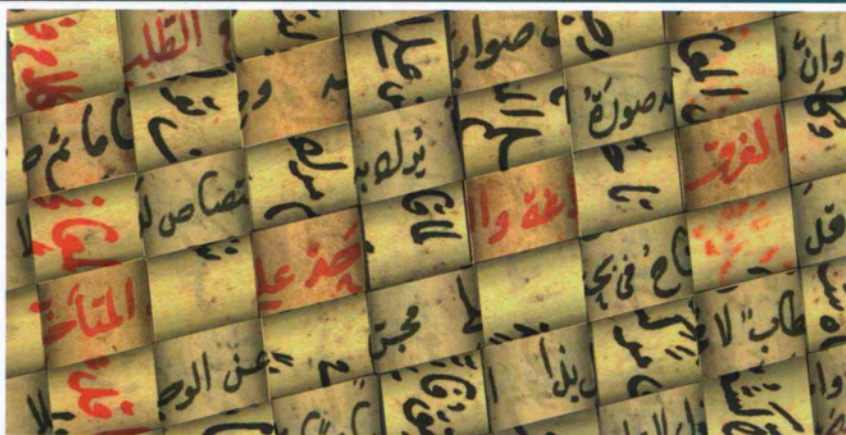


# The Weaving of Words

## Approaches to Classical Arabic Prose

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# The Art of the *Muqaddima* in the Works of Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī (d. 429/1039)<sup>1</sup>

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By the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century prose in Arabic literature had begun to supersede poetry as the preeminent form of artistic expression in most literary functions. This development reached its zenith in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century, as seen in the Arabic belles-lettres, the *maqāmāt* genre, and the various *adab* works of the period.<sup>2</sup> The artistic prose of this period is characterized by a number of features that became the norm in *adab* writing in the following centuries, lasting until the advent of the modern period. These features are: (1) adherence to rhyme and rhythmical balance (*al-sajʿ wa-l-muwāzana*), (2) extensive use of figures of speech (*badīʿ*), (3) synonymity and prolixity (*al-tarāduf wa-l-iṭnāb*), (4) adaptation and inclusion (*al-iqtibās wa-l-tadmīn*), (5) brilliant exordia (*barāʿ at al-istihlāl*).<sup>3</sup>

This style of writing dominated *adab* works but was rarely seen in scientific or historical writings, which featured a more serious and terse approach. It is erroneous, however, to assume that the use of artistic prose in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century and onwards was restricted to *adab* works. Frequently, this ornamented prose is encountered in the *muqaddimāt*<sup>4</sup> (sing. *muqaddima*, “introduction, preface, foreword, opening, exordium”) of many books, regardless of the subject of the book. The authors of these *muqaddimāt* usually employ an artistic style characterized by verbal fireworks which is not always continued in the works themselves. Moreover, these *muqaddimāt* share a considerable degree of conventionality, featuring common topoi, regardless of the subject of the work they introduce. This justi-

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Professors Beatrice Gruendler, Everett Rowson, Gerhard Bowering, and Dimitri Gutas for reading an earlier draft of this article. Their comments and suggestions saved me from many a mistake and oversight.

<sup>2</sup> An examination of the table of contents of five books from this period (namely: the *Ghurar al-balāgha* of Abū Hilāl al-Šābī, *al-Fuṣūl al-adabiyya* of al-Šāhib b. ʿAbbād, *al-Fjāz wa-l-ijāz* and *Siḥr al-balāgha wa-sirr al-barāʿa* of Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī), and *al-Durar wa-l-ghurar* of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Ahwāzī illustrates this new function of Arabic prose. These authors assemble passages of artistic prose arranged according to *aḡhrād* [thematic intensions/genres], such as boast [*ṣakhr*], praise [*madīḥ*], admonition [*ʿitāb*], felicitation [*tahmīʿa*], lampoon/satire [*hijāʿ*], elegy [*rithāʿ*], condolence [*taʿziya*], hedonism [*lahw*], licentious or impudent attitude [*mujūn*], description [*waṣf*], and various other genres and sub-genres, some of which were traditionally restricted to poetry.

<sup>3</sup> These major features of artistic prose did not originate in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century, as one can see precursors in the Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsid prose literature. It is rather the excessive application of these features that determines the style of the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>4</sup> Synonyms are: *taṣḍīr*, *iftitāḥ*, *madkhal*, *tawṭīʿa*, *tambīd*, *istihlāl*, *dībāja*.

fies the classification of *muqaddimāt* as an independent literary form of Arabic prose from the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>5</sup>

This paper treats the literary aspects of *muqaddimāt* in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century by concentrating on the works of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Thaʿālibī (350-429/961-1039). The choice of al-Thaʿālibī serves three main purposes: (1) al-Thaʿālibī composed some ninety books on a range of subjects, almost half of which survived either in print or manuscript, and examining these introductions demonstrates the artistry of *muqaddimāt* in a wide variety of subjects; (2) modern scholarship celebrates al-Thaʿālibī primarily as a compiler and/or anthologist, less frequently as a critic, but only rarely as an author of artistic prose. A close study of his *muqaddimāt* is a first step towards reassessing this perception of him.<sup>6</sup> (3) Al-Thaʿālibī was a celebrated figure in numerous fields of knowledge and prodigious in his output. On the whole, however, he has not received his due in modern scholarship. Therefore, examining his *muqaddimāt* will both shed more light on his method of writing and help in determining the authenticity of some of his unpublished works.

### Muqaddima in Arabic Literature

The Qurʾān, the first lengthy written Arabic prose text, starts with an opening [*al-Fātiḥa*]. This set up a convention that Arabic books maintained regardless of their subject, and which developed, from the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century onwards, into an independent literary form. These introductions possess a tripartite structure consisting of initial commendations, a middle section which provides the objectives of the introduction and work itself and closing praises.

The initial commendations almost always adhere to the custom initiated by the Qurʾān in starting with the *basmala*, often followed by the *ḥamdala*.<sup>7</sup> In the

<sup>5</sup> On the subject of introductions [*muqaddimāt*] in Arabic literature see Peter Freimark, *Das Vorwort als literarische Form in der arabischen Literatur*, Ph.D. thesis, Münster: 1967.

<sup>6</sup> Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh al-Jādir was the first to note the activity of al-Thaʿālibī as an *adīb* by examining his prose and poetry. In his relatively short section on al-Thaʿālibī's prose, al-Jādir cites a number of quotations from al-Thaʿālibī's *muqaddimāt*, entries on poets from his anthology *Yatimat al-dabr*, and various other books. In general, al-Jādir concentrates on al-Thaʿālibī's technique in *ḥall al-naẓm* [prosification, lit: untying the poetic string] in his *Natḥ al-naẓm wa-ḥall al-ʿaqd* and his use of *badīʿ* in general, see al-Jādir, *al-Thaʿālibī nāqidan wa-adīban*, Beirut: Dār al-Niḍāl 1991, 301-33. This article concentrates on al-Thaʿālibī's *muqaddimāt* as an independent literary form of Arabic prose but is far from providing a comprehensive study of al-Thaʿālibī's prose. To conduct such a study, however, one needs first to determine the authenticity of some of his works. Most important in this regard is the history on Persian kings attributed to him: the *Ghurur mulūk al-furs*. We are even faced with this problem of authorship within al-Thaʿālibī authentic works, for in several of his books, al-Thaʿālibī does not state whether he is quoting or composing original prose. Indeed, many of his statements in these works can be traced to prominent figures of his time.

<sup>7</sup> *Basmala* is coined from the formula *bi-smi-llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm* [in the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate], while *ḥamdala* is coined from the formula *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi*

middle section – which ranges from several sentences to many pages – the author may state the reason/s for writing the book, dedicate it to a patron, present the state of the art of its subject, specify its audience, explicate its method, indicate its sources, and discuss any other technical aspects related to its subject area. To achieve these goals, the author usually resorts to certain topoi, especially in stating the reason for his composing the work, such as, ‘I have been requested to write a book on the subject’, or ‘I shall report briefly and avoid prolixity’, ‘No one has ever written directly or completely on the subject’, etc.<sup>8</sup> The modesty topos, as a *captatio benevolentiae*, is popular in almost all literatures.<sup>9</sup> Also equally admired is the familiar ‘querelle des Anciens et des Modernes’,<sup>10</sup> as well as the praise of the virtues of the patron.<sup>11</sup> A typical distinguishing feature of Arabic introductions in comparison to other literatures is the request for God’s help and succor in completing the task of writing.

### *Abū Maṣṣūr al-Tha‘ālibī and His Works*

Abū Maṣṣūr ‘Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Ismā‘il al-Tha‘ālibī (350-429/961-1039) was a prominent critic of Arabic literature, an anthologist, and an author of works on *adab* and lexicography.<sup>12</sup> A prominent figure of his time, he participated in the extraordinary literary efflorescence which, in his generation, made the cities of his region, Khurāsān, serious rivals to Baghdād and its wider cultural sphere. Al-Tha‘ālibī’s life was politically unstable due to the continuous conflicts between the Būyid, Sāmānid, Ghaznavid, and Saljūq rulers who had created independent states that served as destinations for itinerant poets and prose writers. Hence, during the course of his life, al-Tha‘ālibī traveled extensively within the eastern part of the Islamic world, visiting centers of learning and meeting other prominent figures of his time. These travels allowed him to collect, directly from various authors or written works, the vast amount of material he deploys in his

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*rabbi l-‘ālamīn* [Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds]. In texts other than the Qur’ān, *basmala* and *ḥamdala* can take different forms, as illustrated below.

<sup>8</sup> Freimark points out that many of these topoi have parallels in European literatures of the late classical, medieval, and early modern times. On the other hand, some of the topoi frequently found in antiquity are relatively rare in the Arabic tradition, as when an author asks a friend to judge his work. See: *ibid.*, 35ff. and the references cited there.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-71.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-8.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-8.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed biography of al-Tha‘ālibī see Rowson, “al-Tha‘ālibī”, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., X, Leiden: Brill 2000, 426a-427b; C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, Leiden: Brill 1937-49, I, 284-6, S I, 499-502; C. E. Bosworth (tr.), *The Laṭā‘if al-Ma‘ārif of Tha‘ālibī [The Book of Curious and Entertaining Information]*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1968, 1-31; al-Jādir, *al-Tha‘ālibī*, 15-132; Zakī Mubārak, *al-Nathr al-fannī fi l-qarn al-rābi‘*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tijāriyya al-Kubrā [1957], 2: 179-90 and the primary sources provided there.

numerous wide-ranging works, many of which are dedicated to the prominent patrons of his time.

Attempting to compose a bibliography of al-Tha'ālibī's works presents problems of false attribution and duplication. The longest list of his works available from primary sources is provided by al-Ṣafadī<sup>13</sup> and contains titles of seventy works including some duplications and false attributions.<sup>14</sup> Some of these works survive only in manuscript, while more than thirty authentic works have been published. In addition to his authentic published works there are a number of other published works attributed to him that lack scholarly consensus as to their authenticity. The following is a list of al-Tha'ālibī's authentic works that are examined in this article and available either in print or manuscript:<sup>15</sup>

- *Abū-l-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī mā la-hu wa-mā 'alayhi*
- *Ādāb al-mulūk = Sirāj al-mulūk = al-Mulūkī = al-Khwārizmiyyāt*
- *Aḥsan mā sami'tu = al-La'ālī wa-l-durar = Aḥsan mā sami'tu min al-shi'r wa-l-nathr = Aḥsin al-Maḥāsin*
- *Ajnās al-tajnīs = al-Mutashābih = al-Mutashābih lafzan wa-khattān = Tafṣīl al-si'r fi tafṣīl al-shi'r*
- *al-Anīs fi ghurar al-tajnīs*
- *Bard al-akbād fi-l-A'dād = al-A'dād*
- *Fiḥ al-luḡha wa-sirr al-'arabiyya = Sirr al-adab fi majārī kalam al-'Arab<sup>16</sup> = Shams al-adab = Ma'rifat al-rutab fi-mā warada min kalām al-'Arab = al-Muntakhab min sunan al-'Arab*
- *al-Ijāz wa-l-ijāz = al-Ijāz wa-l-i'jāz = K. Ghurar al-balāgha fi-l-nazm wa-l-nathr = K. Ghurar al-balāgha wa-turaf al-barā'a*
- *al-Iqtibās min al-Qur'ān*
- *Khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ*

<sup>13</sup> Ṣalāh al-Din Khalil b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d. 696-764/ 1297-1363), was a philologist, literary critic, litterateur, and biographer, who is famous for his great biographical collection *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, see F. Rosenthal, "al-Ṣafadī", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., VIII, Leiden: Brill 1995, 759a.

<sup>14</sup> See al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag 1988, 21: 194-9.

<sup>15</sup> I did not include in my list the works whose attribution to al-Tha'ālibī are still debated, most important of these are *Tuhfat al-wuzarā'* and *Ghurar Mulūk al-Furs*.

The most comprehensive list of al-Tha'ālibī's works with a good discussion of biographical problems is compiled by M. 'A. al-Jādir, *al-Tha'ālibī*, 58-132. This list, however, is already outdated since more manuscripts of al-Tha'ālibī's works have been published and/or discovered, and the discussion of the biographical problems continued in modern scholarship. A more updated, yet less thorough list, is provided by Y. 'A. al-Madghari in his introduction of al-Tha'ālibī, *Mir'āt al-murū'āt*, ed. Y. 'A. Madghari, Beirut: Dār Lubnān 2003, 30-41. Another important list is that of Q. al-Samarrai, "Some biographical notes on al-Tha'ālibī", *Bibliotheca Orientalis* xxxii (1975), 175-86. For a discussion of the general content of al-Tha'ālibī's works see E. K. Rowson, "al-Tha'ālibī", 426a-427b.

<sup>16</sup> Two different books of al-Tha'ālibī are printed under this title: *Fiḥ al-luḡha* and *Lubāb al-ādāb*.

- *al-Kināya wa-l-ta'riḍ* = *al-Nihāya fī-l-kināya* = *al-Kunā*
- *Laṭā'if al-zurafā' min ṭabaqāt al-fudalā'* = *Laṭā'if al-ṣahāba* = *Laṭā'if al-luṭf*
- *Laṭā'if al-ma'ārif*
- *Lubāb al-ādāb* = *Sirr al-adab fī majāri kalām al-ʿarab*
- *al-Luṭf wa-l-laṭā'if*
- *Man ghāba ʿanhu l-muṭrib* = *Man aʿwazahu l-muṭrib*
- *Mir'āt al-murū'āt*
- *al-Mubhij*
- *al-Muntaḥal* = *Kanz al-kuttāb* = *Muntakhab al-Thaʿālibī* = *al-Muntakhab al-Mikālī*
- *Nasīm al-saḥar* = *Khaṣā'iṣ al-lughā*
- *Nathr al-nazm wa-ḥall al-ʿaqd*
- *Risāla fī mā jarā bayn al-Mutanabbī wa-Sayf al-Dawla*
- *Sajʿ al-Manthūr* = *Risālat saǰ'iyyāt al-Thaʿālibī* = *Qurādat al-dhabab*
- *Siḥr al-balāgha wa-sirr al-barā'a*
- *Tahsīn al-qabīḥ wa-taqbīḥ al-ḥasan* = *al-Tahsīn wa-l-taqbīḥ*
- *al-Tamthīl wa-l-muḥādara* = *Hilyat al-muḥādara* = *al-Maḥāsin wa-l-addād*
- *Tarjamat al-kātib fī adab al-ṣāhib*
- *Tatimmat Yatīmat al-dabr* = *Tatimmat al-Yatīma*
- *al-Tawfiq li-l-talfiq*
- *Thimār al-qulūb fī-l-muḍāf wa-l-mansūb*
- *Yatīmat al-dabr fī maḥāsin abl al-ʿaṣr*
- *al-Yawāqīt fī ba'd al-marwāqīt* = *Yawāqīt al-marwāqīt* = *Madḥ al-shay' wa-dhammih*
- *Zād safar al-mulūk*
- *al-Zarā'if wa-l-laṭā'if* = *al-Tarā'if wa-l-laṭā'if* = *al-Maḥāsin wa-l-addād*

## The Content of *al-Thaʿālibī's* Muqaddimāt

### I- What Makes *Thaʿālibī* Write?

Many of *al-Thaʿālibī's* works are dedicated to prominent patrons of his time and it is clear from *al-Thaʿālibī's* different dedications and travel route that he, like most contemporary literary figures, survived on patronage. *Al-Thaʿālibī* considers the act of dedicating books necessary to fulfill his service [*khidma*] to a patron.<sup>17</sup> In several instances *al-Thaʿālibī* mentions that the subject of the book was sug-

<sup>17</sup> See *al-Thaʿālibī, al-Fjāz wa-l-ijāz*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ, Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir 2001, 17; *al-Anīs fī għurur al-tajnis*, ed. Hilāl Nāǰī, Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub 1996, 41; *al-Tawfiq li-l-talfiq*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ, Beirut: 1990, p. 23; *Tahsīn al-qabīḥ*, ed. Shākir al-Ashūr, Baghdad: Wizārat al-Awqāf 1981, p. 28; *Mir'āt*, p. 66; *Thimār al-qulūb*, ed. Muḥammad Abū-l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif 1985, 3; *Khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ*, ed. Ṣādiq al-Naqawī, Ḥaydarābād: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1984, 2.

gested by a certain patron.<sup>18</sup> In other instances, however, al-Tha‘alibī claims that he is writing to fill a lacuna, especially if no one has ever written on a particular topic. In doing so, he claims originality and innovation [*tarāfa, badā‘a, ikhtirā‘*].<sup>19</sup> In a few instances al-Tha‘alibī compiles a work following a personal experience and with no dedication. Such is the case in his *Tarjamat al-kātib fī ādāb al-ṣāhib* [On the proper conduct of friends], in which he states that the reason for writing the book towards the end of his life is his appalling experiences in friendship.<sup>20</sup> Finally, in *al-Iqtibās min al-Qur‘ān* [Quoting from the Qur‘ān] he states that he always had a ‘strong intention’ [*niyya qawwiyya*] to compile a book on this subject.<sup>21</sup>

## II- Choosing a Title

Al-Tha‘alibī states that he sometimes chooses a title that ‘reveals the content’ of his work,<sup>22</sup> and this holds true for most of his surviving works. In most cases al-Tha‘alibī mentions the title of the work in his *muqaddima*. In *Ādāb al-mulūk*, however, he seems reluctant to choose one title; he writes:

وكنت أردت أن أترجمه بالنسبة إلى الاسم الشريف فأخبرني أبو عبد الله محمد بن حامد أن بعض المؤلفين سبقني إليها... فقلت: الآن إن سميت الملوكي كنت صادقاً، وإن لقبته تحفة الملوك وعدة الملوك لم أك كاذباً، لكني آثرت تفضيحه بالحوارزم شاهي...

And I desired to entitle it using his noble name [i.e. *al-Ma‘mūnī*], but Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Hāmid informed me that some authors had preceded me in this... So I said, “Now, if I call it *al-Mulūkī* [The royal book], I would be sincere, and if I called it *Tuhfat al-mamlūk wa-‘uddat al-mulūk* [The present of the servant and the provision of the kings], I would not be dishonest. But I prefer to glorify it as *al-Khwārizmshāhī*...<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Such is the case when the Khwārizm Ma‘mūn b. Ma‘mūn commissioned him to write *Lubāb al-ādāb* as a literary anthology and *Ādāb al-mulūk* on politics. See: *Lubāb al-ādāb*, ed. Q. R. Ṣāliḥ, Baghdad: Dār al-Shu‘ūn al-Thaqāfiyya, 1988, 19; *Ādāb al-mulūk*, ed. Jalil al-‘Atīyya, Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī 1990, 31. *Tahsin al-qabīḥ* and *Khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ* were compiled by the order of [*bi-rasm*] Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā al-Karajī and Abū al-Ḥasan Musāfir b. al-Ḥasan respectively, see *Tahsin*, p. 27; *Khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ*, 1.

<sup>19</sup> See *Yatimat al-dahr*, Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Ṣāwī, 1934, 4-5, MS Laleli 1959 (Istanbul: Süleymaniye), 2v-3r; *Tahsin al-qabīḥ*, 28; *Mir‘āt*, 65-66; *al-Luṭf wa-l-laṭā‘if*, M. ‘A. Jādīr, Maktabat Dār al-‘Urūba, Baghdad 1984, 19; *al-Kināya wa-l-ta‘rīd*, ed. Faraj al-Ḥawwār, Baghdād 2006, 26; *al-Mubḥij*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ, Damascus: Dār al-Bashā‘ir 1999, 23; *al-Zarā‘if wa-l-laṭā‘if* and *al-Yawāqūt fī ba‘d al-mawāqūt* (printed together) in *al-Zarā‘if wa-l-laṭā‘if wa-l-Yawāqūt fī ba‘d al-mawāqūt*, compiled by Abū Naṣr al-Maqdisī, ed. N. M. Jād, Cairo: Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathā‘iq al-Qawmiyya 2006, 49-50; *Bard al-akbād fī-l-‘Adād*, in *Khams rasā‘il li-l-Tha‘alibī* [*wa-ghayrib*], Istanbul: Maṭba‘at al-Jawā‘ib 1881, 103.

<sup>20</sup> See *Tarjamat al-kātib fī ādāb al-ṣāhib*, MS Hecimoglu 946-1 (Istanbul: Süleymaniye), 87r.

<sup>21</sup> See *al-Iqtibās min al-Qur‘ān*, ed. I. M. Al-Ṣaffār and M. M. Bahjat, Baghdad: Dār al-Wafā‘ 1992, 37.

<sup>22</sup> See *Lubāb*, 19; *Fiqh al-lughā*, Beirut: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Ḥayāt 1980, 11.

<sup>23</sup> *Ādāb al-mulūk*, 32.

The preface provides three titles for the same book. It appears that later scholars, referred to the book using different titles.<sup>24</sup> This is nevertheless not the only instance in which confusion reigns regarding the titles of al-Tha‘alibī’s works. Many of them survive under more than one title, due either to scribal errors or later catalogers relying on phrases – which are not necessarily titles – from his prefaces, conclusions, or other works as definitive titles.<sup>25</sup> In other cases al-Tha‘alibī himself revised a work several times under different titles, rededicating it to different patrons (as will be discussed in more detail below).

### III- Opening the Muqaddima

Al-Tha‘alibī usually adheres to the tradition of Arabic literature by starting with the *basmala* following it with the *ḥamdala* in ornate form, and then continuing with a prayer for the prophet. In some instances he adapts or includes Qur’anic phrases in his *ḥamdala*. This is a technique he was very interested in, as evidenced by his devoting an entire chapter to it under the title of ‘*al-taḥmīd al-muqtabasa min al-Qur’ān al-karīm*.’ [Phrases of praising God adapted from the noble Qur’ān] in his *al-Iqtibās*.<sup>26</sup> The following are few of his openings using this technique:

أما على إثر حمد الله الذي هو أول كتابه وآخر دعوى ساكني دار ثوابه.

As for what comes after praising God, which opens His book<sup>27</sup> and is the last prayer of the inhabitants of the abode of His reward<sup>28,29</sup>

الحمد لله {الذي علم بالقلم، علم الإنسان ما لم يعلم}، و{الحمد لله الذي هدانا لهذا وما كنا لنهتدي لولا أن هدانا الله}، و{الحمد لله رب العالمين} حمد الشاكرين على نعمه التي لا يبلغ أقصى حمد الحامدين أوائل حدودها، ومنحه التي لا تؤدي نهايات شكر الشاكرين أداني حقوقها.

<sup>24</sup> For example al-Ṣafadī, Al-Kutubī and Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba refer to it by al-Khwārizmshāhī or al-Khwārizmiyyāt, see *al-Wāfi*, 21: 197; al-Kutubī, ‘*Uyūn al-tawārikh*, MS Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya 1487 (Cairo), 457; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Ṭabaqāt al-nuḥāt wa-l-lughawīyyīn*, MS al-Zāhiriyya 438 Tārikh (Damascus: Maktabat al-Asad), 388.

<sup>25</sup> For example in *Thimār al-Qulūb* he quotes from his *al-Kināya wa-l-ta’rīḍ* referring to it as *al-Kunā*, while in *Mir’āt al-murū’āt* he quotes from it as *al-Kināya*. In the preface of the book he refers to the work as *al-Kināya wa-l-ta’rīḍ*, while in the conclusion he calls it *al-Nihāya fi-l-kināya*. See *Thimār*, 606; *Mir’āt*, 27, *al-Kināya*, 27, 341.

<sup>26</sup> See *al-Iqtibās*, 47ff.

<sup>27</sup> A reference to the opening of the *Q*. 1: 1.

<sup>28</sup> A reference to *Q*. 10: 10.

دَعْوَاهُمْ فِيهَا سُبْحَانَكَ اللَّهُمَّ وَتَحِيَّتُهُمْ فِيهَا سَلَامٌ وَأَخْرَجَ دَعْوَاهُمْ أَنْ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

<sup>29</sup> *Al-Tamthīl wa-l-muḥādāra*, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāh al-Ḥulw, Cairo: al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī 1961, 3; a very similar phrase is in *Nasīm al-saḥar*, ed. I. M. al-Ṣaffār, in *al-Mawrid* I (1971), 131.



Praise be to God who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know,<sup>30</sup> and praise be to God Who guided us to it, we would never have been guided had not God guided us.<sup>31</sup> And praise be to God, Lord of the worlds,<sup>32</sup> the praise of the thankful, for his blessings whose first boundaries are not touched by the last praises of the thankful, and for His gifts whose lowest recompense is not conveyed even by the ends of gratitude.<sup>33</sup>

In some cases al-Tha'ālibī stops at the *basmala* and skips the *ḥamdala*.<sup>34</sup> While it can be attributed to al-Tha'ālibī's favoring other techniques, the absence of *ḥamd* may also result from scribal error, neglect, or a conscious decision on the part of the scribe to omit it. In a few instances al-Tha'ālibī also embellishes the prayer for the prophet. For example he says:

والصلاة على مصابيح الظلمة وكاشف الغمة عن الأمة وآله مفاتيح الرحمة.

And may peace be upon the [person who acts as] the lamps of the night, who lifts [the shroud of] grief from the nation, and [peace be upon] his family, the keys of mercy.<sup>35</sup>

#### IV- Writing and Rewriting the Work

To justify the continuous re-editing of his *Yatīmat al-dabr* al-Tha'ālibī quotes the following wise saying in his preface:

إنَّ أول ما يبدو من ضعف ابن آدم أنه لا يكتب كتاباً فيبيت عنده ليلة إلا أحب في غدها أن يزيد فيه أو ينقص منه، هذا في ليلة واحدة فكيف في سنين عدة.

The first weakness that appears in man is that he does not write a book and sleep over it without desiring on the following day to extend or abridge it; and this is only in one night, so what if it were several years?<sup>36</sup>

The above quotation faithfully describes al-Tha'ālibī's scholarly attitude. A book for al-Tha'ālibī is a work in progress and its immediate publication is necessary to satisfy a certain "need" [*hāja*].<sup>37</sup> The circulation of the work, however, does not prevent the author from re-editing, re-dedicating, and even re-naming it. In some instances, as in the *Yatīmat al-dabr*, there is a final version, and only this is

<sup>30</sup> A reference to *Q.* 96: 4-5:

الذي علم بالقلم علم الإنسان ما لم يعلم.

<sup>31</sup> A reference to *Q.* 7: 43:

وَرَزَعْنَا مَا فِي صُدُورِهِمْ مِنْ غَلٍّ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهِمُ الْأَنْهَارَ وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلَا أَنْ هَدَانَا اللَّهُ لَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلًا بِالْحَقِّ وَنُودُوا أَنْ تِلْكَ الْجَنَّةُ الَّتِي أُورِثْتُمُوهَا بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ.

<sup>32</sup> *Q.* 1: 2, 10; 75, 40: 65.

<sup>33</sup> *Al-Iqtibās*, 37.

<sup>34</sup> As is the case in: *Nathr al-naẓm wa-ḥall al-ʿaqd*, ed. A. ʿA. Tammām, Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya 1990, 7; *Sajʿ al-Manthūr*, 82; *Ajnās al-tajnis*, ed. M. ʿA. al-Jadir, Baghdad: Dār al-Shuʿūn al-Thaqāfiyya 1998, 24; *al-Kināya*, 23; *al-Mubhij*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> *Nasīm*, 131.

<sup>36</sup> *Yatīma*, 5, MS Laleli 1959, 3r.

<sup>37</sup> *Yatīma*, 5, MS Laleli 1959, 2v.

put into circulation, although previous versions had been widely circulated and copied, as al-Thaʿalibī himself admits. This final version, however, is followed by a continuation, *Tatimmat al-Yatīma*, which adopts the method and regional divisions of the original, but includes new material that had not been available to the author earlier. Al-Thaʿalibī could have incorporated the new material into the original book, creating a new edition, but it seems he did not want to interfere with the officially published version that had already gone through a long history of editing, which he thus describes:

وقد كُتِبَتْ تصدّيت لعمَلِ ذلك في سنة أربع وثمانين وثلثمائة والعمر في إقباله والشباب بمائه فافتتحت به باسم بعض الوزراء مجرباً إياه مجربى ما يتقرّب به أهل الأدب إلى ذوي الأخطار والرتب... ورأيتني أحاضر بأخواتٍ كثيرة لما فيه وقعت بأخرة إليّ وزيادات جمّة عليه حصلت من أفواه الرواة لديّ... فجعلتُ ألبنيه وأقضه وأزیده وأقصه وأمحوه وأثبتته وأنسخه ثم أنسخه وربما أفتتحة ولا أختتمه وأنتصفه فلا أستتمّه والأيام تحجز وتعد ولا تنجز إلى أن أدركتُ عصر السنّ والحنكة... فاختلفت لمعة من ظلمة الدهر... واستمررت في تقرير هذه النسخة الأخيرة وتحريرها من بين النسخ الكثيرة بعد أن غيرت ترتيبها وجدّدت تبويبها وأعدت ترصيفها وأحكمت تأليفها... فهذه النسخة الآن تجمع من بدائع أعيان الفضل ونجوم الأرض من أهل العصر ومن تقدّمهم قليلاً وسبقهم يسيراً... وتتضمن من طرفهم وملحهم لطائف أمتع من بواكير الرياحين... ما لم تتضمنه النسخة السائرة الأولى.

I had set out to accomplish this in the year three hundred and eighty four, when [my] age was still in its outset, and youth was still fresh. I opened it with the name of a vizier, following the convention of the people of *adab*, who do this to find favor with the people of prestige and rank... And I recently found myself presented with many similar reports to those in it and plentiful additions that I obtained from the mouths of transmitters... So, I started to build and demolish, enlarge and reduce, erase and confirm, copy then abrogate, and sometimes I start and do not finish, reach the middle and not the end, while days are blocking the way, promising without fulfilling, until I reached the age of maturity and experience... So I snatched a spark from within the darkness of age... so I continued in composing and revising this last version among the many versions after I changed its order, renewed its division into chapters, redid its arrangement and tightened its composition... This version now contains marvels by the prominent people of merit, the contemporary stars of earth, and by those who slightly preceded them in time... It comprises witty, rare coinings and anecdotes, more pleasurable than the early basil and the fresh aromatic flowers... [All of] which the first widely circulating version did not include.<sup>38</sup>

Even this continuation of *al-Yatīma* was revised later after the first dedication to Abū al-Ḥasan Muhammad b. ʿĪsā al-Karajī.<sup>39</sup> This process of revising takes place in other works of al-Thaʿalibī as well and is by no means restricted to his celebrated *al-Yatīma*. In fact, the multiple titles of works in his bibliography sometimes result from re-workings or re-dedications, a fact about which al-Thaʿalibī himself tells us in his prefaces. For example, in the preface of *al-Mubbij* he explains that he re-edited the book after its first dedication to a point that he “re-established and re-formed it once again”.<sup>40</sup> He also states in *Sihr al-balāgha* that

<sup>38</sup> *Yatīma*, 5- 6, MS Laleli 1959, 2v-3r.

<sup>39</sup> *Tatimma al-Yatīma*, 7.

<sup>40</sup> *al-Mubbij*, p. 23; *al-Kināya*, 27.

the final version dedicated to ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Aḥmad al-Mikālī<sup>41</sup> is the third (and last?) version after two previous editions “close in method and volume”, the first dedicated to Abū Sahl al-Ḥamdūnī<sup>42</sup> and the second to a certain Abū ‘Imrān Mūsā b. Hārūn al-Kurdī.<sup>43</sup> The same can be said about his *al-Ijāz wa-l-ijāz*, of which three different versions of the book survive in a number of manuscripts with considerable variance, different prefaces and sometimes different titles, all undoubtedly by al-Tha‘ālibī himself, given their distinctive style. Thus Al-Tha‘ālibī must have re-worked the work three times, dedicating the first version to a certain Abū Sa‘d Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ghassān, the second to Maṣṣūr b. Muḥammad al-Azdī al-Harawī,<sup>44</sup> whereas in the third and final version he omits the dedication altogether, as he did in the final copy of the *Yatīma*.<sup>45</sup>

#### V- Presenting the Plan and Method

In addition to explaining the editorial process, al-Tha‘ālibī occasionally spends more time discussing his writing method in composing a certain book. In *al-Iqtibās min al-Qur‘ān* he notes that he wrote it over a long period of time, with many breaks ranging from days to years.<sup>46</sup> In *al-Mubḥij* he indicates that he relied on his “memory rather than notebooks” and his “mind rather than transmission” [*‘awwaltu fibī ‘alā khawāṭiri lā dafātiri, wa-‘alā ma‘qūli lā manqūli*].<sup>47</sup>

One of the universal topoi in prefaces is the one of brevity. Al-Tha‘ālibī often describes a book as “light in size, heavy in worth, and great in benefit” [*khafīf al-ḥajm, thaqīl al-wazn, kabīr al-ghanm*],<sup>48</sup> accordingly he selects the most important material:

والشرط في هذه الأخرى إيراد لبّ اللبّ، وحبّة القلب، وناظر العين، ونكته الكلمة، وواسطة العقد، ونقش النقص.

And the condition of this last edition is to include the essential core, the innermost heart, the pupil of the eye, the point of the phrase, the central [pearl] of the necklace, the engraving of the gem-stone.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>41</sup> See his biography in *Yatīma*, 4: 326; Al-Bākhari, *Dumyat al-qaṣr wa-‘uṣrat abl al-‘aṣr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Tūnjī, Beirut: Dār al-Jil 1993, 2: 984.

<sup>42</sup> For information on him see Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir 1966, 9: 379, 381, 428-9, 435-6, 446, 458.

<sup>43</sup> See *Sīr al-balāgha*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya 1984, 4.

<sup>44</sup> For information about him see *Yatīma*, 4: 321; *Tatimmat al-Yatīma*, ed. M. M. Qumayḥa, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 232.

<sup>45</sup> See *al-Ijāz wa-l-ijāz*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ, Damascus: Dār al-Bashā‘ir 2001, 17-21.

<sup>46</sup> See *al-Iqtibās*, p. 37.

<sup>47</sup> See *al-Mubḥij*, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> See *al-Ijāz*, 17, 19, 20; *al-Kināya*, 25; *Ajnās*, 25; *Latā‘if al-zurafā‘*, ed. Q. al-Samarrai, Leiden: Brill 1978, 4; *Mir‘āt*, 66. See also *Saj‘ al-mantḥūr*, Yani Cami 1188 (Istanbul: Süleymaniye), 82.

<sup>49</sup> *Yatīma*, 5, MS Laleli 1959, 3v.

وأودعته منها ظرف الظرف وروح و عقود الدر وعقد السحر.

I entrusted to this book the very elegancies, the innermost soul, the strings of pearls and the knots of magic.<sup>50</sup>

Al-Thaʿālibī frequently mentions in his *muqaddimāt* whether he selects his material from ancient or modern sources or both. Moreover, he almost always clearly presents the scope of his books and offers a considerably detailed outline.

#### VI- *Dedicating the Work*

A few of al-Thaʿālibī's books take the form of mementos to friends. The *muqaddima* in these cases acts as a *risāla* or a *qaṣīda ikhwāniyya*; the book, however, can deal with any subject. For example, in *Nasīm al-saḥar*, a book on the peculiarities of the Arabic language, dedicated to a friend who is described as using the same title phrase, the early morning breeze, al-Thaʿālibī writes:

و حين كاد غراب البين ينعب بين المحبين وأعد الدهر كعادته في تفریق متأخين، أحببت أن تصحبه تذكرة متى تجدد  
ذكري بحضرتة وتوب عني في خدمة مودته، فألفت له واختصرت هذا الكتاب.

When the crow of separation cawed between the lovers, and fate threatened, as is his habit, to separate the brothers, I desired that a memento from me accompany him which will renew my recollection in his presence and will replace me in the service of [brotherly] affection. Thus, I composed this book for him and kept it brief.<sup>51</sup>

As in the case of most books dedicated to patrons, al-Thaʿālibī's dedications usually fall into the end of the *muqaddima*, and follow a conventional format. In this regard, the preface acts like a panegyric poem. Just as the panegyric poem establishes a contract between a poet and a patron, so the preface of a book functions like a contract between the author and his patron. Fulfilling his part of the contract, the author "sells" his book and draws a flattering portrait of the patron, whom he describes with motifs usually encountered in panegyric *qaṣīdas*. There are also cases where panegyric poets rededicated their *qaṣīdas* to different patrons.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, al-Thaʿālibī's act of re-dedicating books to other patrons in his prefaces can be compared to the practice of rededicating *qaṣīdas*, although with some differences. A book is different from a *qaṣīda* in that it does not contain the portrait of the patron, but rather it is the *muqaddima* of the book that serves this function. Thus, it was acceptable for al-Thaʿālibī to re-dedicate his work to another patron without violating the ethics of patronage if he provided every new edition with a new preface, a rule that he observed faithfully.

<sup>50</sup> *Laṭāʾif al-zurafāʾ*, 4. For the same motif see also *Tatimma*, 8; *Nasīm*, 131.

<sup>51</sup> *Nasīm*, 131.

<sup>52</sup> See for examples, Kilito, *The Author and His Doubles*, tr. Michael Cooperson, Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2001, 24ff.

Indeed, al-Tha'ālibī's debt to the *madīh* tradition shows in his numerous common motifs and conventions. One of these conventions is praying for the patron. Throughout his *muqaddimāt*, al-Tha'ālibī follows the convention of asking God to prolong the patron's life. He sometimes adds a prayer for the patron's offspring as well, or prays for his patron's life to last until he sees his children become grey headed.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, al-Tha'ālibī often asks God to bestow on the patron as many gifts from His bounty as the number of the letters in the book he is dedicating; he says:

وإلى الله الرغبة في أن يعرّفه من بركاته ما يزيد على عدد ما فيه من الحروف بألوف.

My desire is that God make him witness thousands more of His blessings than the number of letters in [the book].<sup>54</sup>

Borrowing other motifs from the *madīh* tradition, al-Tha'ālibī often names his patron as the reason behind "the revival of language, literature, or proper conduct",<sup>55</sup> "the one who encompasses the extreme ends of glory" [*jāmi' aṭraf al-majd*],<sup>56</sup> or the best qualities in general.<sup>57</sup> In other instances al-Tha'ālibī finds no need to name the patron, for the superior qualities he mentions are unique to him.<sup>58</sup> Sometimes he claims that his patron is "the direction of prayer" [*qibla*] and/or a figurative *ka'ba* for supplicants and pilgrims.<sup>59</sup> In other cases, he declares that his praise cannot possibly live up to the deeds of his patron and thus he cannot hope to do justice to his patron by praising him or dedicating a book that matches him.<sup>60</sup> Alternatively, his praise sometimes matches the deeds: in which case he would state that his book and his patron suit one another,<sup>61</sup> or

<sup>53</sup> See for example, *al-Yawāqit*, 51; *Tahsin*, 29; *Thimār*, 9.

<sup>54</sup> *Al-Tawfiq*, 24; see also *al-Ijāz*, 21; *Tahsin*, 28, *Mir'āt*, 69; *Zād safar al-mulūk*, MS Chester Beatty Ar. 5067-3 (Dublin), 44a.

<sup>55</sup> See *al-Zarā'if*, 48; *Ajnās*, 25; *Fiqh*, 4; *Ādāb al-mulūk*, 30; *Lubāb*, 18.

<sup>56</sup> See *Ādāb al-mulūk*, 30; *Latā'if al-ma'ārif*, ed. I. al-Ibyārī and H. K. al-Ṣayrafī, Cairo: Dār Iḥ-yā' al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya 1960 [?], 3; *Fiqh*, 3.

<sup>57</sup> See *Mir'āt*, 65-66; *al-Kināya*, 24-5.

<sup>58</sup> See *al-Tamthīl*, 3; *al-Kināya*, 24.

<sup>59</sup> In using the term *ka'ba* al-Tha'ālibī specifies that the patron is the *ka'ba* of sovereignty or majesty [*ka'bat al-mulk* or *al-su'dud*], *al-Tamthīl*, 4; *Yawāqit*, 50; on the other hand, he uses the word *qibla* in common Islamic convention as the direction of prayer, see *Nathr*, 7; *Fiqh*, 9. Al-Tha'ālibī also uses this same motif in his own poetry; see for example *Dīwān al-Tha'ālibī*, collected by M. ʿA al-Jādir, Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub 1988, 102, 111. For instances of this motif in Ibn al-Rūmī's poetry see Gruendler, *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry: Ibn al-Rūmī and the Patron's Redemption*, New York: Routledge Curzon 2003, 239ff; see also *Dīwān Abi Tammām*, ed. M. Ṣubḥī, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir 1997, 2: 100, 248, 297; *Dīwān ibn Nubāta*, ed. Mahdi Ḥabīb al-Ṭāʿī, Baghdad: Wizārat al-ʿIlām 1977, 1: 409; *Kushājim*, *Dīwān*, ed. N. ʿA. Shaʿlān, Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānǧi 1997, 61.

<sup>60</sup> See for example *Tahsin*, 28, *Bard*, 103; *al-Ijāz*, 17, 19; *Latā'if al-Ma'ārif*, 3; *al-Tawfiq*, 23; *al-Zarā'if*, 4. *al-Tawfiq*, 23; *Thimār*, 3; for examples of this motif in poetry, see Gruendler, 248ff.

<sup>61</sup> See *Tahsin*, 28.

that his book compared to other speech is like his patron compared to the nobles of his time.<sup>62</sup>

Another common topos in al-Tha‘ālibī’s prefaces is apologizing for the delay in dedicating the work to his patron. He usually attributes this delay to his incapability of matching the patron’s qualities with a product of his composition. He then moves to comparing his books to the qualities of the patron, resorting to the modesty topos and drawing interesting comparisons that can often be rendered generally as “He who carries owls to Athens or coals to Newcastle”<sup>63</sup>:

وإني أخدمه بكتبي كمن يهدي الخضاب إلى الشباب وينقل الفقه إلى الشافعي، والشعر إلى البحري.

My service to him with my books is like him who presents hair dye to a youth, like him who transmits jurisprudence to al-Shāfi‘ī and poetry to al-Buḥturī.<sup>64</sup>

كمن يهدي إلى الشمس نوراً أو يزيد في البحر نهراً.

Like him who offers light to the sun and adds a river to the sea.<sup>65</sup>

ككوز ماء أجاج يحمل إلى بحر فرات عجاج.

Like a jug of brackish water carried to a raging sweet-watered sea<sup>66</sup>

وكيف تؤلف الكتب للجاحظ ويهدي الفقه إلى الشافعي والشعر إلى البحري والغناء إلى إبراهيم بن المهدي.

And how can one compose books for al-Jāhiz, dedicate jurisprudence to al-Shāfi‘ī, poetry to al-Buḥturī and song to Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī?<sup>67</sup>

كمهدي العود إلى الهند وناقل المسك إلى أرض الترك وجالب العنبر إلى البحر الأخضر.

Like him who offers incense to the Indians, carries musk to the land of the Turks, and imports ambergris to the Green Sea.<sup>68</sup>

In the passages above we see al-Tha‘ālibī lamenting the inferiority of his works to his patron, yet he justifies the act of dedicating a deficient work with two lines by his friend Abū al-Faṭḥ al-Bustī:<sup>69</sup>

لا تتكرن إذا أهديتُ نحوك من علومك الغرّ، أو آدابك التنفا  
فقيمّ الباغ قد يهدي لمالكه برسم خدمته من باغه التحفا

Do not condemn [me] when I present to you the choicest from your [own] venerable sciences or bits from your [own] literary arts

<sup>62</sup> See *Khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ*, 1.

<sup>63</sup> See D. E. Marvin, *The Antiquity of Proverbs*, New York, London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons 1922, 281-2.

<sup>64</sup> *Tahsin*, 28; *Bard*, 103; *Khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ*, 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Al-Fjāz*, 17, 19.

<sup>66</sup> *Laṭā’if*, 3; *al-Tawfiq*, 23; *al-Zarā’if*, 3b.

<sup>67</sup> *Al-Tawfiq*, 23.

<sup>68</sup> *Thimār*, 3.

<sup>69</sup> See his biography in Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a‘yān*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās, Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa 1968, 3: 376.

Indeed, the gardener presents to the owner the precious produce from his [own] garden by virtue of his service.<sup>70</sup>

Using this analogy of the gardener, al-Thaʿālibī finds a clever way of justifying the presentation of a supposedly inferior book. Moreover, the analogy is even cleverer in the fact that it suggests that he deserves no credit for what he offers, since it was not his property in the first place. By means of this crafty trick, al-Thaʿālibī makes the patron the virtual author of the book. He states this even more clearly in another instance, claiming that his entire *Mirʿāt al-murūʿāt* is a portrait of his patron's qualities and thus the patron is the real author of the book.<sup>71</sup> In another instance al-Thaʿālibī justifies his gift by claiming that *adab* is his only possession, and he is presenting it to the patron only because he recognizes that knowledge of the subtleties of *adab* are intrinsic to the nature of the patron.<sup>72</sup>

### *The Form of al-Thaʿālibī's Muqaddimāt*

#### *I- Rhyme and Rhythmical Balance (Sajʿ wa-Muwāzana)*

*Sajʿ* is rhymed prose while *muwāzana* is the rhythmical and/or syntactical balance in the sentence (traditionally in terms of words).<sup>73</sup> Both *sajʿ* and *muwāzana* are major characteristics of 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup>-century artistic prose, although they can be traced back to the soothsayers' prose [*sajʿ al-kuhhān*] of pre-Islamic Arabia. In many cases, however, and especially in the works of later critics, *sajʿ* assumes *muwāzana*.

One of the earliest rhetoricians to discuss *sajʿ* in some detail and in numerical terms was Ḍiyāʿ al-Dīn b. al-Athīr (d. 637/1239).<sup>74</sup> Ibn al-Athīr shows by examples how the length of one rhythmical unit is very close to the length of its part-

<sup>70</sup> *Bard*, 103; *Thimār*, 3.

<sup>71</sup> *Mirʿāt*, 65-6. One can see this motif for example in Ibn al-Rūmī's panegyrics; see for details Gruendler, 227ff and especially 253-255. Such a book, of course, cannot be re-dedicated to another patron after this claim, since it is the whole book in this case that presents a portrait of the patron and not only the *muqaddima*. Rededication in this case would obviously violate the ethics of patronage.

<sup>72</sup> *Khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ*, 2.

<sup>73</sup> *Sajʿ*, according to Régis Blachère's translation, is "rhymed and rhythmic prose", see Régis Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature Arabe des origines à la fin du Xve siècle de J. -C.*, Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve 1964, 189. This definition of *sajʿ* includes *al-muwāzana* as an integral part of *sajʿ*. As *Sajʿ* and *muwāzana* do not always presume each other I take them to be separate in this paper.

<sup>74</sup> See his biography in F. Rosenthal, "Ibn al-Athīr", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Leiden: Brill 1979, III: 723b-5a. Some other medieval authors who treated the same subject are Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (d. after 395/1005) in his *Kitāb al-Ṣināʿatayn*, and al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418) in his *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī ṣināʿat al-inshāʿ*.

ners in terms of words – with no mention of syllables.<sup>75</sup> In this respect the single word [*lafza*] in prose corresponds to the poetic foot [*taf'ila*] in poetry. Ibn al-Athir proposes two major categories, short *saj'* [*saj' qaṣīr*] and long *saj'* [*saj' tarwīl*]. The former consists of two to ten words in each colon, while the latter counts eleven or more.<sup>76</sup> Modern scholarship, in contrast, discusses the numerical balance of *saj'* with regard to the number of words as well as syllables.<sup>77</sup> These recent studies reveal fascinating rhythmical patterns of *saj'* some of which one encounters in Tha'ālībī's *muqaddimāt* as well. One example will suffice to demonstrate this aspect of his *muqaddimāt*. Al-Tha'ālībī says:

أيام مولانا الملك المؤيد ... مواقيت الشرف والفضل. وأوقاته تواريخ الكرم والمجد. وساعاته مواسم الأدب والعلم.  
وأفئاسه نعم. وأقواله نعم. وأفعاله سير. وآثاره غرر. وألفاظه درر. ومعاليه تباهي النجوم ارتقاعاً. ومكارمه تضاهي الجوّ  
اتساعاً. ومحاسنه تباري الشمس ظهوراً. وفضائله تجاري القطر وفوراً.

The days of our lord, the supported king, ... are rendezvous for honor and virtue, his periods are times of generosity and glory, his hours are seasons for literature and knowledge, his breaths are blessings and his sayings are always "yes". His deeds become customs, his achievements illustrious, his utterances pearls. His high ambitions rival the stars in height and his noble deeds rival the horizon in width. His good qualities compete with the sun in brilliance and his merits compete with rain in abundance.<sup>78</sup>

In the first three phrases al-Tha'ālībī does not employ rhyme; instead he uses *muwāzana* making the three phrases parallel syntactically and, almost, morphologically. This morphological and syntactical parallelism is maintained to the end of the paragraph and coupled with *saj'*. We can also see that al-Tha'ālībī maintains a rather strict parallelism of syllables throughout the paragraph. The following diagram shows parallelisms in al-Tha'ālībī's three groups of cola in this paragraph:

<sup>75</sup> See: *al-Mathal al-sā'ir fī adab al-kātib wa-l-shā'ir*, Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍat Miṣr 1959-62, 1: 271-337.

<sup>76</sup> Al-Qazwīnī, on the other hand, divides *saj'* into three groups: short, medium, and long, but without specifying the borders of each; see *al-Īdāh fī 'ulūm al-balāgha*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Khafājī, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī 1949, 2: 248-9.

<sup>77</sup> The most important recent works on *saj'* are: Stewart, Devin, "Saj' in the Qur'ān: prosody and structure", *Journal of Arabic Literature* XXI-2 (1990), 101-139; Zaki Mubārak, *La Prose Arabe au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle de l' Hégire*, Paris: Maisonneuve 1931, 78-94; idem, *al-Nathr al-fannī fī l-qarn al-rābi'*, Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī 1934, 1: 75-123, 137-53; Afif Ben Abdeselem, "saj'", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Leiden: Brill 1995, VIII: 734a-8b. Works taking syllables as a basis were initiated by Maḥmūd al-Mas'adī, *al-Īqā' fī l-adab al-'arabī*, Tunis: Mu'assasat 'Abd al-Karīm b. 'Abdallāh li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' 1986; Yūnis, 'Ali, *Nazra jadida fī mūsīqā l-shi'r al-'arabī*, Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li-l-Kitāb 1993; a statistical approach to *saj'* is applied in Adrian Gully and John Hinde, "Qābūs ibn Wushmagir: a study of rhythm patterns in Arabic epistolary prose from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AH", *Middle Eastern Literatures* vol. 6 no. 2 (July 2003).

<sup>78</sup> *Nathr*, 7.



## Group One

<sup>2</sup> ay/yā/mul/ (marw/lā/na)	ma/wā/qī/tush/sha/ra/fi/wal/fad/li	--v (- - v) v - - - v v v - - v
<sup>2</sup> aw/qā/tu/hūl	ta/wā/rī/kbul/ka/ra/mi/wal/maj/di	--v - v - - - v v v - - v
sā/ā/tu/hūl	ma/wā/si/mu-l/ā/da/bi/wal/ill/mi	--v - v - v - v v v - - v

## Group Two

wal <sup>2</sup> an/fā/su/hu/ni/āam	v - - v v v -
wal <sup>2</sup> aq/wā/tu/hu/na/āam	v - - v v v -
wal <sup>2</sup> af/ā/lu/hu/si/yar	v - - v v v -
wal <sup>2</sup> al/fā/zu/hu/du/rar	v - - v v v -

## Group Three

wal/ma/ā/lī/hi/tu/bā/hin/nul/jū/mar/ti/fā/āan	v v - - v v - - v - - v - -
wal/ma/kā/ri/mul/hu/tu/dā/hil/jaw/wat/ti/sā/āan	v v - v v v v - - - - v - -
wal/ma/hā/si/nul/hu/tu/bā/rish/sham/sa/zu/hū/ran	v v - v v v v - - - - v v - -
wal/fal/dā/ī/lu/hu/tu/jā/ril/qat/ra/wu/fū/ran	v v - v v v v - - - - v v - -

This diagram shows that al-Tha<sup>2</sup>alibī does not only maintain an equal number of words in every *saj<sup>2</sup>a*, which constitutes the best type of *saj<sup>2</sup>* according to Ibn al-Athīr, but also maintains an equal number of syllables with almost perfect parallelism.

Needless to say, al-Tha<sup>2</sup>alibī does not follow a uniform pattern of *saj<sup>2</sup>* in his *muqaddimāt*; rather, he varies his patterns to avoid boredom, as do most authors of artistic prose of the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century. One can generalize, however, and say that most of al-Tha<sup>2</sup>alibī's *saj<sup>2</sup>* range between two to six words, placing his *saj<sup>2</sup>* in the category of short *saj<sup>2</sup>*, according to the division of Ibn al-Athīr, who stressed his preference for this type of *saj<sup>2</sup>*.<sup>79</sup>

II- Extensive Use of Figures of Speech (Badī<sup>2</sup>)

Ibn al-Mu<sup>2</sup>tazz gathers as many as eighteen figures of speech in his *K. al-Badī<sup>2</sup>*: the initial five, according to the author, are artifices of figures of speech [*badī<sup>2</sup>*], while the rest are artifices for the embellishment of speech [*mahāsīn*]. Later, however, the term *badī<sup>2</sup>* was applied to *badī<sup>2</sup>* figures and *mahāsīn* alike. Even before the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century many books dealt with the subject, most importantly the *K. Naqd al-shī<sup>2</sup>r* of Qudāma b. Ja<sup>2</sup>far (d. before 337/948),<sup>80</sup> *K. al-Šinā<sup>2</sup>atayn* of Abū Hilāl al-<sup>2</sup>Askarī (d. after 400/1010),<sup>81</sup> and *I<sup>2</sup>jāz al-Qur<sup>2</sup>ān* of al-Baqillānī

<sup>79</sup> See *al-Mathal*, 1: 335-6.

<sup>80</sup> See his biography in S.A. Bonebakker, "Qudāma b. Dja<sup>2</sup>far", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Leiden: Brill 1986, V: 318b-22a.

<sup>81</sup> See his biography in J.W. Fück, "al-<sup>2</sup>Askarī", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Leiden: Brill 1960, I: 711b-13a; B. Gruendler, "Abū Hilāl al-<sup>2</sup>Askarī", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Leiden: Brill (in press).

(d. 403/1013).<sup>82</sup> A total of twenty-nine figures collected from these books and their use became customary requirements of *balāgha* in both prose and poetry. Qābūs b. Wushmgīr, the famous Persian ruler and author of *belles-lettres*,<sup>83</sup> for example, claims to have invented fourteen figures of speech.<sup>84</sup> By the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century, the number of figures of speech had reached nearly one hundred.<sup>85</sup> Al-Tha‘ālibī, however, while not devoting a whole book to a comprehensive discussion of *badī‘* figures,<sup>86</sup> sets aside whole books for individual common ones. He discusses, for example, *tajnīs* [paronomasia] in his *Ajnās al-tajnīs* and *al-Anīs fī ghurar al-tajnīs, kināya* [allusion/metonymy] in *al-Kināya wa-l-ta‘rīd*, and gives illustrations of *saj‘* [rhymed and rhythmic prose] in *Saj‘ al-manthūr*. Moreover, al-Tha‘ālibī discusses various figures of speech in scattered passages in his books, especially his *Yatīmat al-dahr*. It is natural, then, that al-Tha‘ālibī’s interest in *badī‘* finds a place in his own writing; he says, for example, in his *muqaddimāt*:

الشيخ الأمير السيد تحفةً تجمع أبكار الأفكار وتنظم أسرار الأسفار وتسحر القلوب بنثر النثر وشيعار الشعر المختار.

The Amir, Shaykh and Master is a masterpiece that collects the virgin thoughts, strings the secrets of tomes, enchants the hearts with the coins of prose and the signs of select poetry.<sup>87</sup>

فمن الكبراء أن تسير مؤلفاتي في البلاد مسير الأمثال وتسري مسرى الخيال، إذ هي رياحين الملوك والأمراء وفواكه الفضلاء والرؤساء وليس لي مؤلف برسم الشيخ...

It is a grave sin that my works circulate in countries like proverbs and travel like phantoms, being the basil flowers of kings and governors and the fruit of the virtuous and leaders, while I have no work by the order of the Shaykh...<sup>88</sup>

...ومحاسن سير تظرسها أستاذة الأفلام وتدرسها السنة الليالي والأيام.

<sup>82</sup> See his biography in R.J. McCarthy, “al-Bākillānī”, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Leiden: Brill 1960, I: 958b-59a.

<sup>83</sup> See his biography in C. E. Bosworth, “Kābūs b. Wushmgīr”, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Leiden: Brill 1978, IV: 357b-358b.

<sup>84</sup> See Qābūs b. Wushmgīr, *Kamāl al-balāgha*, ed. ‘A. al-Yazdādī, Baghdād: al-Maktaba al-‘Arabīyya 1922, 19-32.

<sup>85</sup> Usāma b. Munqidh’s work *al-Badī‘ fī naqd al-shi‘r*, which was composed in the first quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century contains 95 figures of speech, see *al-Badī‘ fī naqd al-shi‘r*, ed. A. A. Badawī et al., Cairo: al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī 1960, 91-92. For more information on figures of speech in Arabic Literature see W. Heinrichs, “Badī‘”, in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey, London: Routledge 1998.

<sup>86</sup> The *Rawdat al-Faṣāḥa* that is falsely attributed to al-Tha‘ālibī by M. I. Salim belongs to a later period. Despite the little evidence in the introduction of the work, mainly the start with *barā‘at al-istihlāl* coined with Qur’ānic quotations and the emphasis on the brevity and the worth of the book, the work includes numerous quotations by later authors, including al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122) and al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144).

<sup>87</sup> *al-Anīs*, 41.

<sup>88</sup> *Al-Ijāz*, 20.

... And qualities that the spearheads of pens guard and the tongues of days and nights study.<sup>89</sup>

عونك اللهم على شكر نعمتك في ملكك كملكٍ وبحر كتصيرٍ وبدرٍ في دسبٍ وغيثٍ يصدر عن ليثٍ وعالمٍ في ثوبٍ عالمٍ  
وسلطانٍ بين حُسنٍ وإحسانٍ.

O Lord, we seek your assistance to thank your beneficence for a king like an angel, a sea like a castle, a full moon in a seat of honor, rain stemming from a lion, a cosmos in a garment of a scholar, and a ruler [shifting] between beauty [of creation] and good deeds.<sup>90</sup>

### III- Synonymity and Prolixity (al-Tarāduf wa-l-Itnāb)

Al-Jurjānī (d. 816/ 1413) defines synonymity [*tarāduf*] as “unanimity in meaning” and “the succession of the single phrases that point to the same thing under the same aspect”,<sup>91</sup> while Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī defines prolixity [*itnāb*] as: “expanding speech to increase the benefit”.<sup>92</sup> Both *tarāduf* and *itnāb* were common practices in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century, especially with al-Jāhīz. However, these two techniques were developed further in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century to the point that the literary framework became much wider than its content. Al-Thaʿālibī uses both techniques in his prose writing, for example:

هذا كتاب يشتمل على محاسن الألفاظ الدججة وبدائع المعاني الأربعة ولطائف الأوصاف التي تحكي أنوار الأشجار وأنفاس الأسفار وغناء الأطيبار وأجبياد الغزلان وأطواق الحمام وصدور البازات والشهب وأجنحة الطواويس الخضراء وملح الرياض وسحر المقلل المراض، وتحرك الخواطر الساكنة وتبعث الأشواق الكامنة وتسكر بلا شرابٍ وتطرب من غير إطرابٍ وتهز بأطرابها كما هزت الغصن ريح الصبا وكما انتفض العصفور بلله القطر من ثر كثير الورد ونظم كنظم العقده.

This is a book that includes the best of pretty utterances, the marvelous fragrant meanings, and subtle descriptions, [all of] which imitate the blossoms of trees, the breeze of early mornings, the singing of birds, the necks of gazelles, the collars of doves, the breasts of falcons and buzzards, the green wings of peacocks, beautiful gardens, and the charm of the languid eyes.

[The content of the book] moves still minds, arouse hidden desires, intoxicate without drink, and delight without music, and cause tremors from this delight (just) as the east winds shakes the bough, (and) as the bird who was splashed by rain shakes off the moisture – all this being prose that is like the scattering of rose water and poetry like the stringing of [pearls] in a necklace.<sup>93</sup>

Al-Thaʿālibī here presents two main points: first, that his book includes excellent utterances, meanings, and descriptions that rival the beauty of nature, and sec-

<sup>89</sup> *Al-Tamthil*, 3.

<sup>90</sup> *Al-Kināya*, 23.

<sup>91</sup> Al-Jurjānī, K., *al-Taʿrīfāt*, Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān 1969, 58.

<sup>92</sup> Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *al-Furūq fi l-lughā*, Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadida 1973, 32.

<sup>93</sup> *Man ghāba ʿanhu-l-muṭrib*, ed. N. Shaʿlān, Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī 1984, 3.

ond, that it includes both prose and poetry that exert an effect on the human mind. However, in repeating the same concepts in different phrases and listing examples of “subtle descriptions”, he provides the text with a considerable verbal effect, though it adds nothing to the content.<sup>94</sup>

#### IV- Adaptation and Inclusion (al-Iqtibās wa-l-Taḍmīn)

Quoting or adapting Qur’ānic verses, *ḥadīth*, or lines of poetry is another major feature of 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup>-century prose writing that al-Tha’alibī employs in his *muqaddimāt*. In the case of poetry, the examples above demonstrate that when al-Tha’alibī quotes poetry in his *muqaddimāt*, it is usually only a few lines and typically not his own. In some instances the poetry is quoted because it reminds al-Tha’alibī of some meaning or motif he is expressing in the surrounding prose. In these cases the poetry runs parallel to the prose text, does not add to the meaning, and functions simply to illustrate the original motif. This also shows al-Tha’alibī’s ability in applying *ḥall al-naẓm* [prosification] in this practice.<sup>95</sup> Al-Tha’alibī in these cases depends on poetic motifs from ancient or contemporary poetry. Indeed, al-Tha’alibī’s general works demonstrate an interest in *ḥall al-naẓm*, in particular a whole book dedicated to this practice, his *Nathr al-naẓm wa-ḥall al-aqd* [Releasing of the Poetic String and Untying of the Knot]. Drawing his reader’s attention to this technique, he says:

أما بعد فإنّ هذا الكتاب أخرجت بعضه من غرر نجوم الأرض، ونكت أعيان الفضل من بلغاء العصر في النثر  
وحللت بعضه من نظم أمراء الشعر الذين أوردت ملح أشعارهم في كتابي المترجم بيئمة الدهر.

Thereupon, I brought out half of this book from the best [outcome] of the planets [i.e. authors] of the earth and the best eloquent people of the age in prose writing, while I released its [other] half from releasing the poetic string of the princes of poetry, whose good poetry I cited in my book *Yatīmat al-dahr*.<sup>96</sup>

In other instances al-Tha’alibī quotes poetry as part of the prose text, making use of what al-Qalqashandī considers *fann al-imitzāj* [the art of intermingling]<sup>97</sup>:

<sup>94</sup> See other examples of both techniques in quotations number 6, 8, 10, 11, 17.

<sup>95</sup> On the genre, see Amidu Sanni, *The Arabic Theory of Prosification and Versification*, Beirut-Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 1998.

<sup>96</sup> *Sihr al-balāgha*, 3.

<sup>97</sup> For details see al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a’shā fī šinā’at al-inshā’*, Cairo: al-Mu’assasa al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma 1964, 1: 280. An extreme case of this art, one from which the term *al-imitzāj* might have originated, is found in the *rasā’il* of Badī‘ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī, a case that al-Tha’alibī himself quotes in his *Yatīmat al-dahr*:

إنّا لقرب الأستاذ أطال الله بقاءه {كما طرب النشوان مالت به الحمر}، ومن الاتّيح لقائه {كما انتفض العصفور بلّله  
القطر}، ومن الامتزاج بولائه، {كما التقت الصهباء والبارد العذب} ومن الاتّياج بمرآه، {كما اهتز تحت البارح العفن  
الرطب}

هذا كتاب يشتمل على محاسن الألفاظ الدعجة وبدائع المعاني الأرجة ولطائف الأوصاف التي تحكي أنوار الأشجار ...  
وتحرك الخواطر الساكنة وتبعث الأشواق الكامنة وتسكر بلا شراب وتطرب من غير إطراب وتهزّ بأطرابها {كما هزّت  
العصن ريح الصبا} و{كما انتفض العصفور بلله القطر} من ثرٍ كثير الورد ونظم كظم العقد.<sup>98</sup>

In this example the phrase “*kamā hazzati-l-ghuṣna rīhu-ṣ-ṣībā*” is a hemistich in *al-Mutaqārib* meter,<sup>99</sup> while the second “*kamā intafada-l-ʿusfuru ballalabu-l-qatṭru*” is in *al-Ṭawīl*,<sup>100</sup> and al-Thaʿalibī uses both as part of the prose text with no indication to this fact, except for the hint provided at the end of the sentence explaining that the book includes both prose and poetry.

Al-Thaʿalibī in his *muqaddimāt* applies the same technique of quoting poetry in his quotation of Qurʾānic verses, i.e. the verses are included in the text as a part of the main speech and not as a quotation. Al-Thaʿalibī dedicates a whole book to this technique entitled *al-Iqtibās min al-Qurʾān*, which was discussed earlier.<sup>101</sup> To give an example from another work, comparing the family of al-Mikālī to the “good tree” [*shajara tayyiba*] mentioned in the Qurʾān, al-Thaʿalibī says in the *muqaddima* of *Fiqh al-lughā*:

كانت شجرته الميكالية في قرارة المجد والعلاء و{أصلها ثابت وفرعها في السماء}

His Mikālī tree was situated in the depth of glory and highness, its root is firm while its branches are in the sky.<sup>102, 103</sup>

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My condition [in longing] to approach the Master {is like [the condition of] the intoxicated man who is swayed by wine), and in my gratification to his encounter [I am like] {the bird who, splashed by rain, shakes off the moisture}, and for attaining his amity, [I hope to be] {like the wine which mixes with cold fresh water}, and in my delight by seeing him, I am {like the damp bough which shakes in the hot wind of summer}.

See *Kashf al-maʿānī wa-l-hayān ʿan rasāʾil Badīʿ al-Zamān*, ed. A. al-Ṭarābulṣī, Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Kāthūlikiyya 1890, 128-9, and *Yatīma*, 4: 243, MS Laleli 1959, 546v. Other examples by al-Hamadhānī are in *Kashf*, 139, 141, 292, 375.

<sup>98</sup> See translation in Quotation number ten above.

<sup>99</sup> The full line, by al-Nājīm (d. 314/926), is:

تهزّ القريض بأحانها كما هزّت العصفور ريح الصبا

See al-Ḥuṣrī al-Qayrawānī, *Jamʿ al-Jawābir*, ed. ʿA. M. Al-Bajāwī, Beirut: Dār al-Jil 1987; Idem, *Nūr al-tarf*, ed. L. ʿA. Abū Ṣāliḥ, Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla 1966, 258, Ibn Abī ʿAwn, *Kitāb al-Tashbihāt*, ed. M. ʿA. Khān, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 122.

<sup>100</sup> The hemistich is attributed to many poets; most probably it originated from the line of by Abu Ṣakhr al-Hudhālī [d. 80/700]:

وإني لتعروني لذركه هزة كما انتفض العصفور بلله القطر

See Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya 1932, 5: 184.

<sup>101</sup> See Quotation two above.

<sup>102</sup> A reference to *Q.* 14: 24.

<sup>103</sup> *Fiqh*, 3; see also for another example 10.

V- *Brilliant Exordia* (Barāʿat al-Istihlāl)

Al-Jurjānī defines the term *barāʿat al-istihlāl* as follows: “*barāʿat al-istihlāl* occurs when the author makes a statement at the beginning of his work to indicate the general subject before entering into the details, i.e. when the beginning of speech is suitable to the intended [subject]; it frequently occurs in the exordiums of books.”<sup>104</sup> Al-Thaʿālibī often recognizes this convention in writing. For example, in *Ādāb al-mulūk* [On the proper conduct of kings] he says in his *tahmīd*:

ثم الحمد لله الذي استخلف الملوك في أرضه واسترعاهم أمور خلقه وجعلهم المدافعين عن سواد الأمة وبياض الدعوة والأرمة على الملة والحوزة.

Then praise be to God who made kings his successors in land, asked them to look after the matters of His creation, made them the defenders of the common [lit: black] people and the pure [lit. white] call, the keepers of the faith, as well as the owners [of this faith].<sup>105</sup>

Although al-Thaʿālibī usually uses *barāʿat al-istihlāl* immediately at the beginning of his *muqaddima* – often in the *tahmīd* section – he sometimes leaves this to the middle of his *muqaddima*. For example, he employs *barāʿat al-istihlāl* in *al-Kināya wa-l-taʿrīd* [book of hinting and allusion] in praising his patron:

هذه صفة تُغني عن التسمية ولا تحوج إلى التكنية، إذ هي مختصة بملونا الأمير السيد الملك المؤيد.

This is a description that obviates the necessity of naming and does not need *any hinting* for it is special to our master, the chief prince, and the supported king.

In this quotation the word “hinting” [*takniya*] refers to the title of the book. Sometimes al-Thaʿālibī indicates the subject of his book more subtly by writing the preface in a style that constitutes the subject of the book itself. An example of this is the previously discussed *al-Iqtibās min al-Qurʾān* [Quoting from the *Qurʾān*], in which al-Thaʿālibī starts the *tahmīd* section with the series of Qurʾānic excerpts quoted above. Another example is his *Thimār al-qulūb* where he writes in its preface:

...وإن كنت في ذلك كهدي العود إلى الهنود وناقل المسك إلى أرض الترك وجالب العنبر إلى البحر الأخضر.

...even if in doing so I am like him who offers incense to the Indians, carries musk to the land of the Turks, and imports ambergris to the Green Sea.<sup>106</sup>

This sentence is part of the modesty topos discussed previously, which occurs frequently in al-Thaʿālibī’s *muqaddimāt*. However, the phrases *ʿūd al-hind*, *misk al-*

<sup>104</sup> *Al-Tāʾrīfāt*, 64; see also, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿsha*, 11: 73ff.

<sup>105</sup> *Ādāb al-mulūk*, 30.

<sup>106</sup> *Thimār al-qulūb*, 3.

*turk*, and *ʿanbar al-baḥr al-akḥḍar*<sup>107</sup> are examples of the material of the book that is an alphabetically-arranged lexicon of two-word phrases and clichés.<sup>108</sup>

### Conclusion

Using al-Thaʿālibī's scholarship as a point of departure, this article has presented the *muqaddima* as an independent literary form of Arabic artistic prose by drawing attention to both its content and form. With respect to content, the article has illustrated the conventional aspects of al-Thaʿālibī's *muqaddima* by examining its prefatory remarks, presentation of the title work, delineation of the method and plan of the work, and finally the dedication, or rededication, of the work. In terms of the content, the *muqaddima* acts as a panegyric poem – a contract between the author of the work and his patron – by drawing a portrait of the dedicatee to be matched by his acts of generosity. With respect to form, this article has shown that the *muqaddima*, at least in the case of al-Thaʿālibī, enjoys all of the features of artistic prose from the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century, thereby expanding the range of artistic prose to genres beyond those of *adab*, *maqāmāt*, and *belles-lettres*. Indeed, biographers and anthologists living shortly after al-Thaʿālibī's death did not hesitate, when selecting from al-Thaʿālibī's literary product, to include his *muqaddimāt* as a proof of his excellent prose.<sup>109</sup> This fact shows that these *muqaddimāt* were considered to be artistic prose at the time. Finally, this article analyzes the artistic techniques employed by the author for the purpose of showing his own literary talents, on the one hand, and attracting and directing the attention of the reader, on the other. In this respect, the effect of these *muqaddimāt* is like that of an overture with which a composer starts an opera.

<sup>107</sup> For a discussion of the three terms see *Thimār al-qulūb*, 533.

<sup>108</sup> For an excellent example of *barāʿat al-istihlāl* in al-Thaʿālibī's works see *Zād safar al-mulūk*, 43b-43a.

<sup>109</sup> Ibn Bassām is a prime example in this respect, for in his entry on al-Thaʿālibī in *al-Dhakhīra* includes several of al-Thaʿālibī's *muqaddimāt* filling several pages along with quotations from *Yatīmat al-daḥr* and al-Thaʿālibī's poetry; see Ibn Bassām al-Shantarīnī, *al-Dhakhīra fī maḥāsin ahl al-jazīra*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās. Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa 1979, 8: 560ff.