

The Ten Mu‘allaqāt: The Problematic of Their Suspension and the Trajectory of Their Commentaries

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Preface

The Mu‘allaqāt are long poems among the finest examples of pre-Islamic poetry that have come down to us. The characteristics of this poetry are manifested in them with the utmost clarity, and they have been regarded as the finest literary remains transmitted to us from pre-Islamic Arabs. They are “selections from pre-Islamic poetry; their authors are the most celebrated poets of the Jāhiliyya, and people, both in ancient and modern times, have held them in the highest esteem.”¹

These Mu‘allaqāt embodied “the latent power of the living, integrated work of art, capable of withstanding the admirable changes of time, whatever transformations and developments may occur in tastes. This indicates their artistic authenticity, which enabled them to contend with time, penetrate the depths, and compel their recipients to enter their distinctive world and explore their artistic reach.”²

These poems acquired wide renown in the history of Arabic literature because of “the account that arose around their suspension upon the Kaaba, their transmission, and the commentaries composed for them after they had been collected. All of this conferred upon them an aura of majesty and solemnity, aroused the interest of scholars and men of letters in them, and kept them the object of study down to the present day.”³

No one doubted their authenticity or their pre-Islamic origin “except a small number of modern writers who went to excess in scepticism.”⁴

The Cause of the Naming and the Question of Suspension

Ibn al-Sā’ib al-Kalbī stated that “the first poetry to be suspended in the Jāhiliyya was the poetry of Imru’ al-Qays. It was suspended on one of the corners of the Kaaba during the season until it had been viewed; then, it was taken down. The poets then suspended their poems after him. This was a source of pride for the Arabs in the Jāhiliyya. They counted those whose poetry had been suspended as seven persons, except that ‘Abd al-Malik

¹ Bakrī Shaykh Amīn, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt al-Sab‘* (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li-al-Malāyīn, 2003), 11.

² Sulaymān al-Shāṭṭī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt wa-‘Uyūn al-‘Uṣūr* (Kuwait: ‘Ālam al-Ma‘rifa, 2011), 287.

³ Muḥammad Ṣabrī al-Ashtar, *Al-‘Aṣr al-Jāhili: al-Adab wa-al-Nuṣūṣ; al-Mu‘allaqāt* (Aleppo: University of Aleppo, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Directorate of University Books and Publications, 1994), 3.

⁴ Yaḥyā al-Jubūrī, *Al-Shi‘r al-Jāhili: Khaṣā’iṣuḥu wa-Funūnuhu*, 5th ed. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1986), 180.

removed the poetry of four of them and established four others in their place.”⁵ The same view was held by Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih al-Andalusī, who says that the Arabs at that time “set out to choose seven poems from ancient poetry, wrote them in gold ink on folded Coptic cloth, and suspended them between the curtains of the Kaaba. Hence, one speaks of the Mudhahhaba of Imru’ al-Qays, the Mudhahhaba of Zuhayr, and the Seven Mudhahhabāt; they may also be called the Mu‘allaqāt.”⁶

They were called al-Mudhahhaba “from idhhāb or tadhhib, both meaning gilding or coating with gold.”⁷ They were “written on Coptic cloth in gold ink and suspended upon the Kaaba.”⁸

Al-Suyūfī further confirmed the matter by saying, “The Mu‘allaqāt used to be called the Mudhahhabāt, because they were selected from all other poetry, written on Coptic cloth in gold ink, and suspended upon the Kaaba.”⁹ Thus, the Arabs suspended these long poems “on the corners of the Sacred House, the place of their pilgrimage and the House of their father Abraham.”¹⁰ The poetry of Imru’ al-Qays was the first poetry to be suspended, and the act of suspension then continued. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Baghdādī says, “The first person to suspend his poetry in the Kaaba was Imru’ al-Qays; after him, the poets suspended theirs, and the number of those whose poetry was suspended was seven.”¹¹ He also transmitted the statement of Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān: “The poem of ‘Amr ibn Kulthūm and the poem of al-Hārith ibn Ḥilliza were among the glories of the Arabs and remained suspended upon the Kaaba for a long time.”¹²

Many modern scholars have supported this position. Jurjī Zaydān says, “Most scholars and researchers on this subject agreed with them; it was only some European Orientalists who later resumed denying this, and some of our writers agreed with them out of a desire for novelty in everything.”¹³

Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt believes that whoever denies the suspension has no proof: “The majority of historians claim that the Arabs selected them, wrote them in gold ink on Coptic cloth, and then suspended them upon the Kaaba in admiration of them and in order to make their fame known. Some of them remained until the day of the conquest of Mecca, while others were destroyed by a fire that struck the Kaaba before Islam. ...

⁵ Quoted in Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rāfi‘ī, *Tārīkh Adāb al-‘Arab*, vol. 3, 4th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1974), 184. See also Abū al-Ḥasan Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī al-Azdī, *Al-‘Umda fī Maḥāsīn al-Shi‘r wa-Ādābihi wa-Naqdih*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Sa‘āda, 1955), 96.

⁶ Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih al-Andalusī, *Al-‘Iqd al-Farīd*, ed. Mufīd Muḥammad Qumayḥa, vol. 5, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1983), 269.

⁷ ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn ‘Umar al-Baghdādī, *Khizānat al-Adab wa-Lubb Lubāb Lisān al-‘Arab*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, vol. 1, 4th ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1997), 87.

⁸ Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī, *Al-‘Umda*, 1:96.

⁹ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *Al-Muzhir fī ‘Ulūm al-Lugha wa-Anwā‘ihā*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad Jād al-Mawlā, Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Bajāwī, and Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, vol. 2 (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, n.d.), 480.

¹⁰ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddima: Tārīkh al-‘Allāma Ibn Khaldūn*, ed. ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Wāfī, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, 1979), 580.

¹¹ ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Baghdādī, *Khizānat al-Adab*, 1:125.

¹² ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Baghdādī, *Khizānat al-Adab*, 1:126.

¹³ Jurjī Zaydān, *Tārīkh Adāb al-Lugha al-‘Arabiyya*, rev. and annotated by Shawqī Ḍayf, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, n.d.), 92.

Among people are those who deny their suspension upon the Kaaba without any established evidence or convincing proof. ... Moreover, the suspension of important documents upon the Kaaba was a custom in the Jāhiliyya whose trace remained in Islam. Among these was Quraysh's suspension of the document in which they bound themselves to boycott Banū Hāshim and al-Muṭṭalib because of their protection of the Messenger of God when he resolved upon the call and al-Rashīd's suspension of his covenant of succession after him to his two sons, al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn. Why, then, should the matter not have been so with these poems, given what you know of the influence of poetry among them and the standing of poets in their eyes? Moreover, this matter has analogues in Greek literature."¹⁴

In the view of Muḥammad Hāshim 'Aṭiyya, this suspension may have taken place during the seasons, during some of them, or perhaps for an hour of a day.¹⁵

Among those who affirmed the suspension were Badawī Ṭabāna, who, after discussing the question from its various angles, said, "We find no apparent or hidden reasons that would call for doubting the truthfulness of these reports, nor do we see any reasonable cause for denying these Mu'allaqāt or for declaring false these reports upon which transmitters in different ages have successively agreed."¹⁶

He mentioned, among the synonyms and designations of the Mu'allaqāt, "the Seven Long Poems, or the Long Odes; the Gilded Poems; the Sumūt, or the Simt; the Famous Poems; the Sab'iyāt; and the Seven Pre-Islamic Poems."¹⁷ Among the supporters of the idea of suspension were Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Asad¹⁸ and Muḥammad Najīb al-Bahbīṭi.¹⁹

Those Who Rejected the Idea of Suspension

Some men of letters and historians, both ancient and modern, rejected the idea of suspension. Foremost among these was Ibn al-Nahḥās, who is considered "the first of the deniers."²⁰ He says, "As for the statement of those who said that they were suspended in the Kaaba, no transmitter knows it. The soundest statement made on this matter is that Ḥammād al-Rāwiya, when people became disinclined to memorize poetry, collected these seven poems, urged them to study them, and said to them: These are the famous poems. Thus, the poems were called famous for this reason."²¹

¹⁴ Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-'Arabī*, 26th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, n.d.), 33–34.

¹⁵ See Muḥammad Hāshim 'Aṭiyya, *Al-Adab wa-Tārīkhuhu fī al-'Aṣr al-Jāhilī*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Shurakā'uh, 1936), 126.

¹⁶ Aḥmad Badawī Ṭabāna, *Mu'allaqāt al-'Arab: Dirāsa Naqdiyya Tārīkhiyya fī 'Uyūn al-Shi'r al-Jāhilī*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjlū al-Miṣriyya, 1958), 31.

¹⁷ Badawī Ṭabāna, *Mu'allaqāt al-'Arab*, 18.

¹⁸ See Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Asad, *Maṣādir al-Shi'r al-Jāhilī wa-Qīmatuhā al-Tārīkhiyya*, 5th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1978), 171, 187.

¹⁹ See Muḥammad Najīb al-Bahbīṭi, *Al-Mu'allaqāt Sīra wa-Tārīkhan* (Casablanca: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1982), 195.

²⁰ Yaḥyā al-Jubūrī, *Al-Shi'r al-Jāhilī: Khaṣā'ishuhu wa-Funūnuhu*, 182.

²¹ Ibn al-Nahḥās, *Sharḥ al-Qaṣā'id al-Mashhūrāt al-Mawsūma bial-Mu'allaqāt*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 125.

The wording of Ibn al-Naḥḥās, in the expression of Muḥammad al-Bahbītī, is “loose and lacking in conscious precision.”²²

Jurjī Zaydān also found Ibn al-Naḥḥās’ position strange, saying, “The truth is that people were never as eager for poetry as they were in his time. Did not the caliphs summon this very Ḥammād from Iraq to Syria to ask him about a verse: who composed it, or in what context it was composed?”²³

He said, “Most scholars hold that they were suspended in the Kaaba.”²⁴

Among those who pursued Ibn al-Naḥḥās’s view critically was Badawī Ṭabāna, who held that “if he said: As for the suspension of these poems upon the Kaaba, As for the suspension, no transmitter knows it, then others known for verification and scrutiny said: More than one scholar mentioned that the report of the suspension.”²⁵

As for what Ibn al-Kalbī transmitted, Sulaymān al-Shaṭṭī holds that the report of suspension is unsound, since “we find that a number of trustworthy authorities from the age of Ibn al-Kalbī, such as Ibn Sallām, al-Jāhīz, and Ibn Qutayba, have books contemporary with him that are devoid of any reference to this suspension.”²⁶ Moreover, this report “lacks the features of a historical chain of transmission.”²⁷ This is although “Ibn al-Sā’ib al-Kalbī is not regarded as trustworthy by his contemporaries, nor by many of those who came after them, in much of what he transmits.”²⁸ However, al-Bahbītī says, “Had he been known to have lied even once, our books would not have been filled with transmissions from him.”²⁹ He also says, “Moreover, those who were scrupulous in religion preferred to refer to the Mu‘allaqāt by a description that dispensed with Thus, they would say al-Sab‘ al-Ṭiwāl, ‘the Seven Long Poems’, and would not say al-Mu‘allaqāt.”³⁰

‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn holds that “what attracts attention is that those who named them al-Mu‘allaqāt were not among the group of transmitters and commentators of the poetry of the Arabs, nor among those expert in it; rather, they were carried along by that brilliant designation, as was the habit of men of letters.”³¹

Those who denied the suspension attempted to find a reasonable explanation for this word.

The German Orientalist Theodor Nöldeke holds that the disagreement among the transmitters of poetry over the exact wording of the verses of the Mu‘allaqāt is evidence that the suspension is not authentic. Then, had they been suspended and famous, those

²² Muḥammad Najīb al-Bahbītī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt Sīra wa-Tārīkhan*, 87.

²³ Jurjī Zaydān, *Tārīkh Adāb al-Lugha al-‘Arabiyya*, 1:92.

²⁴ Jurjī Zaydān, *Tārīkh Adāb al-Lugha al-‘Arabiyya*, 1:92.

²⁵ Badawī Ṭabāna, *Mu‘allaqāt al-‘Arab*, 56.

²⁶ Sulaymān al-Shaṭṭī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt wa-‘Uyūn al-‘Uṣūr*, 28.

²⁷ Al-Shaṭṭī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt wa-‘Uyūn al-‘Uṣūr*, 25.

²⁸ Al-Ṭāhir Aḥmad Makkī, *Dirāsa fī Maṣādir al-Adab*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 1999), 103.

²⁹ Muḥammad Najīb al-Bahbītī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt Sīra wa-Tārīkhan*, 7.

³⁰ Muḥammad Najīb al-Bahbītī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt Sīra wa-Tārīkhan*, 14.

³¹ Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim al-Anbārī, *Sharḥ al-Qaṣā’id al-Sab‘ al-Ṭiwāl al-Jāhiliyyāt*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Hārūn, 5th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1993), 13.

who wrote about the conquest of Mecca would not have ignored them; moreover, had they been suspended, the Qur'an and the books of Hadith and literature would not have omitted them. He holds that al-Mu'allaqāt means "the selected poems" and that Ḥammād named them thus in comparison with necklaces hung around necks because one of their names is al-Sumūt and among the meanings of al-Sumūt is necklaces.³²

He also held that the word is derived from al-'alaq, meaning things, ornaments, and garments that are held precious, that is, in the sense of a simṭ, a necklace, or precious stones that are suspended. Hence, they are called at times al-Mu'allaqāt, at times al-Mudhahhabāt, at times al-Sab' al-Ṭiwāl, and at times al-Sumūt.³³

Brockelmann held the same view: "Later scholars claimed that they were called Mu'allaqāt because they had been suspended upon the Kaaba on account of their high value. However, this explanation arose only from the apparent interpretation of the designation and was not its cause. The truth is that this collection was selected by Ḥammād al-Rāwīya."³⁴

Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rāfi'ī discussed this question at length and reached the following conclusion: "As for the report concerning writing in gold, or in gold ink, and suspension upon the Kaaba, its transmission is questionable. In my view, it is among the fabricated reports whose origin became obscure until later scholars trusted it. What drew them into that was only that these poems almost constitute the gilded page of the anthology of the Jāhiliyya."³⁵

As for Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, he followed the path of those who denied the suspension, saying: "We do not concern ourselves with the story of the suspension of these seven, or ten, poems upon the Kaaba, or in notebooks. We do not think that the supporters of the ancient tradition concern themselves with this story, which arose in a very late age and which nothing in the life of the Arabs or in their concern for literature confirms."³⁶ Muḥammad al-Khiḍr Ḥusayn rejects the question of suspension and explains the reason for the designation by their attachment to the minds of their young and old, and of their leaders and subordinates.³⁷

Among those who rejected the question of suspension was Shawqī Ḍayf, who counted this matter among myths and said: "They were so called only because of their preciousness, deriving from the word al-'alaq, meaning the precious."³⁸

Thus, these long poems are Mu'allaqāt: "It was said that they regarded them as 'ilq, that is, something precious; it was said that they wrote them in gold and suspended them upon

³² Quoted in Sulaymān al-Shāṭṭī, *Al-Mu'allaqāt wa- 'Uyūn al- 'Uṣūr*, 18.

³³ Quoted in Sulaymān al-Shāṭṭī, *Al-Mu'allaqāt wa- 'Uyūn al- 'Uṣūr*, 18.

³⁴ Carl Brockelmann, *Tārīkh al-Adab al- 'Arabī*, trans. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm al-Najjār, vol. 1, 5th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1959), 67.

³⁵ Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rāfi'ī, *Tārīkh Ādāb al- 'Arab*, 2:163.

³⁶ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Fī al-Adab al-Jāhili*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa-al-Tarjama wa-al-Nashr, 1933), 214. See also Aḥmad Badawī Ṭabāna, *Mu'allaqāt al- 'Arab*, 25.

³⁷ Muḥammad al-Khiḍr al-Tūnisī, *Naqd Kitāb "Fī al-Shi'r al-Jāhili"* (Cairo, 1945), 307.

³⁸ Shawqī Ḍayf, *Al- 'Asr al-Jāhili*, 24th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 2003), 176.

the walls of the Kaaba; and it was said, rather, that they suspended them in the mind, that is, they memorized them by heart.”³⁹

Fātin Muḥammad Khalīl al-Labbūn, the editor of al-Shinqīṭī’s *Commentary on the Ten Mu‘allaqāt*, says, “It was also said that this was because they are worthy of being suspended in the minds on account of their beauty; and it was said that they are like the asmāt suspended around necks. What is most likely today is that they were called al-Mu‘allaqāt by comparison with al-sumūt; that is, necklaces were suspended in the minds. They were also called al-Mudhahhabāt because, owing to their preciousness, they are worthy of being written in gold ink.”⁴⁰

Among the arguments of the deniers discussed and refuted by Badawī Ṭabāna was that the Arabs would not have defiled the Kaaba with such licentiousness as that of Imru’ al-Qays, nor with the immorality of Ṭarafa; moreover, they were illiterate, so how could they have written these poems and suspended them upon the Kaaba?⁴¹ Among those who denied the suspension were Muṣṭafā Jawād⁴² and Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Ḥūfī, who says, “We reject the view of those who maintain that they were suspended upon the Kaaba in its entirety and in every detail.”⁴³

The conclusion regarding the question of suspension is what ‘Abd al-Salām Hārūn said: “Discussion of the correctness of this designation, ‘al-Mu‘allaqāt’, or of the soundness of its explanation, if the designation itself is sound, neither advances nor delays anything. It cannot be settled or decided conclusively. The matter is only one of giving preponderance to one side over another. I have read contemporary studies on this meaning, some supporting it and some opposing it, yet from that, I have not reached a decisive view. I say that it is only one of the enduring literary problems.”⁴⁴

In any case, “this issue is historical, not artistic; it stands outside the framework of the poetic art of the Mu‘allaqāt. It may contain a hint of preference for particular poets or specific poems, but this consideration is present and established, borne by the other names that are closer to correctness and stability. ... As for those who denied the suspension while accepting the name, they moved on to linguistic interpretations that are of no benefit and to artistic explanations far removed from the conception of the ancients.”⁴⁵

Yahyā al-Jubūrī withheld judgement on the matter, saying, “The arguments put forward to deny the suspension and the arguments presented to affirm and establish it are many and cogent; yet all of them are based on logical assumptions. I do not see the correctness

³⁹ ‘Umar Farrūkh, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-‘Arabī*, vol. 1, 4th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li-al-Malāyīn, 1981), 5.

⁴⁰ Aḥmad ibn al-Amīn al-Shanqīṭī, *Sharḥ al-Mu‘allaqāt al-‘Ashr wa-Akḥbār Shu‘arā’ihā*, ed. and completed by Fātin Muḥammad Khalīl al-Labbūn (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī li-al-Ṭibā’a wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī’, n.d.), 2.

⁴¹ See Aḥmad Badawī Ṭabāna, *Mu‘allaqāt al-‘Arab*, 38ff.

⁴² See Jawād ‘Alī, *Al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-‘Arab Qabla al-Islām*, vol. 9, 2nd ed. (Baghdad: University of Baghdad, 1993), 514.

⁴³ See Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Ḥūfī, *Al-Ḥayāt al-‘Arabiyya min al-Shi’r al-Jāhili*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍat Miṣr, 1952), 146.

⁴⁴ Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim al-Anbārī, *Sharḥ al-Qaṣā’id al-Sab‘ al-Ṭiwāl al-Jāhiliyyāt*, 13.

⁴⁵ Sulaymān al-Shāṭṭī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt wa-‘Uyūn al-‘Uṣūr*, 32.

of affirming their suspension categorically, just as I do not see the correctness of categorically denying their suspension.”⁴⁶

Their History

Ḥammād al-Rāwīya⁴⁷ collected the Mu‘allaqāt, and they received abundant attention in commentary and memorization. Poets took them as models to be imitated. Some scholars have deemed it more likely “that Ḥammād was not the first to collect them, but rather the first to select them from larger poetic collections so that they would serve as a poetic model to be emulated. As for the act of collection itself, it goes back to a time earlier than Ḥammād himself.”⁴⁸

The Mu‘allaqāt did not assume their final form at once but passed through several stages.

In the time of al-Aṣma‘ī, a collection consisting of six poems was known. He commented on them and entitled his commentary *The Six Poems*. It has reached us through the recension of al-A‘lam al-Shantamarī al-Andalusī, and it included poetry by Imru‘ al-Qays, Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā, ‘Alqama ibn ‘Abada, Ṭarafa ibn al-‘Abd, al-Nābigha al-Dhubyanī, and ‘Antara ibn Shaddād.⁴⁹ Then, Ḥammād came and made them seven: Imru‘ al-Qays, Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā, Ṭarafa ibn al-‘Abd, al-Nābigha al-Dhubyanī, Labīd ibn Rabī‘a, al-A‘shā, and ‘Amr ibn Kulthūm. Afterward, Abū Zayd al-Qurashī came and added the poem of ‘Antara ibn Shaddād.

In the fourth century AH, Abū Ja‘far al-Naḥḥās appended the poem of al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza, which glorifies the tribe of Bakr so that it would stand opposite the poem of ‘Amr ibn Kulthūm, which glorifies the tribe of Taghlib. Thus, the Mu‘allaqāt became nine. He commented on them, saying in the introduction to his commentary, “What most scholars of language have followed is expansiveness in explaining the obscure vocabulary of poetry, while neglecting the subtle points of grammar within it by examining most of it thoroughly. I have not multiplied poetic proofs or genealogies so that the memorization of this, God willing, may be easy.”⁵⁰ Ibn al-Naḥḥās’ commentary is “a set of lessons and scattered views on the sciences of grammar applied to poetry.”⁵¹ It came “comprehensive in much of what the student of Arabic literature and its linguistic questions needs.”⁵²

With respect to Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim al-Anbārī, he kept the number at seven after al-A‘shā and al-Nābigha were removed from Abū Zayd al-Qurashī’s collection and al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza was added. The editor of this commentary, ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, says, “This commentary may stand at the summit of the commentaries on the Seven Poems ... and it scarcely sees a gap on the path to perfection

⁴⁶ Yaḥyā al-Jubūrī, *Al-Shi‘r al-Jāhili: Khaṣā‘iṣuḥu wa-Funūnuhu*, 183.

⁴⁷ On Ḥammād, see Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās, Ibrāhīm al-Sa‘āfin, and Bakr ‘Abbās, vol. 6, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 55.

⁴⁸ Al-Ṭāhir Aḥmad Makkī, *Dirāsa fī Maṣādir al-Adab*, 100.

⁴⁹ See Yūsuf ibn Sulaymān ibn ‘Isā, known as al-A‘lam al-Shantamarī, *Ash‘ār al-Shu‘arā’ al-Sitta al-Jāhiliyyīn*, comm. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Khafājī, 1st ed. (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Muniriyya bial-Azhar, 1954).

⁵⁰ Ibn al-Naḥḥās, *Sharḥ al-Qaṣā‘id al-Mashhūrāt al-Mawsūma bial-Mu‘allaqāt*, 3.

⁵¹ Sulaymān al-Shāṭṭī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt wa-‘Uyūn al-‘Uṣūr*, 170.

⁵² See *Sharḥ al-Qaṣā‘id al-Mashhūrāt al-Mawsūma bial-Mu‘allaqāt*, ed. Aḥmad Khattāb (Baghdad: Ministry of Information, 1973).

without attempting to fill it.”⁵³ His commentary “is considered among the finest commentaries that have treated these poems, both ancient and modern if not the finest of them absolutely because it came as an integrated book fulfilling the conditions required by a commentary on such Mu‘allaqāt.”⁵⁴

The commentary of Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥasan ibn Aḥmad al-Zawzanī is among the most widely circulated commentaries, although most of his attention is directed toward grammar, parsing, and the explanation of vocabulary. However, its concision, its avoidance of allowing one branch of knowledge to dominate another, and the ease of its language were behind this diffusion and approval. Indeed, this commentary gathered “the merits of the adherents of the linguistic method, abridged excesses and digressions, confined its understanding to the artistic text, and clarified it, within the limits of capacity, with the clarity of one who understood the meaning of the poem well, not from the standpoint of the literalness of its words, but by penetrating to what the poet wishes to say, grasping his allusions and hints, while drawing upon and benefiting from all other branches of knowledge, and preserving the required balance so that the poetic text always remains prominent. He fused all the important information related to the text and poured it into his concise commentary.”⁵⁵

At the end of the fifth century AH, Abū Zakariyyā al-Tibrīzī added ‘Abīd ibn al-Abras to the previous number, and they became *The Ten Mu‘allaqāt*. He commented on them, and the matter settled at this number: Imru’ al-Qays, Ṭarafa ibn al-‘Abd, Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā, Labīd ibn Rabī‘a, ‘Amr ibn Kulthūm, ‘Antara ibn Shaddād, al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza, al-A‘shā al-Bakrī, al-Nābigha al-Dhubyanī, and ‘Abīd ibn al-Abras.

The editor of the book, Fakhr al-Dīn Qabāwa, observed that al-Tibrīzī relied in his commentary on the commentary of Ibn al-Anbārī and the commentary of Ibn al-Nahḥās with a reliance that was almost complete.⁵⁶ This is also the view of Sulaymān al-Shaṭṭī, who holds that “he had no method except teaching through compilation.”⁵⁷ Commentaries then followed one after another, most of which did not go beyond what had appeared in the earlier books.⁵⁸ Scholars differed slightly over the Mu‘allaqa of two poets: al-A‘shā and al-Nābigha.

⁵³ ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, introduction to *Sharḥ al-Qaṣā’id al-Sab‘ al-Ṭiwāl al-Jāhiliyyāt*, 14.

⁵⁴ Barakāt Yūsuf Habbūd, introduction to *Sharḥ al-Qaṣā’id al-Sab‘ al-Ṭiwāl al-Jāhiliyyāt* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-‘Aṣriyya, 2005), 22.

⁵⁵ Sulaymān al-Shaṭṭī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt wa-‘Uyūn al-‘Uṣūr*, 196. See also Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Zawzanī, *Sharḥ al-Mu‘allaqāt al-Sab‘*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Alī Ḥamd Allāh (Damascus, 1963).

⁵⁶ Abū Zakariyyā al-Tibrīzī, *Sharḥ al-Qaṣā’id al-‘Ashr*, ed. Fakhr al-Dīn Qabāwa (Aleppo: al-Maktaba al-‘Arabiyya, 1969).

⁵⁷ Sulaymān al-Shaṭṭī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt wa-‘Uyūn al-‘Uṣūr*, 106.

⁵⁸ See Ṣalāḥ Rizq, *Shi‘r al-Mu‘allaqāt fī Ḍaw’ al-Dirāsa al-Taḥlīliyya wa-al-Ru‘ya al-Mu‘āṣira*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-‘Ulūm, 1984); Ṭalāl Ḥarb, *Al-Wāfi bial-Mu‘allaqāt*, 1st ed. (Beirut: al-Mu‘assasa al-Jāmi‘iyya li-al-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 1993); and Muḥammad Najīb al-Bahbītī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt Sīra wa-Tārīkhan*.

According to the majority, the Mu‘allaqa of al-A‘shā is “Waddi‘ Hurayra”, while Abū Zayd al-Qurashī alone made it the poem that opens:⁵⁹

مَا بُكَاءُ الْكَبِيرِ فِي الْأَطْلَالِ
وَسُؤَالِي وَمَا تَرُدُّ سُؤَالِي

*Why does the old man weep among the ruins,
and why my questioning, when my question brings no answer?*

The Mu‘allaqa of al-Nābigha, in most collections, is the poem that opens “Yā dāra Mayya”, while Abū Zayd al-Qurashī made it:⁶⁰

عُوجُوا فَحَيُّوا لِنُعْمِ دِمْنَةَ الدَّارِ

مَاذَا تُحَيُّونَ مِنْ نُؤْيٍ وَأَحْجَارِ

*Turn aside and greet, for Nu‘m, the traces of the dwelling;
what do you greet but a trench and stones?*

عُوجُوا فَحَيُّوا لِنُعْمِ دِمْنَةَ الدَّارِ

مَاذَا تُحَيُّونَ مِنْ نُؤْيٍ وَأَحْجَارِ

*Turn aside and greet, for Nu‘m, the traces of the dwelling;
what do you greet but a trench and stones?*

The Most Famous Commentaries and Studies after the Beginning of the Nahḍa

The Mu‘allaqāt received the greatest share of annotations, commentaries, and translations. This esteem, “although it had its valid reasons, was dangerous for Arabic poetry in all its periods; it was what led poets in all ages to imitate them and to adopt their system in the manner of composition and in the multiplicity of themes within a single poem.”⁶¹

Among the modern and contemporary commentaries and studies are the following:

*- *Niḥāyat al-Arab fī Sharḥ Mu‘allaqāt al-‘Arab* by Badr al-Dīn al-Na‘sānī (d. 1943). Its first edition appeared in 1906, and it is one of the useful instructional commentaries.

*- *Sharḥ al-Mu‘allaqāt al-‘Ashr wa-Akḥbār Shu‘arā’ihā* by Aḥmad ibn al-Amīn al-Shinqīṭī (d. 1913). Its first edition appeared in 1911. In this commentary, he was concerned with “presenting the texts of these poems alongside the accounts of their poets. He follows the earlier method, with abridgement and concentration, especially in relation

⁵⁹ Abū Zayd al-Qurashī, *Jamharat Ash‘ār al-‘Arab fī al-Jāhiliyya wa-al-Islām*, 202. See also *Dīwān al-A‘shā al-Kabīr*, ed. Maḥmūd Ibrāhīm Muḥammad al-Raḍwānī, 1:97; and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Fī al-Adab al-Jāhilī*, 253.

⁶⁰ Abū Zayd al-Qurashī, *Jamharat Ash‘ār al-‘Arab fī al-Jāhiliyya wa-al-Islām*, 183.

⁶¹ Badawī Ṭabāna, *Mu‘allaqāt al-‘Arab*, 6.

to the explanation of the texts of the poems, contenting himself with the bare minimum; his book is therefore closer to a gloss on vocabulary, with reference to some important points of parsing.”⁶²

*- *Faḥ al-Kabīr al-Muta‘āl: I‘rāb al-Mu‘allaqāt al-‘Ashr al-Ṭiwāl* by Muḥammad ‘Alī Ṭāhā al-Durra (d. 2007). Its author explained and parsed the Ten Mu‘allaqāt.⁶³

*- *Rijāl al-Mu‘allaqāt al-‘Ashr* by Muṣṭafā ibn Muḥammad al-Ghalāyīnī (d. 1944). His book is “an instructional book, which he published in order to save the time of dictation and to serve as a textbook for students. This commentary meets the need of the beginning learner, and his observations are general and simple comments that fulfil the student’s need.”⁶⁴

*- *Mu‘allaqāt al-‘Arab: Dirāsa Naqdiyya Tārīkhiyya fī ‘Uyūn al-Adab al-Jāhilī* by Badawī Aḥmad Ṭabāna (d. 2000). The first edition appeared in 1958. He says in the introduction to the book: “I have been keen for this study to be an objective study that relies on the text alone and derives from it what can be derived without artificiality, excess in interpretation, or burdening words with meanings beyond their capacity to bear.”⁶⁵ Thus, his study was based on two pillars: “the prominence of Arab life in the Mu‘allaqāt, first, and the poetic art within them, second.”⁶⁶

*- *Al-Mu‘allaqāt al-Sab‘* by Bakrī Shaykh Amīn (d. 2019). This book appeared in 1974. The author did not seek to provide a comprehensive commentary on the Mu‘allaqāt; rather, he explained selected passages from them that suit the taste of the contemporary reader.

*- *Al-Sab‘ al-Mu‘allaqāt: Muqāraba Sīmiyā‘iyya/Anthrūbūlūjiyya li-Nuṣūṣihā* by ‘Abd al-Malik Murtād (d. 2023). This book appeared in 1998. The author says in the introduction: “This book is a serious endeavour to reread pre-Islamic poetry in general and the poems of the Seven Mu‘allaqāt in particular; a new reading founded on a method composed of anthropology and semiotics. It is a sober analysis in which the researcher exerted himself, discussing many of the views and ideas that have been expressed about the poems of the Mu‘allaqāt in terms of both their contents and their forms.”⁶⁷ This study came “balanced in its presentation, proceeding with a vision that carried within it reliance on sound traditional materials and a rich modern culture.”⁶⁸

*- *Al-Ru‘ā al-Muqanna‘a: Naḥwa Manhaj Binyawī fī Dirāsat al-Shi‘r al-Jāhilī* by Kamāl Abū Dīb. This book appeared in 1986. The study turned “to the choice of the structuralist method for the study of this poetry.”⁶⁹

⁶² Sulaymān al-Shāṭṭī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt wa-‘Uyūn al-‘Uṣūr*, 293.

⁶³ Muḥammad ‘Alī Ṭāhā al-Durra, *Faḥ al-Kabīr al-Muta‘āl: I‘rāb al-Mu‘allaqāt al-‘Ashr al-Ṭiwāl*, 2nd ed. (Jeddah: Maktabat al-Sawādī, 1989).

⁶⁴ Sulaymān al-Shāṭṭī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt wa-‘Uyūn al-‘Uṣūr*, 295.

⁶⁵ Aḥmad Badawī Ṭabāna, *Mu‘allaqāt al-‘Arab*, 8.

⁶⁶ Sulaymān al-Shāṭṭī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt wa-‘Uyūn al-‘Uṣūr*, 298.

⁶⁷ ‘Abd al-Malik Murtād, *Al-Sab‘ al-Mu‘allaqāt*, 2.

⁶⁸ Sulaymān al-Shāṭṭī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt wa-‘Uyūn al-‘Uṣūr*, 68.

⁶⁹ Sulaymān al-Shāṭṭī, *Al-Mu‘allaqāt wa-‘Uyūn al-‘Uṣūr*, 341. See also ‘Afif ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, *Al-Adab al-Jāhilī fī Āthār al-Dārisīn Qadīman wa-Ḥadīthan* (Amman: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 203.

*- *Dirāsāt al-Adab al-‘Arabī and Qirā’a Thāniya li-Shi’rinā al-Qadīm* by Muṣṭafā Nāṣif (d. 2008). The author followed “the aesthetic-mythic method”; he explained its premises in his first book and applied it to pre-Islamic poetry in general and the Mu‘allaqāt in particular in his second book, where he interpreted the symbols of this poetry on the basis of the collective unconscious.⁷⁰

*- *Maqālāt fī al-Shi’r al-Jāhilī and Buḥūth fī al-Mu‘allaqāt al-Shi’riyya* by Yūsuf Sāmī al-Yūsuf (d. 2013). In these two books, the author subjected the Mu‘allaqāt and other pre-Islamic poems to psychological study. His point of departure was the collective mind deeply rooted in antiquity, following the theory of Carl Jung.⁷¹

Conclusion

Students in the literature have differed over the question of the suspension of these long pre-Islamic poems, just as they have differed somewhat in terms of their number. However, this debate has not come between us and ancient poetry; for “despite the distance of the ages between us and the pre-Islamic period, and despite those centuries more than fifteen which the caravan of time has traversed in its continuous journey from the depths of the Arabian Peninsula to the horizons of our contemporary world, pre-Islamic poetry remains immortal in our depths, pulsing with all the meanings of life, because it was a truthful expression of life.”⁷²

However, much these critics may differ: “they agree that these are the selected, excellent, authentic poems that occupied an elevated place in their souls.”⁷³

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⁷⁰ See ‘Afif ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, *Al-Adab al-Jāhilī fī Āthār al-Dārisīn Qadīman wa-Ḥadīthan*, 171.

⁷¹ See ‘Afif ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, *Al-Adab al-Jāhilī fī Āthār al-Dārisīn Qadīman wa-Ḥadīthan*, 263.

⁷² Yūsuf Khulīf, *Dirāsāt fī al-Shi’r al-Jāhilī* (Cairo: Dār Gharīb, 1981), 3.

⁷³ Yaḥyā al-Jubūrī, *Al-Shi’r al-Jāhilī: Khaṣā’iṣuḥu wa-Funūnuhu*, 180.

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