿAzab [Port Said, n.d.], 3).

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

the perusal of his work is a *terminus post quem* for his death, since the last year mentioned in the book is 648/1250. Al-Waṭwāṭ quotes this source in connection with the persecution of the Banū Umayyah on the part of al-Saffāḥ and his uncle ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAlī. The story of the desecration of the corpse of Hishām, which appears to have been torn into pieces by ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAlī in 132/750, is quoted verbatim, with only minor adaptation, from *Bulghat al-Ẓurafā'*,[64] a source that is mentioned to explain the reason for the desecration: the unjust flogging of ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAlī's father that had been ordered by Hishām. This addition could hint at the author's desire to show his control of the sources and his capability of finding further useful information.

In contrast to the preceding title, which is mentioned in its full and correct form, the third reference on which we will focus is somewhat less clear. Al-Waṭwāṭ mentions a certain *Akhbār fī Wulāt Miṣr,* attributing it to Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan Ibn Zūlāq (d. 386/996 or 387/998). This Egyptian historian wrote works continuing those of al-Kindī on the governors and judges of Egypt, which are almost entirely lost except for the extensive quotations one can find in the books of al-Maqrīzī, Ibn Saʿīd, Ibn Ḥajar, and later authors.[65] This title, *Akhbār fī Wulāt Miṣr*, does not feature in the bibliography of Ibn Zūlāq; al-Maqrīzī's *Muqaffá* and the other sources we consulted mention instead an *Akhbār Quḍāt Miṣr,* while *Akhbār Wulāt Miṣr* appears among al-Kindī's titles. If we discard the possibility of an error on the part of the copyist or the editor, this—like al-Babbaghā''s quotation presented earlier—could also prove that al-Waṭwāṭ quotes by heart, and with some inaccuracy.

The next citation we will examine is in fact a combination of two different sources, and could be interesting in terms of evaluating the working method of al-Waṭwāṭ. He mentions the *Kitāb al-ʿUmdah* of Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 456/1063 or 463/1071)[66] in connection with an anecdote featuring Abū Nuwās, al-ʿAbbās ibn al-Aḥnaf, al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk, al-Khalīʿ, and Muslim ibn al-Walīd al-Ṣarīʿ improvising verses of poetry on an inexact quotation of the Quran made by Yaḥyá ibn al-Muʿallá al-Kātib.[67] Al-Waṭwāṭ explains that the story is contained in the *Kitāb al-ʿUmdah* of Ibn Rashīq, who adds to the anecdote an additional line of poetry. In its entirety this passage does not completely correspond with the relevant passage from *Kitāb al-ʿUmdah,* but the verses of poetry, which are the focus of the narrative, are quoted verbatim and, all in all, the quotation is reliable. Al-Waṭwāṭ then informs us that he found supplementary information (a verse of Abū

[64] Al-Rūḥī, *Bulghat al-Ẓurafa,* 104.

[65] *GAL,* 1:149, S1:230; [ed.], "Ibn Zūlāq," *EI2,* 3:979.

[66] On him see *GAL,* 1:307, S1:539–40; Ch. Bouyahia, "Ibn Rashīḳ," *EI2,* 3:903–4.

[67] Ibn Rashīq, *Kitāb al-ʿUmdah fī Maḥāsin al-Shiʿr wa-Ādābihi wa-Naqdihi,* ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Beirut, 1981), part 2:91–92, in the chapter on *taḍmīn* and *ijāzah*.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

al-ʿAbbās ibn al-Ḥuṭayʾah) and says: "Reading the *Badāʾiʿ al-Badāʾih,* I happened to come across an addition *(ziyādah)* that it is necessary to mention."[68] *Badāʾiʿ al-Badāʾih*[69] is an anthology of improvisations composed by ʿAlī ibn Ẓāfir ibn al-Ḥusayn Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan al-Azdī (d. 623/1226 or 613/1216), an Egyptian *faqīh,* historian, *adīb,* and poet, who was a civil servant in the chancery of al-ʿAzīz, then al-ʿĀdil, then al-Malik al-Ashraf Mūsá ibn al-Malik al-ʿĀdil al-Ayyūbī in Damascus.[70] Along with his works of a historiographical nature, he also wrote an anthology on courageous men *(Akhbār al-Shujaʿān),* which could have been used as a source by al-Waṭwāṭ in the relevant chapter of *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ.* ʿAlī ibn Ẓāfir relates the circumstances of this improvisation in an anecdote that contains a long *isnād* going back to al-Ṣūlī, on the authority of Ibn Khurradādhbih (d. 300/911?).[71] Al-Waṭwāṭ does not mention any *isnād,* nor does he refer to Ibn Ẓāfir's version in its entirety, but prefers to recall the missing verse and add it to the "defective" version of the episode. He could have mentioned the "complete" version, but in doing this he would not have had the opportunity to stress his ability to compare different versions of the same narrative. Reconstructing the process of finding and combining useful information enables al-Waṭwāṭ to emphasize his familiarity with the sources and his skill in selecting and organizing useful information. The quick reference to *Bulghat al-Ẓurafāʾ* mentioned earlier is another element pointing to his ability to select the best and probably also a hint at the wealth of books he had at his disposal.

The last example we would like to consider is the reference to *Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ* of Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿImrān al-Marzubānī (d. 384/994). Al-Marzubānī was a literary scholar from Baghdad who studied with famous grammarians like Abū Bakr ibn al-Anbārī and Ibn Durayd, and wrote encyclopedic works on poets and philologians.[72] Few of his works are extant, but information on the titles and sizes of those that did not survive can be found in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm. To the best of our knowledge, a book called *Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ* does not feature in al-Marzubānī's bibliography, but an encyclopedia of poets entitled *Muʿjam al-Shuʿarāʾ* has been preserved, though only partially. The book of al-Marzubānī is mentioned in connection with an anecdote representing an exchange of verses between the caliph al-Maʾmūn and the poet Ibrāhīm ibn Yaḥyá al-Yazīdī (d. 225/840), one of his boon companions. The *nisbah* of the poet is elucidated in the following passage, in which al-Waṭwāṭ obviously intends to complement the story he has just quoted with a useful piece of information.

[68] Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 228.

[69] ʿAlī ibn Ẓāfir, *Badāʾiʿ al-Badaʾih* (Bulaq, 1278/1861).

[70] On him see *GAL,* 1:321; SI:553–54; Kaḥḥālah, *Muʿjam al-Muʾallifīn,* 3:453.

[71] ʿAlī ibn Ẓāfir, *Badāʾiʿ,* 123–24.

[72] R. Sellheim, "al-Marzubānī," *EI2,* 2:634–35.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

Many other sources were no doubt exploited, but are not explicitly mentioned: reading the pages of *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ*, one cannot avoid recalling major anthologies of the golden age, for example *Muḥāḍarāt al-Udabā'* of al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Zahr al-Ādāb* of al-Ḥuṣrī, *Rabīʿ al-Abrār* of al-Zamakhsharī, or collections of anecdotes like *Akhbār al-Adhkiyā'* and *Kitāb al-Ḥamqá wa-al-Mughaffalīn* of Ibn al-Jawzī. Al-Waṭwāṭ refers to authors' names much more frequently than to book titles: among the personalities occurring with a certain frequency one can find men of letters and secretaries such as al-Thaʿālibī, who is mentioned quite often, Ibn Qutaybah, Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, al-ʿAttābī, al-Ṣāḥib ibn ʿAbbād, al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, Ibn al-ʿAmīd al-Kātib, Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, and Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī, but also grammarians and philologians like al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhidī, Ibn al-Anbārī, al-Aṣmaʿī, Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī, and ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. Unfortunately, the references to these authorities are so loose that one is not in a position to say whether al-Waṭwāṭ consulted their books himself, or if these are second-hand quotations. A large number of aphorisms and wise sayings are ascribed to well-known historical, semi-legendary, or legendary personalities: Wahb ibn Munabbih, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, al-Shaʿbī, Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufrah, ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir, the wise caliph al-Ma'mūn, and al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays feature alongside Jesus, Luqmān, Buzurgmihr, the Prophet, and his companions. Poetry has an important place in this anthology, and short quotations (from two to ten lines of poetry) are numerous. The poet who is by far cited most frequently is certainly al-Mutanabbī, followed by Ibn al-Rūmī, al-Buḥturī, Abū Tammām, and Abū Nuwās. Compared to the quotations of the poets of the Abbasid period, references to pre-Islamic and Umayyad poetry are all in all rather infrequent, and contemporary poets *(shuʿarā' al-ʿaṣr),* such as Bahā' al-Dīn Zuhayr, scarcely appear in the pages of *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ*. This, coupled with the bookish nature of his sources, could be taken as a hint at the marginalization al-Waṭwāṭ probably suffered and which is attested in the biographical profile outlined by his contemporaries.

Among the authors mentioned by al-Waṭwāṭ, three deserve our attention: Abū al-Faraj al-Babbaghā', Abū al-Faḍl al-Mīkālī (d. 436/1044–45), and al-Bākharzī (d. 467/1075). These are all personalities connected, in one way or another, to Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī, the great literary critic and anthologist author of *Yatīmat al-Dahr* and *Thimār al-Qulūb*. As for al-Babbaghā', all we know of his prose and poetry is contained in al-Thaʿālibī's anthologies, and this means that the passages of al-Babbaghā' quoted by al-Waṭwāṭ result from his acquaintance with al-Thaʿālibī's books. Abū al-Faḍl al-Mīkālī, a poet stylist and traditionist, was a member of the most influential family of Nishapur and remained an intimate friend of Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī throughout his life.[73] This relationship was so close

[73] On him see C. E. Bosworth, "Mīkālīs," *EI2*, 7:26.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

that the two names are both associated with *Al-Muntaḥal,* an early collection of poetry that is attributed to both of them, but most probably is "a revision by al-Thaʿālibī of his friend's work."[74] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bākharzī, a poet and anthologist, was a student of al-Thaʿālibī and a poet himself, and wrote *Dumyat al-Qaṣr* as a continuation of his master's *Yatīmah.*[75] The presence of these two names, al-Mīkālī and al-Bākharzī, among the sources mentioned in *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* is probably to be taken as a hint at the thorough knowledge al-Waṭwāṭ had of al-Thaʿālibī's life, acquaintances, and works, and the simultaneous presence of Abū al-Faraj al-Babbaghāʾ, Abū al-Faḍl al-Mīkālī, and al-Bākharzī among the sources mentioned in *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* certainly points to the familiarity of al-Waṭwāṭ with al-Thaʿālibī's literary output. All these elements suggest that al-Waṭwāṭ held al-Thaʿālibī in high esteem and considered him and his works as an example to imitate. A further suggestion in this sense is the genre that inspires the overall architecture and the arrangement of *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ*, *al-maḥāsin wa-al-masāwiʾ*, whose undisputed master was al-Thaʿālibī. Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī thus emerges as the most influential author for al-Waṭwāṭ in terms of style and of criteria of selection and combination of the materials.[76] While his works certainly inspired the antonymic pattern of al-Waṭwāṭ's anthology, the influence of al-Thaʿālibī is not discernible in the parenetic slant and the moralizing tone that characterizes *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ*, which is completely absent from al-Thaʿālibī's works. While al-Waṭwāṭ emphatically proclaims the ethical goal of his book, intended as a guide to virtue and perfection (which corresponds to practicing virtue, *faḍīlah,* and avoiding vice, *radhīlah*),[77] al-Thaʿālibī openly proclaims the eminently literary and aesthetic purpose of his anthologies.

4. Patterns: The Genre *al-Maḥāsin wa-al-Masāwiʾ*

Al-Waṭwāṭ's dependence upon the great authors of the past, and especially al-Thaʿālibī, is clearly discernible in the model informing *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ*: *al-maḥāsin wa-al-masāwiʾ*.[78] This is rooted in the Jāḥiẓian corpus and has a long history in Arabic literature. When applied to persons, or to habits and behaviors, the paired terms *al-maḥāsin*/*al-masāwiʾ* mean "merits/vices" or "commendable/

[74] E. Rowson, "al-Thaʿālibī," *EI2*, 10:426.

[75] On him see D. S. Margoliouth, "al-Bākharzī," *EI2*, 1:952.

[76] We know for instance that al-Thaʿālibī composed a *risālah* on friendship (see Bilal Orfali, "The Art of the Muqaddima in the Works of Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī [d. 429/1039]," in *The Weaving of Words: Approaches to Classical Arabic Literature*, ed. Lale Behzadi [Beirut, 2011], 181–202; the work is quoted at p. 186), and friendship is one of the favorite themes of *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ*.

[77] Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 14–15.

[78] For a concise history of the *al-maḥāsin wa-al-masāwiʾ* genre see the essay by Geries, *Un Genre littéraire arabe*, cited above, and idem, "al-Maḥāsin wa-l-masāwī," *EI2*, 5:1223–27.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

blameworthy." This pair of terms can also denote good/bad examples of something, the pros/cons of something, or the positive/negative sides of something, and it is in this last connotation that they constitute the conceptual core of the *al-maḥāsin wa-al-masāwi'* genre, roughly translated as "merits and faults," in al-Thaʿālibī's output.

If al-Jāḥiẓ was the first to use this dichotomous structure of the discourse and apply it to ethics *(akhlāq),* the first book properly belonging to this genre is *Al-Maḥāsin wa-al-Masāwi'* by al-Bayhaqī (a rather obscure Zaydī author of the fourth/tenth century), which was probably composed during the reign of al-Muqtadir (908–32). It is organized in chapters, each of which is divided into two parts, the first devoted to *maḥāsin* (virtues) and the second devoted to *masāwi'* (vices), so that we have for instance a chapter on fidelity/infidelity, one on courage/cowardice, and so on. This arrangement based on antonymy can easily be traced back to al-Jāḥiẓ, who is frequently cited and whose works seem to be the source of many passages, both in method and content. Al-Bayhaqī's book, intended both for instruction and entertainment, contains the "practical philosophy" of the author and addresses the general public.[79] Al-Bayhaqī's work was almost unknown to later *adab* authors, with some rare exceptions: the first is the anonymous author of *Al-Maḥāsin wa-al-Aḍdād,* for some time attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ,[80] who "borrows" many materials from al-Bayhaqī and transforms this latter's methodological approach into a simple literary game; the second is al-Damīrī (742–808/1341–1405), who cites it in his *Ḥayāt al-Ḥayawān al-Kubrá.* This quotation suggests that the work surely circulated in Egypt in the fourteenth century and perhaps before, and it is not impossible that al-Waṭwāṭ came across it and could thus appreciate its organization and methodological approach. Thanks to the false attribution of *Al-Maḥāsin wa-al-Aḍdād* to al-Jāḥiẓ, the appreciation of this method of composition grew, so that other examples appeared in the course of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. The thesis/antithesis method characteristic of the *al-maḥāsin wa-al-masāwi'* genre was widely practiced by the famous anthologist and literary critic al-Thaʿālibī: he wrote three works shaped around it, but in a way completely different from that of al-Jāḥiẓ or al-Bayhaqī. Two of his titles, *Al-Ẓarā'if wa-al-Laṭā'if fī al-Aḍdād* and *Yaqāwīt fī baʿḍ al-Maqāwīt fī Madḥ Kull Shay' wa-Dhammihi*, (each one being "the first" of this genre, if we trust al-Thaʿālibī's words), contain the same materials and deal with the same subjects. Contrary to al-Bayhaqī's book, they do not include (with one single exception) anecdotes or narratives and are only conceived to present the readers beautiful sentences and verses of poetry to be cited in the course of witty conversations. Clearly, for al-Thaʿālibī the dialectical method was not a means for treating philosophi-

[79] Geries, *Un Genre littéraire arabe*, 71–101.

[80] Ibid., 102 ff.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

cal or ethical matters, like it had been for al-Jāḥiẓ or al-Bayhaqī; it was rather a display of virtuosity and a way to show his mastery of Arabic eloquence and his thorough knowledge of the literary tradition.[81] This is still more evident in another work of his, *Taḥsīn al-Qabīḥ wa-Taqbīḥ al-Ḥasan* ("Beautifying the ugly and uglifying the beautiful"), shaped according to the principle of the paradox, considered in literary criticism as a sign of eloquence.[82] It contains a selection of the materials taken from his two other titles mentioned above, where things usually considered blamable are instead praised, and the other way round. The success of the *al-maḥāsin wa-al-masāwi'* genre is also attested in other cases, in method if not in content, and the practice of first praising and then blaming the same thing is also found in famous works like *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī* and al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt.*[83] If al-Jāḥiẓ applied the dialectical approach to ethics in order to show the shortcomings of extremism and demonstrate the superiority of the Aristotelian way of the happy medium, in later times, and especially with al-Thaʿālibī, "the typical man of letters unhampered by knowledge of Aristotle and his philosophy,"[84] this method gradually lost its ethical slant to become a sort of bravura performance completely devoid of any educational intent. The peculiar trait of *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ* is the systematic application of the method perfected by al-Thaʿālibī in a very different, moralizing and educative perspective. In some way the two extremities of the line along which the genre developed, al-Jāḥiẓ first and al-Waṭwāṭ last, join each other in that al-Waṭwāṭ's anthology shares the ethical orientation of al-Jāḥiẓ' works, even if in very different terms. *Mutatis mutandis*, our Mamluk bookseller in a certain sense could thus be seen as the spiritual heir of the great Abbasid polymath.

5. A Philosophical Background?

The proclaimed ethical purpose and the organization of *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ* reflect a certain philosophical background in al-Waṭwāṭ's education, which is also attested by the philosophical concepts and terms that surface throughout the text. Terminology, notions, and the conceptual frame of his work are strongly dependent on Hellenizing philosophy and deserve a careful examination. For instance, in his introduction al-Waṭwāṭ starts by stating that the difference of habits *(akhlāq)* is a function of the difference of elements *(aʿrāq),* and the inclination of each individ-

[81] Geries, *Un Genre littéraire arabe,* 137.

[82] On this literary practice and al-Thaʿālibī's work in particular see Geert J. Van Gelder, "Beautifying the Ugly and Uglifying the Beautiful: The Paradox in Classical Arabic Literature," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 48 (2003): 321–51.

[83] Geries, *Un Genre littéraire arabe,* 143.

[84] Van Gelder, "Beautifying the Ugly," 336.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

ual depends on his essences and accidents *(jawāhir wa-aʿrāḍ).*[85] The relationship between physical constitution and psychology, or in other terms between body and soul, is typical of the humoral physiology of Greek philosophy and medicine that was integrated into Islamic medicine, and so also is the terminology used. But ethics is by far the most interesting facet of this long-standing tradition: in *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* al-Waṭwāṭ shows the same ambivalent attitude towards virtues and vices typical of Aristotelian thought (which by no means corresponds to moral relativism) that al-Jāḥiẓ adopted in his works. In Aristotelian ethics, and its Islamic reception, a good or a bad behavior can only be assessed as such in context: that is to say that virtues and vices are not absolute, but they must be judged depending on circumstances. In brief, behavior can only be evaluated in terms of the way a certain man shows his positive or negative features in a specific context. Everything is relative, and thus an excess of virtue can turn into a blamable feature: for instance, generosity can become profligacy, and so on.[86] To demonstrate the ambivalence reigning in the ethical realm al-Waṭwāṭ, like some of his predecessors in the genre *al-maḥāsin wa-al-masāwiʾ,* praises and blames the same feature, both for virtues and vices. This mirror symmetry in the inner organization of the chapters of *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* very properly highlights the relativity of evaluation in ethics, especially in the third section of each chapter, devoted to blaming virtues and praising vices, which is a tell-tale mark of this approach. Al-Waṭwāṭ seems aware that absolute virtue cannot exist and that it can accidentally be spoiled by some external element, just as the moon is darkened by an eclipse, and good and evil can only be defined by reciprocally contrasting them.[87] The same premises seem to be at the core of what could be defined in Aristotelian terms as "the golden man," whose rational soul stands in the middle *(mutawassiṭat al-ḥāl)* between the two poles: every virtue is thus an intermediate condition between excess and deficiency, a mean between two extremes.

This position, shared by al-Jāḥiẓ and the Islamic ethicists of that period, is widely represented in *adab* literature. Nevertheless, in *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* the ambivalent attitude so characteristic of the *al-maḥāsin wa-al-masāwiʾ* genre is much more mitigated and there seems to be little margin for ambiguity: the lexical entries are used to pinpoint unambiguous concepts, the book has a rigorous and clear-cut structure, and the conceptual frame and organization of the work are clearly articulated in a systematic antonymic disposition. Antonymy is in fact the backbone of this anthology, starting from the title which distinctly sets forth a positive pole opposed to a negative pole. This is not fortuitous at all, inasmuch as the title serves as a key of interpretation for the whole text and is, as al-Waṭwāṭ

[85] Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 7.

[86] Geries, *Un Genre littéraire arabe,* 54 ff.

[87] Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 8, 9.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

says (showing here a remarkably lucid perception of the processes implied in anthologizing), "an instructive announcer"[88] of the contents of the book. Antonymy is also represented in the choice of the ethical themes, since both a notion and its contrary are treated; and antonymy is at the core of the method of exposition, based on the successive praise and blame of the positive or negative feature involved. There is a remarkable harmony of content and form, of themes and organization, and this gives this work its peculiar flavor.

Other elements hinting at a philosophical background can be pointed out. Vocabulary, philosophical premises, and perspective are all hints at the familiarity the author must have had with the contents and methods of Greek philosophy, perhaps not based on the habitual reading of the direct sources but on the extensive perusal of secondary sources and learned conversations. One significant example is the use of the term *al-nafs al-nāṭiqah* ("the rational soul"), which alludes to the theory of the tripartite soul formulated in Plato's *Republic* and *Phaedrus*. This is not limited to mere lexicographical pointers; concepts and ideas can also readily be identified, such as the exhortation to practicing virtue. Al-Waṭwāṭ affirms that natural disposition *(khulq)* can be defined as a habit of the soul that a man practices spontaneously. Men can have good or bad natural dispositions, but those who do not have good natural dispositions can acquire praiseworthy morals by means of practice and familiarity (*al-riyāḍah wa-al-ulfah*).[89] This statement unquestionably recalls the Aristotelian notion of virtue as a habit; in Aristotle's moral philosophy, a virtuous character needs to be trained to virtue by teachers and experience. This theory emerges from the words of al-Waṭwāṭ when he states that man achieves virtue by keeping good company, or, on the contrary, acquires vice by keeping bad company.[90] The point is of course introduced by the usual quotations of the appropriate Muslim traditions, but soon the passage takes a more general tone and an unknown *ḥakīm* is brought up to explain the point further; he specifies that a friend of good morality *(akhlāq)* and behavior *(sīrah)* is a paragon and a model to imitate. This corresponds to the premises of Aristotelian ethics: the importance of friendship in directing man to virtue or vice, depending on good or bad company, is one of the points emphasized in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics,* a work widely known in the Arab world. In all probability al-Waṭwāṭ had this treatise in mind when he mentioned "those who occupy themselves with ethics" *(al-mutakallimūn fī al-akhlāq),*[91] and it is also no accident that the fifteenth chapter of *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ* is devoted to friendship and the significance of choosing good friends. In this connection al-Waṭwāṭ also emphasizes

[88] Ibid., 9.

[89] Ibid., 10.

[90] Ibid., 11.

[91] Ibid., 10.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

the importance of personal effort and commitment to reach perfection (*kamāl*),[92] which is a point also treated in the *Nicomachean Ethics,* where the excellent human being is defined as somebody "doing well and being serious" *(spoudaios).* Aristotle also asserts that for a human being virtue must involve reason, and again this is echoed by al-Waṭwāṭ, who underlines the role of thinking *(fikr)* and discernment *(tamyīz)* in leading to virtue.[93] The insistence on the practical nature of ethics, rather than on its theoretical character, also reflects al-Waṭwāṭ's apparent reliance on Aristotelian thought. In this perspective, virtue is rooted in practice and behavior much more than in knowledge, and this equates to saying that to become good one must actually be virtuous and behave as a virtuous man. That is why al-Waṭwāṭ over and over again urges the reader to behave in a praiseworthy manner and to practice virtue.[94] This practical slant also finds a very proper and concrete realization in the structure of *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ,* and namely in the second section of each chapter, where each virtue or vice is depicted through the representation of people characterized by it or who became famous for it. Thus, in each chapter sections one and three constitute a kind of theoretical frame for the notion presented, bracketing a second section that shows, so to speak, virtue (or vice) "in context," concretized in the sayings and deeds of virtuous (or corrupt) people. This careful construction is a further indication of the harmony of the conceptual premises with content and form that characterizes *Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ.*

6. Conclusion

In his anthology, al-Waṭwāṭ showed his capacity for reusing the literary models of the past and adapting them to the goals and expectations of his contemporaries. Taking on the *al-maḥāsin wa-al-masāwi'* pattern, he does not tread in the footsteps of al-Thaʿālibī, with the pronounced aesthetic and literary tones of his works. He prefers instead to adopt the ethical intent of the origins of the genre, and thus adapt the literary tradition to the requirements of his time. Anthologies were not "mere repackagings of the literary tradition, but innovative manipulations of that tradition in ways that appealed to contemporary developments in literary taste and sensibilities…[and] late pre-modern and early modern anthologists reinterpreted the canon in ways that appealed to an expanding readership."[95] This is certainly true in the case of al-Waṭwāṭ, whose attachment to the works of the past is based on a sincere appreciation and desire to revive their message. The case of

[92] Ibid., 11, 14–15.

[93] Ibid., 15.

[94] E.g., al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 12, 15.

[95] *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography 1350–1850,* ed. J. E. Lowry and D. J. Stewart (Wiesbaden, 2009), 7.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.

Ghurar al-Khaṣā'iṣ shows that anthologizing was much more than the process of collecting apposite anecdotes and pieces of poetry, and authors were in a position to adopt literary canons and to use the materials of the tradition in an innovative way. Accordingly, forms of inter-textual references were used "to determine one's relation with the past, to enter into a dialogue with its central texts, to introduce their message into contemporary discourse and to adapt it to the then-prevailing tastes."[96] As an author of encyclopedias, of sophisticated *inshā'* compositions, and of anthologies, al-Waṭwāṭ perfectly embodied this and the other literary trends of his period.

[96] Bauer, "Mamluk Literature," 114.

DOI: 10.6082/M1BV7DR1. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1BV7DR1)

DOI of Vol. XVII: 10.6082/M18050P5. See https://doi.org/10.6082/5ZJ0-6548 to download the full volume or individual articles.