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THE ARABIC QASIDAS OF FUZULI

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ARABSKIE KASIDY FUZULIEGO

Annotation.

Muhammed bin Suleyman Fuzūlī (d. ca. 1556) composed qasīdas in Turkish, Persian, and Arabic. While his Turkish and Persian qasīdas are widely studied, his Arabic qasīdas have received relatively little scholarly attention. This article examines the twelve Arabic qasīdas (eleven complete, one fragment, totaling 465 bayts/couplets), discussing their textual transmission, poetic structure, and thematic content. The study showcases Fuzūlī's proficiency in Arabic metres, rhetorical techniques, and semantic intricacies. His qasīdas reflect Sufi thought and Shi'ite devotion, particularly to the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and Imam 'Ali (عليه السلام), as well as lyrical explorations of earthly love. The study contextualises Fuzūlī's Arabic qasīdas within his trilingual poetic heritage, emphasising their integral role in appreciating the poet's artistic and spiritual achievements. Consequently, these qasīdas should be studied alongside his Turkish and Persian poetry to gain a comprehensive understanding of Fuzūlī's poetic genius and his contributions to the literary traditions of the Islamic world. The article also touches upon the poet's date of birth, which appears differently in various sources. Based on the date on a manuscript obtained from the National Library of France (BnF), it emphasises the importance of revising this date.

Streszczenie.

Muhammad ibn Sulejman Fuzūlī (zm. ok. 1556) tworzył kasydy w językach tureckim, perskim oraz arabskim. Podczas gdy jego kasydy tureckie i perskie są szeroko badane, kasydy arabskie pozostają stosunkowo słabo opracowane w literaturze naukowej. Niniejszy artykuł analizuje dwanaście arabskich kasyd (jedenaście zachowanych w całości oraz jeden fragment, łącznie 465 bajtów/dwuwerszy), omawiając ich przekaz tekstowy, strukturę poetycką oraz treść tematyczną.

Badanie ukazuje biegłość Fuzūliego w zakresie arabskich metrów poetyckich, technik retorycznych oraz subtelności semantycznych. Jego kasydy odzwierciedlają myśl suficką oraz szyicką pobożność, zwłaszcza wobec Proroka Muhammada (ﷺ) oraz imama 'Ali (عليه السلام), a także zawierają liryczne refleksje nad miłością ziemską.

Artykuł umieszcza arabskie kasydy Fuzūliego w kontekście jego trójjęzycznego dziedzictwa poetyckiego, podkreślając ich integralną rolę w pełnym zrozumieniu artystycznych i duchowych osiągnięć poety. W związku z tym kasydy te powinny być badane równolegle z jego twórczością turecką i perską, aby uzyskać całościowe spojrzenie na geniusz poetycki Fuzūliego oraz jego wkład w tradycje literackie świata islamu.

Artykuł porusza również kwestię daty urodzenia poety, która w różnych źródłach podawana jest odmiennie. Na podstawie daty znajdującej się w rękopisie przechowywanym w Bibliotece Narodowej Francji (BnF) podkreśla się konieczność rewizji tej daty.

Keywords: Fuzūlī, Arabic Poetry, Qasīda, Bertels, Bandaroghlu.

Słowa kluczowe: Fuzūlī, poezja arabska, kasida, Bertels, Bandaroghlu.

Introduction: Muhammed bin Suleyman Fuzūlī (d. ca. 1556) is recognized as one of the most prominent poets of the classical Azerbaijani literature, composing in Turkish, Persian, and Arabic. A Scottish orientalist E. J. W. Gibb (1857-1901) characterized Fuzulī's trilingual creativity as follows: "He composed with equal ease and elegance in Turkish, Persian, and Arabic, his Turkish poems being highly favoured by the critics of Rūm, his Persian *divān* being the delight of the poets of every land, his Turkī pieces being recited by the Mughals, and his Arabic bayts being famous with the eloquent among the Arabs" (Gibb, 1904, p.72)

Although his Turkish and Persian works have been extensively studied, his Arabic qasīdas have received comparatively little scholarly attention, despite being

important for understanding Fuzūlī's literary and spiritual development. These qasīdas were discovered by chance in a manuscript at the Asia Museum (now the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts) and were first studied by the Russian scholar Evgenii Eduardovich Bertels. In 1930, he published preliminary information on these qasīdas and prepared critical editions of two of them (the qasīdas No. 1 and No. 6 in the *Divān*), translating them into Russian in the process (Bertels, 1930, pp. 39–71).

These texts have become more accessible thanks to subsequent critical editions by Hamid Arasli in 1958 (Baku) and Abdul Latif Bandaroglu in 1994 (Baghdad). Alongside these publications, research into Arabic

qaşidas also began. One of the scholars who has conducted noteworthy research on Fuzūlī's qaşidas is Vejihe Feyzullayeva. While examining the poet's qaşida production as a whole, she also addressed those composed in Arabic. In 2012, Ruhengiz Jumshudlu became the first researcher to conduct an extensive, independent, scholarly study of these Arabic qaşidas.

Although various sources in Türkiye mention Fuzulī's Arabic works, they have not yet been the subject of a systematic and extensive investigation. Nevertheless, Ayhan Erdogan translated and analysed two qaşidas (the qaşidas No. 4 and No. 11 in the *Dīvān*) (Erdogan, 2010, pp. 171–181).

This study provides a succinct analysis of Fuzūlī's Arabic qaşidas, covering their textual history, poetic form, thematic content, and linguistic features. Through an examination of these qaşidas, the article will seek to reconstruct the poet's multilingual literary vision, while also highlighting the spiritual and aesthetic significance of his Arabic poetry.

Main Text: Several scholars argue that Fuzūlī possessed a complete Arabic *Dīvān*, and the surviving qaşidas represent fragments of that collection. For instance, Hamid Arasli asserts that, besides the qaşidas known to contemporary scholarship – many still unpublished – Fuzūlī composed a separate Arabic *Dīvān* (Arasli, 1958, p. 141). Similarly, Abdulkadir Karahan indicates that the extant Arabic qaşidas, though limited in number, are excerpts from this *Dīvān*; medieval sources such as Şādiqī and Bursali Mehmed Tahir also corroborate the existence of Fuzūlī's Arabic *Dīvān*, sometimes exaggerating its extent to 30,000 (3000 [?]) bayts (Karahan, 2020, p. 245).

Motivated by these claims, we surveyed the manuscript catalogues of major libraries worldwide in an attempt to locate Fuzūlī's Arabic works. Although this search did not yield any new qaşidas, we found a manuscript in the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* that contains four Arabic bayts attributed to Fuzūlī (cote: Persan 49; former catalogue numbers: 1675, O.13, 1682 and 1548). A comparison with editions by Arasli and Bandaroglu shows that these four bayts correspond to couplets 11–14 of the second qaşida.

Although the manuscript does not provide substantial new information on Fuzūlī's Arabic qaşidas, it contains data relevant to his birth date, which remains a matter of debate. While scholars such as Alessio Bombaci (Aliyeva, 2025, p. 1058), and Hasibe Mazioglu (Mazioglu, 2002, p. 2) propose 1480; A. Karahan (Karahan, 1989, p. 72), and Bandaroglu (Bandaroglu, 1994, p. 5) suggest 1494 – a date also adopted by the “Azerbaijan Literary History” and *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*.

According to Edgar Blochet (1870–1937), the manuscript was copied in 894 AH (1488 AD) by Derwish Yusuf ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Khorasani al-Isfahani (Blochet, 1905, p. 86). This implies that Fuzūlī may have been born before 1480, a possibility and that should be given careful consideration in future biographical studies.

Scholars are familiar with twelve of Fuzūlī's Arabic qaşidas (eleven complete and one fragment), totalling 465 bayts. Various researchers have documented

the distribution of bayts among the qaşidas differently: Y. E. Bertels numbered the qaşidas and recorded the number of bayts in each: No. 1 – 63, No. 2 – 51, No. 3 – 43, No. 4 – 21, No. 5 – 30, No. 6 – 38, No. 7 – 27, No. 8 – 27, No. 9 – 53, No. 10 – 52, No. 11 – 53, and No. 12 (fragment) – 7 couplets (Bertels, 1962, p. 507).

Fuad Koprulu repeated Bertels's enumeration, whereas A. Karahan reported a total of 470 bayts. Other scholars, such as V. Feyzullayeva and R. Jumshudlu, suggested totals of 465 (Feyzullayeva, 1985, p. 22) and 460 (Jumshudlu, 2012, p. 13), respectively.

Ayhan Erdogan's view, however, is entirely different. He states: “*The divan, consisting of a total of 516 couplets, comprises 12 qaşidas together with the final 7-couplet khātima. The lengths of the qaşidas also vary. Listed in order, the number of couplets in the qaşidas is as follows: 114–51–44–21–30–38–27–27–53–52–52–7 = 516 bayts*” (Erdogan, 2010, p. 172).

However, the accuracy of the figures presented by Erdogan is open to doubt. This is because in the editions of Fuzūlī's Arabic works prepared by both Arasli and Bandaroglu, there is no Arabic qaşida consisting of 114 couplets. In both editions, the first and longest qaşida comprises 63 couplets.

Our comparative analysis of the number of couplets in the qaşidas shows that the figures in the editions prepared by Arasli and Bandaroglu fully coincide, and that these figures are identical to those provided by Bertels, with the exception of two qaşidas. Bertels counted one couplet fewer in the third qaşida and one couplet more in the eleventh qaşida. In fact, the third qaşida consists of 44 couplets, while the eleventh qaşida consists of 52 couplets.

Taking these corrections into account, the number of couplets in Fuzūlī's Arabic qaşidas can be presented as follows:

No. 1 – 63, No. 2 – 51, No. 3 – 44, No. 4 – 21, No. 5 – 30, No. 6 – 38, No. 7 – 27, No. 8 – 27, No. 9 – 53, No. 10 – 52, No. 11 – 52, and No. 12 – 7 couplets.

Thus, the total number of couplets in the qaşidas amounts to 465.

Eight of Fuzulī's Arabic-language qasidas (nos. 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12) are written in the *tawīl* metre; three (nos. 3, 4 and 5) in *kāmil*; and one qasida (no. 8) in *wāfir* (Bertels, 1962, p. 508). These metres of ‘arūd were considered to be more characteristic of Arabic poetry. M. F. Koprulu notes that non-Arab (‘Ajam) poets made very limited use of metres widely known among Arabs, such as *tawīl*, *madīd*, *basīt*, *wāfir*, and *kāmil* (Koprulu, 1980, p. 134).

However, Fuzūlī did not use metres typical of Turkish and Persian poetry, such as *muḍārī* and *muḵṭass*, but instead favoured those commonly used by Arabic poets. Bertels explains this preference in two ways:

1) Fuzulī perceived the rhythm of Arabic poetry more clearly in these metres and sought to give his qaşidas an Arabic ‘character’ by using them;

2) These heavy metres were more suited to the solemn and ceremonial style of the qasida, leading him to favour them (Bertels, 1962, p. 508).

However, given that another one of our classical poets, Khagani Shirvani, who is considered a master of

the qasida, also wrote in Persian using metres such as *madīd*, *ṭawīl*, *basīṭ*, *wāfir* and *kāmil*, which are considered “uncharacteristic of Persian poetry” Bertels's second argument seems more convincing. In other words, Fuzūlī did not attempt to impart an artificial Arabic character to his works; rather, he favoured the metres that were most appropriate to the genre of the works he was composing.

The lack of diacritical marks, and vowels (ḥarakāt) in classic Arabic texts is one of the factors that complicates the translation process and leads to distortion. It is worth mentioning a thought about the Arabic alphabet by Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (973-1048), one of the famous scholars of the Middle Ages: “Arabic writing has a great drawback. It contains letters identical in their forms. They are easily confused, and there results the need for diacritical marks to distinguish those letters from each other, as well as the need for ways and means to express the grammatical terminations at the ends of words. Where these marks are omitted, the meaning becomes obscured” (Rosenthal, 1961, p. 22). When religious texts are composed, potentially contradictory points are carefully taken into consideration, and in order to prevent misinterpretation or distortion, such passages are provided with diacritical marks, and vowels; in other cases, the texts are generally presented without them. This situation may result in multiple readings of a single word and, consequently, in different translation variants. This also applies to Fuzūlī's works.

As we mentioned earlier that Fuzūlī's Arabic qasīdas were published by H. Arasli and A. L. Bandaroglu, though both editions contain certain inaccuracies. This explains why different translators interpret certain bayts differently, for example, in the case of Qasīda No. 10, bayt No. 15:

لسانك حلو لحظ طرفك ساحر كأنك حلي و أرضك بابل

(Bandaroglu, 1994, p. 113)

Koprulu interpreted the part of the bayt كأنك حلي و أرضك بابل as *if you were from Hillah and your land was Babylon*, and concluded that Fuzūlī was born in Hillah and spent most of his life there. However, A. Karahan and A. Golpinarli rightly objected to this idea.

Azerbaijani scholars have also translated the couplet in various ways. Memmed Mubariz Alizadeh, for example, produced the following poetic translation of the bayt:

*Your tongue is sweet, those meaningful eyes enchanting,
Has your homeland become Babylon to you, are you a sweetmaker?*

(Fuzūlī, 2005, p. 302)

V. Feyzullayeva did not consider this translation to be accurate, and made the following suggestion:

Your tongue is sweet, your crooked gaze is enchanting,

You seem like Hillah, and your land is Babylon.
(Feyzullayeva, 1985, p. 41)

However, translating the phrase لحظ طرفك in the first line as *crooked gaze* is inappropriate both grammatically and semantically. This is because the phrase is in the *idāfah construction* (noun + noun) structure in Arabic, whereas *crooked gaze* is a noun +

adjective phrase. Moreover, the phrase *crooked gaze* is also semantically incompatible with the description *sweet-tongued, captivatingly beautiful*. The correct meaning of the phrase is as follows: لحظ طرفك *glance, your eyes* → *the glance of your eyes*.

The researcher rightly points out that translating the word حلي as *sweetmaker* in the second line distorts the meaning, and his proposed alternative translation is open to debate. This is because, in Arabic, the absence of a *tashdid*, (or *shaddah*) can completely change the meaning of a word. Depending on the placement of the *tashdid* in this couplet, the word حلي can be read in two ways:

1. حِلِّي (hillī) – if there is a *tashdid* on both the letter *lām* and the letter *yā*.

This form is consistent with the edition by Bandaroglu. Researchers such as Bertels (Bertels, 1962, p. 515), Feyzullayeva (Feyzullayeva, 1985, p. 41), and Jumshudlu (Jumshudlu, 2012, p. 188) have preferred this reading.

2. حُلِّي (jewellery, adornment) – only if there is a *shaddah* on the letter *yā*.

In Arasli's edition, the couplet is written this way. A. Erdoghan, who translated Fuzūlī's two Arabic qasidas, adopted this reading:

Your tongue is sweet, even a single glance is enchanting.

You are like a jewel, and the place you live is Babylon.

(Erdoghan, 2010, p. 177)

The city of Babylon, mentioned in the couplet, is famous for its association with the magic of ancient Mesopotamia. The Qur'ān (Sūrah al-Baqara, āyah 102) also refers to Babylon's association with magic. The motif of *Babylonian magic* features prominently in Eastern literature. In my estimation, Fuzūlī also compares the beloved's gaze to Babylonian magic and has expressed that the sweet-tongued, enchanting beauty is likened to a precious jewel found in the legendary Babylon:

*Your tongue is sweet, your gaze enchanting;
you are like a precious jewel, and your dwelling place is Babylon.*

Despite their limited volume, the poet's Arabic works are rich in rhetorical devices, such as *isti'ārah* (metaphor), *tashbīh* (simile), *jinās* (paronomasia), *tibāq* (antithesis), among others. According to early studies on Fuzūlī, *ishtiqaq* (derivational wordplay) is the most frequently employed rhetorical device in his Arabic qasīdas (Bertels, 1962, p. 511; Jumshudlu, 2012, p. 177). Fuzūlī made extensive use in his works of words derived from the same root yet conveying mutually contradictory meanings. The poet's pseudonym represents the most striking example of this practice. In its first sense, the word *fuzūlī* denotes a person of knowledge and virtue, while in its second sense it refers to someone who speaks vainly or engages in idle talk. In the preface to his Persian Divan, the poet explicitly states that he adopted the pen name Fuzūlī precisely because of this dual meaning. One of his Arabic couplets also alludes directly to this issue:

عَلُوْ مَقَامِي فِي الْفَضَائِلِ ظَاهِرٌ مُّشْبِعٌ اسْمِي بِالْفُضُولِ لَقَدْ سَهَا

(Bandaroglu, 1994, p. 73)

*My excellence in virtue is manifest;
Those who circulate my name under idle talk
(fudūl) have erred.*

Another example: the poet, employing words derived from the same root فط, yet expressing completely opposite meanings – *tafrīt* (neglect) and *ifrāt* (excess), says:

قلبي بتفريط المنى منكسر جسمي بإفراط السقام نحيل
(Bandaroghlu, 1994, p. 91)

*My heart is broken by neglect of desire;
My body, weakened by excess of affliction.*

Fuzuli's couplet reflects the influence of Qur'ānic verses (Sūrah al-Furqān, āyah 67; Sūrah al-Isrā āyahs 29 and 110) and resonates with the wisdom of خَيْرُ الْأُمُورِ — أَوْسَطُهَا، لَا إِفْرَاطَ وَ لَا تَفْرِيْطَ — *The best of deeds is the moderate one; avoid both excess and negligence.*

Fuzuli's Arabic qasīdas are not merely literary compositions; they also serve as poetic reflections of Islamic thought, Sufism, and devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt. Across the qasīdas, one encounters both worldly themes and spiritual, mystical sentiments. Some bayts express love for the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib (ع), while others depict pure affection for an earthly beloved, with its attendant suffering and longing. Proper interpretation of these bayts often requires reference to the Qur'ān, authentic Hadith, and exegesis.

The poet's devotion to Shi'ism and to Imam 'Alī (ع) is evident throughout his work. In bayts that praise Imam 'Alī (ع), Fuzuli demonstrates a meticulous adherence to religious sources, portraying the Imam's exalted status with profound erudition. Consider the eleventh qasīda, dedicated him:

ولِي وصي كامل متكمل تقى نقي زاهد متسرع
اقام بناء الدين جودا و طاعة فأعطى فقيرا خاتما وهو يركع
(Bandaroghlu, 1994, p. 120)

*He is a perfect guardian and executor,
devout, pure, ascetic, and swift in acts of piety.
He established the structure of religion with generosity and obedience,
giving a ring to a poor man while in the state of ruku'.*

The first bayt of the qasida praises the exalted status of Imam 'Alī (ع). The phrase *zahid muteserri* (the hasty ascetic) in the couplet is linked to an authentic (ṣahih) hadith. According to a narration from al-Bukhari: "I used to take the "Suhur" meal with my family and hasten so as to catch the Fajr (morning prayer) with Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)" (Bukhari: 577). This hadith reveals the qualities of a person who rushes to worship, possesses piety, and strives to fulfill religious obligations as quickly as possible. Fuzuli's characterization of Imam 'Alī (ع) as a "hasty ascetic" in the couplet emphasizes his meticulousness in worship and sensitivity in servitude.

The second bayt describes the generosity and philanthropy of Imam 'Alī (ع) and recalls the Incident of Giving the Ring While in *Ruku'* as evidence of this generosity: Imam 'Alī (ع) gave the ring on his finger to a poor man who approached him while he was in *ruku'* during prayer, without breaking his prayer. It is narrated that this led to the revelation of āyah 55 of Sūrah

al-Mā'idah: *Your protector is only Allah, His Messenger, and those who believe. They are those who pray and give zakat while bowing down.*

Classical exegeses explicitly state that this āyah particularly refers to the virtue of Imam 'Alī (ع). Fuzuli's allusion to this event in his bayt confirms Imam 'Alī (ع)'s high position in Islamic society.

As well as being a poet of religious devotion, Fuzuli is also a lyrical poet. In his longest qasīda, the lyrical persona experiences profound emotional turmoil in pursuit of love, undergoing pain and longing while maintaining purity and virtue:

ظواهرُ حالي في الملام علامةٌ وَلَكِنَّ حالي في الضمير سَوَى الصِّفَا

(Bandaroghlu, 1994, p. 73)

*My outward appearance indicates blame,
yet in my inner being, there is nothing but purity.*

Some of the poet's couplets can be compared both to the Emevi period's platonic love-exalting *udhri poetry* and to the Abbasid period's *aff poetry*, which occupies an intermediate position between *udhri poetry* and explicit ghazals. Such poems typically begin with complaints to Allah, accompanied by tears, anguish and sorrow, as well as feelings of longing, reunion, sorrow and joy, and complaint and contentment. These characteristics are also evident in Fuzuli's ghazals. However, the philosophical content typical of Fuzuli's ghazals is not characteristic of Arabic ghazals, which have a simpler effect. In other words, the love conveyed in Fuzuli's works can only be compared to that sung by poets of pure, chaste love due to its purity and innocence. Unlike Arab poets, Fuzuli's love evolves and carries philosophical meaning.

Conclusion: Thus, the 465 surviving Arabic bayts of Fuzuli allow modern scholars to appreciate a distinct facet of his literary genius. Fuzuli's Arabic qasīdas represent a distinct and integral component of his literary corpus. Despite their relatively small number compared to his Turkish and Persian works, they demonstrate mastery of classical Arabic meters, rhetorical devices, and semantic subtleties. Reflecting both spiritual devotion to Imam 'Alī (ع) and the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and lyrical explorations of earthly love, the qasīdas combine Sufi and ethical reflections with the artistic rigour of classical Arabic poetry. Therefore, these qasīdas should be studied alongside his Turkish and Persian poetry to gain a comprehensive understanding of Fuzuli's poetic genius and his contribution to the literary traditions of the Islamic world.

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