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Chapter 12: The Precedence Of The Shi'ah In Prosody

Section One: The Pioneer in This Field of Arabic Literature

There is no doubt that Khalil ibn Ahmad al–Farahidi, the scholar previously–mentioned in the chapter on lexicology is the first to invent *al–a'rud*, prosody whereby he fortified Arab poetry, and as a result is known as *al–A'rudi* (the prosodian). An attempt to count instances where the scholars declared this fact will no doubt lengthen our book. However, we have cited some in the original version of this book.

There is a claim by Ibn Faris in *Al–Sahibi* that prosody was an ancient science forgotten over time so that its circulation among the people decreased. Later on, this discipline was revitalized by al–Khalil. Ibn Faris cites the saying of al–Walid ibn al–Mughirah concerning the Holy Qur'an, 'I have compared what Muhammad recites with the recitation of poetry, both its *hajaz* and its *rajaz* (two types of poetical metres) and found that its does not resemble it at all'.

No historical document corroborates this allegation nor could it be backed by any plausible inference. It appears that the assumption of Ibn Faris was nothing more than personal conjecture, which is not acceptable to those who are learned in historical reports. It will be noted that al–Walid was cognizant of poetic rhymes by mere natural disposition, the same way he knew the Arabic language itself.

Obviously this is different from the discipline which al–Khalil has systematised and in which he classified the Arabic verse into five types (*da'irahs*) consisting of fifteen metres altogether. In *Kitab al–Tanbih*, Hamzah ibn al–Hasan al–Isfahani was explicit on the matter: "The Islamic state has not produced the like of al–Khalil in inventing disciplines which were, hitherto unknown to Arab scholars. The best proof of this is the science of prosody which was the brain child of al–Khalil, for neither did he learn it from some sage nor did he emulate a preceding scholar...".

A full account of this issue is quoted in the original version of this book. Abu al–Faraj Ibn al–Nadim also says: 'And he (al–Khalil) was the initiator of prosody and thereby preserved the purity of Arabic poetry.'

Ibn Qutaybah says about al–Khalil: "He was the originator of prosody." Abu Bakr al–Zubaydi states in the opening part of *Istidrak al–Ghalat*: "Al–Khalil ibn Ahmad was the most distinguished scholar of his time, one of the geniuses of the nation and the master of the intelligent ones, the like of whom the world has never known.... Then from his own invention he wrote a book on prosody named. *Al–Farsh wa al–Mithal fi al–'Arud*, in which he compiled all the poetic metres, organising similar forms into their specific classes thus, forming the *da'irah*s. This brilliant feat rendered the minds helpless, dazzled and overwhelmed."

In *Maratib al–Nahwiyyin*, Abdulwahid says, "al–Khalil introduced a number of novelties... and he invented prosody. He created other forms of verse apart from the known metres of Arabic poetry." In his biography, Ibn Khillikan observes: "He was the one who contrived the science of prosody and brought it to light..."Allamah Jamal al–Din al–Hasan ibn Yusuf ibn al–Mutahhar al–Hilli says in *Al–Khulasah* that al–Khalil ibn Ahmad was the most skilled master in literature and his word in it was authoritative. He invented prosody and his distinction is very obvious. He was a follower of the Imamiyyah School".

The comments cited so far suffice our aim for if we were to quote all that the scholars of literature have said about al–Khalil this section would be unduely long.

Section Two: The First to Write about Prosody After al-Khalil

The first person to write about prosody after al–Khalil was Abu Uthman Bakr ibn Habib al–Mazini the grammarian who died in 248 A.H. Abu al–Abbas al–Mubarrad states that al–Mazini was among the servants of Isma'il ibn Maytham, a master of those who elaborated on Shi'ism. Al–Najashi observed in his *Asma al–Musannifin min al–Shi'ah* that he was the chief of the masters of grammar, lexicology and other branches of Arabic studies in Basra and he had well–known precedence in this field"

Jamal al–Din ibn al–Mutahhar gives a similar account about him in *Al–Khulasah*, adding that he was one of the Imamiyyah scholars. On his part, al–Suyuti records in *Al–Tabaqat*: "He was a master of Arabic, whose narrations were profuse. He believed in the return (*al–raj'ah*). Whoever disputed with him was silenced because al–Mazini had exeptional fluency. He disputed with al–Akhfash on some issues and confuted him". Al–Mubarrad says: "Apart from Sibawayh, Abu Uthman was the most learned grammarian of all".

Abu Uthman wrote a number of books such as *Kitab fi al—Qur'an* (a book on the Qur'an), *Kitab 'Ilal al—Nahw* (a book on the problematic cases of grammar), *Kitab al—Tafsir* (a book on exegesis), *Kitab Sibawayh* (the book of Sibawayh), *Kitab Ma yalhan fih al—'Ammah* (a book on popular solecisms), *Kitabal—Alif wa al—Lam* (a book about 'alif' and 'lam' i.e. the definite article) *Kitab al—Tasrif* (a book on morphology), *Kitab al—'Arud* (a book on prosody), *Kitab al—Qawafi* (a book on rhymes) and *Kitab al—Dibaj* (a book on style). Ibn al—Nadim, al—Suyuti, al—Hamawi and other scholars have confirmed that he wrote these books. *Kashf al—Zunun* also mentions al—Mazini's *Kitab al—'Arud*.

Section Three: Other Books on Prosody Written by Shi'ah scholars

Kitab al–lqna' fi al–'Arud (a book on prosody) which is written by the most efficient scholar, al–Sahib ibn 'Abbad, who was previously mentioned and Kitab Sina'at al–Shi'r fi al–Arud wa al–Qawafi (a book on prosody and rhymes) written by al–Husayn ibn Muhammad ibn Ja'afar ibn Muhammad ibn al–Husayn al–Rafi'i who was known as al–Khali'. Al–Rafi'i died in the fourth century. In our original book we have presented a detailed biography of him. He was an Imamiyyah Shi'ah. Others are Kitab 'Iyar al–Shi'r (the book on the standard of poetry), Kitab Tahdhib al–Tib' (book on refining the character) and Kitab al–'Arud (a book of prosody), all of which are written by Sharif Muhammad ibn Ahmad al–Tabataba'i al–Isfahani, as stated in Nasamat al–Sahrfi Dhikr Man Tashayya' wa Sha'ar. He was born in 322 A.H. The author of Ma'ahid al–Tansis praised him and ascribed to him Kitab al–'Arud (a book of prosody), adding: "No one preceded him in that. He is the author of the famous lines on good justification (tabrir) which are as follows:

Oh you whose generosity water emulates,

While your heart is as hard as stone.

Would that my fortune equals what your body,

Apportions to your shirt, oh unique one of humanity!

Nor is your shabbiness cause for bewilderment,

Since by the moon, hangs your tarboosh.

Other works on prosody are: *Kitab al-'Arud wa al-Qawafi* by the previously-mentioned Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Wazir, *Kitab al-Kafi fi Ilm al-'Arud wa al-Qawafi* and *Kitab Nazm al-'Arud* both of which were written by Sayyid Abu al-Ridha' Fadlallah al-Rawandi, may Allah be pleased with him, who was living in the year 548. *Al-Darajat al-Rafi'ah* contains a good biographical account of him.

Another work on prosody is *Risalah al-'Arud wa al-Qawafi*, a book written by the poet al-Hakim al-Anwari who died in the year in which the Abbasid dynasty fell.

Kitab al–Arud by Malik al–Nuhat, the author of Al–Umdah fi al–Nahw which is mentioned in Kashf al–Zunun which declares that he was a Shi'ah. We shall talk more about him in the section on the leading grammarians.

The books Al-Iklil al-Taji, Qurrat 'Ayn al-Khalil (which is a commentary on Ibn al-Hajib's Al-Nazm al-Jalil) and a commentary on Sadr al-Din al-Sawi's Qasidah were written by Sheikh Taqiy al-Din al-Hasan ibn Ali ibn Dawud al-Hilli, the author of *Kitab al-Rijal*. He is popularly known as Ibn Dawud,

the student of Sayyid ibn Tawus, both of whom are mentioned in the section on masters of defamation and authentication (al-jarh wa al-ta'adil).

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