

BIOGRAPHY AS LITERATURE OF LIFE: A REFLECTION ON THE LIFE AND WORKS OF SHAYKH FAZAZI AL- ANDALUSI

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ABSTRACT

This paper is designed to discuss the significant place of biography in the work of literature. This is an area that has been less explored by researchers in literary history and this poses great danger for historical scholarship and literature at the wider context. It is fair to say that the future of any community is determined and measured by the attention it pays to her historical personages, because the future nestles comfortably in the past. Therefore, this paper focuses on the biography of Shaykh al- Fazazi al-andalusi. The study adopted historical descriptive method. In the dim twilight of history, al- Fazazi was born and flourished in the political and intellectual scene of the Muslim Spain in the 13th century, spent his utmost strength and skill holding life cheap in support of a cause so high and placing without reserve his chivalry, prowess, wit, and learning. In the light of this importance, a reflection on the life and works of al- Fazazi is necessary. The paper argues that al- Fazazi straddles a fine path of faithful Muslim, and demonstrates artful arrangement in his poetic works. He employed a number of Arabic metaphors that are connected with political traditions, Islamic context, and general cultural experience. The use of epenthetic vowel, phonological component of grammar and the uniformity between edges of prosodic and morphological constituents are model of elegant style. The paper concludes that al- Fazazi, is one of the famous literary figures of his era who brazes the trail of new development in Arabic literature of his era and outstanding littérateur to be reckoned with in all ages.

Keywords: Biography, Literature, Al-Fazazi works, Muslim Spain

INTRODUCTION

The term 'biography' is perhaps the most durable genre of literary Arabic history. The beginning of the genre is traced back to Jahiliyyah; the pre- Islamic period. Most of the earliest works are woven around the deeds and actions of the people of the time. The period is known in history as ayyam al- 'Arab1. (Days of the Arabs) At the early stage of Islam, biography was seen and known as sirah (story), especially with regard

to its subject matter and factuality of the events recorded. It has been considered from this earliest time as a form of historical literature². The second century of Islam (2 A.H/8 C.E) produced the first monumental work in the biographical literature. This was the work of Ibn Ishaq (d.151 A.H/769 C.E), *sirah rasul Allah* and many other works of Arabic biographies were produced³.

The most famous biographical works appeared at the beginning of the 3th /9th Century, titled *kitab at-tabaqat al-kabir* and *jumaa'*. This works ushered in a new and complex form in which the biography was embedded. The most enduring in which the Arabic - Islamic biography that survived till modern age is biographical dictionary. Famous among this is *wafayat al-a'yan* (biographical dictionaries), of Ibn khallikan (d.681 A.H/1282 C.E), *Ansab-al ashraf* of Baladhuri and *al- muntazam* of Ibn al-Jawzi⁴. There are works of other subjects that contain biographies such as *mu'jmah al Buldan* of Yaqut which deals with some geographical dictionaries. Some regular lexicons, particularly *Taj al-arus*, of al Murtada al-Zabidi had brief biographical entries for people whose names are peculiar. Biographies also abound in the literary works of particularly gifted and interested literature.

AL-FAZAZI: His Genealogy and Birth

Little is known about al-Fazazi's biography. The paucity of biographical information about him makes it difficult to adequately appreciate and give a full account of his life .However, the meager information that we are able to deduce from his writings coupled with accounts of him given by scholars enables us to build up information about him, as one of the erudite scholars of remarkable standing produced by Muslim Spain and the great panegyrist of the Prophet Muhammad. (S.A.W)

He was Abu Zayd 'Abd ar-Rahman b. Sa'id b. Yakhlaftan b. Ahmad al- Yajifashi al-andalusi, a distinguished Andalusian prose writer, poet, excellent jurist, a seasoned administrator and mystic teacher popularly known and fondly called al-Fazazi⁵. He was born in Cordova around 540A.H/1145C.E during the reign of (al-Murabit) al-Moravid dynasty, he was probably of Muwallad ancestry⁶. By the time of his birth, the al-Moravid dynasty had become weak and the internal dissension had grown up. Muslim states of Andalusia were then rising against one and others and destroying in turn. This situation was followed by slot and corruption leading to disintegration and fall. Consequently, the al-Moravids fell an easy prey to their more vigorous kinsmen, the Muwahhids. (Almohads) Al-Fazazi as observed earlier, though born in Cordova, where his parents lived; he grew up and became famous during the reign of al-Mohads.

His Upbringing and Education

Al-Fazazi was brought up in Cordova where his parents lived but he later lived in Tilimsan (Tlemcen) Maghrib, Morocco and other places. By the time of his birth, Cordova was home of learned men. Therefore, he grew up in a scholarly environment and centre of intellectual activities. His early education followed the customary line of Islamic education of his time. This involved the studying of Qur'an, Hadith, Tafsir and Fiqh. He memorized Qur'an at an early age in life.⁷ He later learned the rudiments of religious and literary sciences. The settlement of the influential scholars in Cordova gave him ample opportunity to broaden his knowledge. He attended scholarly sessions under different scholars, moving from one place to others until he learned at the feet of many great scholars of his time. Famous among the teachers of al-Fazazi (d. 627A.H/1230C.E) were Abu 'Abdullah al-Tajibi (d. 581A.H/1185C.E), and Abu Jabr Ahmad al-Husanah, Abu Sabr as-Sabit and Abu Qasim a-Sahilih and Abi 'Abdullah b. Fahr and Abu al-Hassan b. as-Sa'igi and many other scholars within his reach⁸. He studied various branches of Arabic and Islamic science like arts, grammar, language, etymology, theology, jurisprudence, poetry, fiqh and hadith. He endeavoured to build up himself by engaging in voracious reading and vigorous studies. This extensive reading, coupled with his natural talent, aided his mastery of Arabic language and other Islamic sciences. Al-Fazazi, still not satisfied with the knowledge he acquired, proceeded to Cordova University, where he received his higher education in many branches of Arabic and Islamic studies at the feet of renowned scholars of that time. He later visited many North African cities such as Morocco, Tilimsan and extended his tour to other neighbouring towns, where he had friends and disciples. One of the famous friends of al-Fazazi is Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Kanem, who hailed from West Africa

His public service

After a long study and an impressive academic career, the fame of al-Fazazi spread to the ruling dynasty of Al-Mohads, consequently, he was recognized by the people in authority, and was invited to serve in the administration of al-Mohads. Initially, he was appointed as the chief Qadi (Judge) of Murcia by Almohads Sultan Abu Ya 'qub Yusuf (1167-1184 CE) whom he enjoyed his confidence and esteem¹⁰. Al-Fazazi as a judge of Murcia, performed wonderfully well in this position. His legal dispensation was full of justice and his juridical knowledge earned him good name and high esteem in the Almohad court. When Abu Ya 'qub Yusuf passed on in (1184 CE), his immediate successor Abu Yusuf Ya 'qub al-Mansur (1184-1199 CE) had no hesitation in appointing al-Fazazi as the state secretary, here was his secretarial

dignity was manifested¹¹. In this new post, al-Fazazi performed his assignment with sincerity and diligence. This won him the confidence of Almohad rulers. Hence, he advised them on state matters, with boldness. During this period, both Muslims and Arab princes had succumbed to the vices of civilization and became enervated.

It should be noted however that, throughout the reign of Abu Yusuf Ya 'qub (1184-1199 CE), al-Fazazi enjoyed his position, received the honour and patronage of the ruling dynasty, but no sooner that Abu Yusuf Ya 'qub passed on in 1199 CE than his boldness earned him the wrath of the opponents of the ruling class. Intrigues started to follow him everywhere. His long association with the past rulers and his unreserved resentment against the increasing involvement of the rulers and the princes in the pursuit of materialistic illusion landed him in jail. His enemies made mischievous reports about him to the ruler, Almohad Caliph, Abu al- 'Ala (d. 640A.H/1242C.E), for which he was tried, convicted and jailed. He spent a considerable time in prison, but was later released on royal pardon¹². After he was released from jail, al-Fazazi was tired of the ups and downs of the political intrigues and power and he therefore, abandoned all worldly pursuits. He started roaming through Cordova, Andalus, Marrakush, and Magrib. He engaged himself in meditation, worship, invocation and writing¹³. He spent the latter years of his life chiefly in Marrakush, till he passed on in 627A.H/1230 C.E.

Al -Fazazi followed the example of scholars and sages, and left behind a praiseworthy memorial and imperishable monument.

His works

The circumstances that brought about the composition of his works had their roots in the political situation of his time which landed him in jail, although he was released later upon change of power. Tired of the ups and downs of the political entanglement, he found solace in Tasawwuf. Sufism and the praise of the prophet Muhammad became aesthetic importance at the time of al- Fazazi. He, therefore, engaged himself in fervent prayers. Al- Fazazi demonstrated this belief and convictions in his literary works. Generally speaking, al-Fazazi as a prolific writer had a thorough grounding in the traditional Islamic sciences. His proficiency in Arabic language helped him to leave behind a valuable legacy for which he was renowned and his fame rested upon as one of the literary figures of great importance produced by Muslim Spain. His works are distinguished by completeness of detail, accuracy, and the truly stupendous learning of al-Fazazi, thus his works are a vast storehouse of valuable information for scholars of Arabic language and literature.

Below are the major works of al-Fazazi¹⁴.

I. Al-'ishriniyyat

II. Al-'ashriyyat

III. Al-mu 'ashsharat al-hubbiyyat

Al-'ishriniyyat

Al- 'Ishriniyyat is a panegyric poetry on the prophet Muhammad. It is a collection of twenty-nine odes (qasidah). Each Ode contains twenty lines, and the individual odes are arranged in alphabetical rhyme letter. He composed the work in Cordova in the year (604A.H/1207-8 C.E). The work was originally entitled al-Wasa'il al-Mutaqabbalah (the acceptable means) but it later acquired the popular titled 'Ishriniyyat (the twenties) due to the fact that every ode in the work contains twenty lines. The fame of 'Ishriniyyat within a short period, spread beyond the place of its composition. It was spread to North African states such as Tilimsan, Morocco and Sudan. With the passage of time, a certain personage, Muhammad Yusuf b. Masad, studied 'Ishriniyyat at the feet of al-Fazazi from whom he later received a license (ijaazah) on the 'Ishriniyyat. al-Fazazi recited it in the holy mosque of the Ka'bah, during his pilgrimage to Makkah in 624A.H/1227 C.E 15. Some years later Abu Bakr b. Muhib built three hemistiches on the original verses of al-Fazazi and made the stanza pentastich (Takhmis). Al-'Ishriniyyat, now contains 580 stanzas and each contains five hemistiches. The whole poem is written in Tawil (long) metre, the most common of all traditional Arabic metres extensively employed in Arabic poetry. The dual authors of the work in the composition of 'Ishriniyyat; followed the conventional style of beginning poem with Nasib in which the poet used to express his nostalgia for his lost love, wailing on devastated places. The same pattern was followed by Ibn Muhib, who supplied an introduction to the poem in the years later.

Al-'Ishriniyyat poems begin with the following poetic verses¹⁶.

خليلي عوجا بالمحصب وانزلا	ولا تبغيا عن حيفه متحوّلا
أكرم به مغنى تحراه منزلا	أحق عباد الله بالمجد والعللا
نبي له أعلى الجنان مبو	

I. O my two friends turn toward Muhasib and alight

II. Wish not, to move away from the high valley

- III. How honourable the house is! Aim at it
- IV. The most deserving glory and greatness among the (creatures)
- V. servants of Allah
- VI. A prophet, for whom the highest dwelling place in paradise is reserved.

Other verses of Ishriniyyat poems run thus: 17

على كل فن فضل الله فنه
بأن فرض الدين القويم وسنه
فقد ساس انس الخلق طرا وجته
اعد نظرا في الخلق تعلم بانه
كأحمد لم ينشأ ولا هو ينشأ

- I. On every creed, Allah excelled his creed (Religion)
- II. He established a firm Religion and sanctioned it (with law)
- III. Indeed, he dealt with all creatures, men and jins
- IV. Look in retrospect at the creature, and you will realize that
- V. The like of Ahmad was not created and will never be created

It is worthy of note to say that as al Ishriniyyah starts with letter Alif (أ) the first letter of Arabic alphabet, it also ends with letter Yaa, (يا) the last alphabet of Arabic characters. Suffice the Takmis (pentasths) below¹⁸. It reads as follows:

فيا ربنا في أرضه وسمائه أمتنا علي تصديقنا باصطفائه
فائنا وذو الأشواق يعيا بدائه يشق علينا العيش دون لقائه
إذا الدين لم يكمل فلا كانت الدنيا

- I. Oh Our Lord of heaven and earth

- II. Make us believers in the message of Al- Mustapha
- III. We are longing and conscious of his call
- IV. We are longing to meet him but earthly life (prevents)
- V. When religion is faulty life is worthless

Al-'ashriyyat

Al- 'ashriyyat is another work of al- Fazazi. The work was composed by an Arabic scholar and mystic teacher, who served as secretary to a number of Muslim rulers both in Spain and Morocco¹⁹. He was Abu Zayd 'Abd ar-Rahman b. Yakhalaftan b. Ahmad al-Fazazi (d. 627 A.H / 1230 C.E). At later period, 'Abdullah b. Fudi (d. 1245 A.H / 1829 C.E.), a Nigerian scholar and one of the leading literary figures in the 19th century, throughout West Africa, wrote the pentastich²⁰ (Takhmis) on the original work in about (1230 A.H / 1820 C.E.). 'Abdullah added three hemistiches to each verse of al-Fazazi, thereby making it five hemistiches.

The Format of al-'ashriyyat

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

Structural Arrangement of Al-'ashriyyat

The structural arrangement of al-'ashriyyat, makes it unique and different from works of other scholars. It is based on ten odes, while the last consonant of every hemistich is identical to others, In the manner of structural arrangement of al-'ashriyyat, al-Fazazi organized it into conceptual structure. He composed the verses and grouped them into chapters in accordance with Arabic alphabetical order of Western format. Every chapter contains ten odes (asharat /Decaodes), hence the title al-'ashriyyat is derived from it.

The poems of al-'ashriyyat open thus:

أجدت بك الأيام و النفس تهرأ

كأنك من خطب المنون مبرأ

أمنت الليالي وهي أغدر صاحب

فكن حذرا إن التوائب تفجأ

أما لك من فقد الأوبة واعظ

و لا فرق إلا أن سيرك أبطأ

I. The days of life renewed themselves with you and the soul is tattering

II. As if you are immune from the cause of death

III. You feel secured (with passing of) the night, not knowing that it is a perfidious partner

IV. Be cautious, death will suddenly come

V. Is it not enough for you as admonition, the death of the beloved ones?

VI. No difference (between you and the dead) except, that your own journey is delayed

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

أيا غافلا والموت بالقرب يطراً

أهمك مرعى في مريبك يمرأ أجذك لم تعمل بما كنت تقرأ

أجدت كأنك من خطب المنون مبرأ

بك الأيام والنفس تهرأ

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

The verse of the poem by al-Fazazi, which comprises the fourth and fifth hemistiches of the first stanza and the last consonants are Hamzah, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet. This system is used throughout the ten couplet of the first chapter. The couplet called Bait is regarded as a unit of composition. This is made up of two hemistiches; the rhyme is enunciated and maintained throughout the poem. Al-Qasa'id al-'ashriyyat has many identical rhymes in their sequence. The rhymes of the poem are usually masculine, but at times feminine.

Suffice the following verses as example: 23

بلابله تهدي إليك مذلة بلاؤك مال ترتجي منه بلة
بدت لك أعلام المنون مظلة بخلت بما يفنى ويرجع جلة
ونورك قد يخبو ونارك لا تخبو

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

In the above poem, it is important to note that the consonant letter in each ode is not the same, the fourth and fifth hemistiches which are the original verse of al-Fazazi begin with hamza, the first, the second and the third hemistiches are consonant letters of Ibn Muhib. Another illustrating example is the following verses

in al-‘ashriyyat 24.

عدوك شيطان عن الدّين كايّد
عناء شديد في هلاكك كايّد
عتيد له في كل فعل مكيد
عنائك في كف الهوى وهو قايد
إلى منهل يظما عليه المطالع

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

The poems of al-‘ashriyyat however end with letter Yaa. It reads thus:

يراهم زيوفاً ذو الحجا بعد نقدهم
يضيعون عمراً في هواهم ورقدهم
ينادى الحجا أهل الحجا بعد فقدهم
ويبهات ما في الحى بعدهم حى

- i. Men of intellect after their ponderness, adjudged them as spurious people
- ii. They waste their life in their greed and sleep (laziness)
- iii. They imitate the righteous people prefading to be like them in their belief
- iv. The wise men call upon the men of intellect (to work righteously) after missing them
- v. Alas! never, there is none, after them in the tent

The hemistiches start with the same letters, both at the beginning and at the end. Here al –Fazazi demonstrates as evidence of his extra ordinary knowledge Arabic

language.

Al-Mu'ashsharat Al-Hubiyat

This is another work credited to Shaykh al-Fazazi. It is an Arabic poem of the pietistic invocations and prayers composed to praise God, and supplication to Him. Al-mu'ashsharat al-Hubiyat unlike al-'Ishriniyat and al-'ashriyat is composed in a conventional Arabic metre of two lines. In this work the ascetic characteristics of al-Fazazi are well pronounced. As a man of spiritual inclination, he was fond of supplicating to Allah in time of his trials. Al-Mu'ashsharat al-Hubiyat portrays al-Fazazi as a committed Sufi who was in trouble, but has hope in Allah and communicated with Him. The work is opened thus,

ومنك وجدت اللّطف في كلّ نائب	إليك مددت الكفّ في كلّ شدّة
فحقّق رجائي فيك يا ربّ واكفني	شمت عدوّ أو إساءة صاحب
وكم كربة نجيتني من غمارها	وكانت شجّا بين الحشا والترائب
أغثنى فقد سدّت علىّ مذاهبي	فيا منجى المضطر عند دعائه

- i. I stretched my hands to you (God) at every hardship/distress
- ii. I found a relief from you (God) at every difficulty
- iii. O my Lord, actualize my hope in you and protect me
- iv. From the evils and harms of enemy or of friend
- v. How many of sorrow you have saved me from its immense affliction
- vi. It was sorrow that exists between the bowel and the heart
- vii. O the saviour of the sufferer when he calls (Him) in supplication
- viii. Grant me relief as all roads are barricaded (against me)

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This paper has attempted to give account of the biography of Shaykh Ahmad Fazazi who lived in Muslim Spain in the 13th Century. It became apparent in this paper that Shaykh al-Fazazi is one of the outstanding scholars that emerged in the Muslim World; therefore he should not be allowed to enter into oblivion. The paper highlights further on the connection between him and the rulers of his time and served them in different capacities; as a Judge at one time and state secretary at other time. He was also appointed as adviser sometimes. His works serve as historical source for the early Arabic literature; contain the characteristics of the early Arabic poetry. A-Fazazi used his poetic compositions sometimes as the media of his era, stated clearly his points of view at public deliberations. In study of his works we came across

motivations, reflections and the grammatical code employed to depict his ideas. The choice of words used reflects the realistic linguistic choices that project the reality of his time. We may surmise with the submission that his works serve as a model of successful rhetorical technique of hybrid genre and mixed styles of Arabic.

In conclusion, al-Fazazi was a man of many parts but his fame stands on his writings and an examination of his works reveals that he was one of the literary figures of great importance produced by the Muslim Spain. He has the honour of polishing the language of his works, and arranged his poems in a form of composition which is very difficult to compose by ordinary person. Considering the contents and sequence of its parts, the uniform manner which the themes of the poems were composed, is highly orderly

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