Concepts of Authorship
in Pre-Modern Arabic Texts

Lale Behzadi, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila (eds.)

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Table of Contents

A Pre-Modern Anthologist at Work:

The Case of Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Waṭwāṭ (d. 718/1318)

Antonella Ghersetti

1 Preliminary Remarks: Concept of "Author" and Degrees of Authorship in the Pre-Modern Period

In his seminal work on the Arabic book, Pedersen pointed out that in the pre-modern period, "the author of the Islamic book seldom reveals himself as a person. The purpose of a book is not to express personal feelings or originality [...]. The author picks up from his notes and sets down an item that he finds useful" sometimes – but not always – listing the authorities from whom he has received it.[1] If, on the one hand, this statement highlights the composite character of writing and its peculiar nature in the Islamicate pre-modern world, on the other hand it presupposes a modern concept of authorship where individuality and originality are crucial.

This presupposition is clearly misleading, if mechanically applied to pre-modern literature. The debate about the concept of authorship initiated some four decades ago questioned the monolithic notion of "Author". In the meantime, it also emphasized its inadequacy for comprehending the different degrees of authorship and the diverse kinds of relationships between the person claiming the intellectual responsibility of a text and the text itself. "La mort de l'auteur", the cornerstone of this debate and probably Barthes' most controversial essay, should be taken as a warning to refocus literary analysis on the reader and the text, rather than attempt to escape the author as an individual. If Barthes' provocative statement must be taken very cautiously when dealing with pre-modern literatures,[2] his emphasis on the fact that the text is a tissue of citations could

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1   Pedersen, *Arabic Book*, 23.
2   "In what way then could Barthes' Author – dead or alive – be of any interest for medievalists? 'The Death of the Author' asked no questions and gave no answers directly relevant to interpreters of Medieval literature", Greene, "What happened," 206.

be a useful perspective in approaching many pieces of pre-modern Arabic literature, and in particular *adab* anthologies whose compilatory character is self-evident. As a consequence, instead of investigating the existence of "the Author" ("one obvious distinct feature of the Medieval author is that he/she/it is a difficult animal to corner and to describe", says Greene,[3] and we cannot but agree) it is perhaps more fruitful to beat the track proposed by Foucault in « Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur? ». Two of the four directions of research he listed[4] seem to be particularly convenient to our purpose: the relation of appropriation between an author and a text and the position of the author as expressed on his/her own books through prologues or constructed figures.

To have better insights into the concepts of authorship in the pre-modern world we should consider using different theoretical benchmarks, being also careful to "disentangle the issue of the *originality* of material from that of its authorship".[5] The first step is perhaps to recognize the existence of a wider range of authorial positions.[6] For instance, different degrees of authorship were acknowledged and clearly described by Saint Bonaventure, an Italian scholastic theologian and philosopher of the order of the Friars Minor (1217-1274). He distinguished four degrees of interaction with the texts: the copyist (*scriptor*) simply copies somebody else's texts; the compiler (*compilator*) puts together somebody else's texts; the commentator (*commentator*) combines somebody else's texts adding his own texts as commentaries; the author (*auctor*) writes both somebody

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3 Greene, "Introduction," 3.

4 Summarized by Greene, "What happened," 207: "(1) the name of the author [...]; (2) the relation of appropriation between an author and a text; (3) the relation of attribution between an author and a corpus of texts constituted as an *opus*; (4) the position of the author as expressed in his or her own books through prologues or constructed figures such as the narrator, the copyist, the singer, or the memorialist, and also the position of the author in various types of discourses."

5 Kennedy, "*Maqāmāt* as a nexus," 198.

6 Greene, "Introduction," 2: "from the inspired creator to the humble scribe, there is a gamut of authorial positions that are capable of sustaining literary excellence and revealing a subject."

else's texts and his own texts, and his own are considered more important than the others'.[7]

> Quadruplex est modus faciendi librum. Aliquis enim scribit aliena, nihil addendo vel mutando; et iste mere dicitur *scriptor*. Aliquis scribit aliena, addendo, sed non de suo; et iste *compilator* dicitur. Aliquis scribit et aliena et sua, sed aliena tamquam principalia, et sua tamquam annexa ad evidentiam; et iste dicitur *commentator* non auctor. Aliquis scribit et sua et aliena, sed sua tamquam principalia, aliena tamquam annexa ad confirmationem; et talis debet dici *auctor*.[8]

Arabic authors of the same period were also well aware of the existence of different degrees of interaction with the texts: Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), for instance, circumscribes his authorial activity stating that he is a compiler (*murattib*) and not an author (*muṣannif*).[9] The contrastive use of these two terms seems to hint at a perceptible difference in the authorial activity: the first term (*murattib*) refers to the activity of putting into proper order, of barely organizing and arranging texts received from somebody else; the second (*muṣannif*) seems to hint at a certain degree of originality, or at least at some personal intervention more important than simply rearranging received texts. This statement is contained in a longer passage of *al-Dhayl ʿalā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila* of Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1392) that criticizes Ibn al-Jawzī for his inaccuracy and for

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7   The Latin term *auctor*, derives from the verb *augeo* (to augment, to increase). The author (*auctor*) was "the one who augmented" in the sense that "he made something successful, gave something a prosperous future". On this etymology of *auctor* see Bettini, "Alle soglie dell'autorità."

8   Bonaventura, "Commentaria in Sententias Magistri Petri Lombardi," (Quaestio IV), "Proemium" = (Proemium Quaestio IV), in Opera Omnia, vol. 1, 14-15. The distinction is also mentioned by Barthes (*Ancienne rhétorique*, 184-185), who nevertheless does not quote his source. Italics are mine.

9   *Anā murattib wa-lastu bi-muṣannif*: quoted in Ibn Rajab *al-Dhayl ʿalā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, vol. 2, 487. It is always tricky to translate these terms: in this case I translate *murattib* with "compiler", which corresponds exactly to what Saint Bonaventure defines as "compilator", and *muṣannif* with "author" to stress the different degrees of interaction with the text.

his habit of writing books without checking them carefully once they are finished (*fa-yuṣannifu l-kitāba wa-lā ya'tabiruhu*). The terms Ibn Rajab uses to describe the authorial activity of Ibn al-Jawzī (*taṣānīf, taṣnīf, yuṣannifu*) seem to hint at an activity of abridgement and summarization (*fa-kāna taṣnīfuhu fī funūnin mina l-'ulūmi bi-manzilati l-ikhtiṣāri min kutubin fī tilka l-'ulūm*) which, if compared with *tartīb*, implies a higher degree of interaction with the texts and another variety of personal intervention.[10]

A quick glance at dictionaries proves to be of some help in grasping some nuances of the terms employed when we are dealing with the concept of authorship in the arena of Arabic literature in the pre-modern period. Both *Lisān al-'arab* of Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311-1312) and *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* of al-Fīrūzābādī (d. 817/1415) relate *ṣannafa* to the process of discriminating and singling out or setting apart,[11] while *allafa* is related to the process of combining and putting together or joining.[12] Hence, if *ṣannafa* alludes to the analytical process of separating into categories and differentiating, *allafa* on the contrary points to the synthetic process of combining. The alternate use of the former or the latter in the same text must be taken as a hint at the fact that two different processes are in play in the activity of writing, and especially of writing literary anthologies, the case in point in our essay. Thus, the author's relationship with the texts suggested by these two Arabic terms is not far from that described by Barthes for the Medieval author, who receives and recomposes the texts.[13]

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10   Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, vol. 2, 487.

11   *LA*: *al-taṣnīfu: tamyīzu l-ashyā'i ba'ḍihā min ba'ḍ; ṣannafa al-shay'a: mayyaza ba'ḍahu min ba'ḍ; taṣnīfu l-shay'i: ja'luhu aṣnāfan* and *QM*: *ṣannafahu taṣnīfan: ja'alahu aṣnāfan; mayyaza ba'ḍahā 'an ba'ḍ.*

12   *LA*: *allafta bayna shay'ayn ta'līfan; allafta baynahum ta'līfan idhā jama'ta baynahum tafarruq; allafta al-shay'a ta'līfan idhā waṣalta ba'ḍahu bi-ba'ḍin wa-minhu ta'līfu l-kitāb; allafta l-shay' ay waṣaltahu* and *QM*: *allafa baynahumā ta'līfan: awqa'a l-ulf.*

13   Barthes, *Ancienne rhétorique*, 185: "Ce que par anachronisme nous pourrions appeler l'*écrivain* est donc essentiellement au moyen âge: 1) *un transmetteur* : il reconduit une matière absolue qui est le trésor antique, source d'autorité ; 2) *un combinateur* : il a le droit de « casser » les œuvres passées, par une analyse sans frein, et de les recomposer (la « création », valeur moderne, si l'on en avait eu l'idée au moyen âge, y aurait été

2 Degrees of Authorship in Literary Anthologies

If the Arabic anthologist was both a *muṣannif* and a *mu'allif*, in that both an analytical and a synthetic process were applied, it is perhaps more problematic to specify which kind of interaction with the text was regarded as prevailing. In other words, which degree of authorship he had, or to which one of the categories listed by Saint Bonaventure he could be ascribed. Was he deemed – or did he see himself as – a *commentator* more than an *auctor*, considering that he simply selects and puts together texts received from another authority appending to them his remarks in the guise of subordinate texts? Was he considered – or did he see himself as – a *compilator*, on the basis that he limited himself to picking the best from received texts? In reading the prefaces of Arabic literary anthologies one has the impression that the anthologists had a fairly clear perception of the degree of their personal interaction with the texts, both the ones they received and the ones they produced. Some creative effort was always involved in compilation, as Hilary Kilpatrick has extensively demonstrated in the case of Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī's *Kitāb al-aghānī*.[14] Even in the case where the presence of the anthologist seems strictly limited to the selection and the prologue is quite scanty, a subjective implication cannot be denied. This is the case of one of the most renowned anthologists of the Abbasid era and a model of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Waṭwāṭ, Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī (d. 429/1039), whose texts are mostly intended as bare compilations of fine prose or poetry and whose explicit interventions are limited to extremely brief prologues.[15] The existence of a subjective implication was quite clear to the pre-modern Arabic anthologists: one of them, Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm al-Ḥuṣrī (d. 413/1022), makes it explicit in the prologue of his *Zahr al-ādāb*, in a passage where he underlines the relevance of the selection process: "I have no other motif of pride in writing this [book] (*ta'līfihi*) than the power of making a fine

désacralisée au profit de la structuration)."

14 Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs*.

15 A quick survey of some of his anthologies shows that the prologue (*muqaddima*), where usually the authorial voice is more present, is extremely concise and almost devoid of subjective interventions. On the art of the *muqaddima* in his works see Orfali, "Art of the *muqaddima*."

choice (*ḥusn al-ikhtiyār*): this is a piece of the man's intellect and a sign of his backwardness or of his excellence."[16]

A fruitful approach when investigating the concept of authorship in pre-modern literature seems hence to shift from the notion of author and authorship to the notion of subject and subjectivity, a direction of research also proposed for European Medieval literature by Michel Zink.[17] In other words, what we could investigate more appropriately is the presence of a person in the text, be it in the form of selection, combination and arrangement of materials, or perceptible linguistic signs. As a matter of fact, every text carries in itself some signs pointing to the author's presence: personal pronouns, adverbs of time and space, verbs conjugation, apostrophes where the verb in the first or second person breaks the impersonal discourse and introduces the enunciator in statements.[18] Depending on the presence or absence of the "authorial function" (in Foucault's words) these can refer to an internal voice (narrator) or to the real enunciator (the author as a person) and thus give birth to a plurality of voices.

In the case of Arabic literary anthologies, mostly based on reported materials (prose and poetry quotations), it is rather easy to tell whether the enunciator corresponds to the historical author (the "real" writer). In this type of works the material, perceptible signs of the presence of the author are fairly reduced, and normally limited to the prologue (*muqaddima*) and the epilogue, if at all present.[19] The prologue is perhaps the part of the work where the authorial voice is more detectable and where the author's presence is more transparent;[20] it also functions as a bridge

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16 *Wa-laysa lī fī taʾlīfihi mina l-iftikhāri aktharu min ḥusni l-ikhtiyāri wa-khtiyāru l-marʾi qiṭʿatun min ʿaqlihi tadullu ʿalā takhallufihi aw faḍlih*: al-Ḥuṣrī, *Zahr,* vol. 1, 36.

17 A step in this same direction has also been made for the Islamicate world in later periods: see e.g. Franke, "The Ego of the Mullah."

18 Zumthor, *Essai,* 86-87.

19 On the *muqaddima* see the seminal work by Freimark, *Vorwort.*

20 A case in point is that of *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabāʾ*, where the preface contains much more details and individual traces than the rest of the work: "One feels especially lucky to find this candor and detail considering the relative absence of the *adab* author's voice from the actual text of an anthological work such as *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabāʾ*" (Thomas,

between the author and the reader, between the real context and the text, and there the author tries to establish a personal relationship with his readers.[21] The *muqaddima* has been highly formalized as a literary form since the 4th/10th c., hence the possibility for the authors to leave a mark of their subjectivity was no doubt very limited.[22] Still, traces of subjectivity can be found. They are highly variable depending on the personality of the author, on his social context and on his purposes. For example, in Ibn Qutayba's (d. 275/889) extensive prologue to *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* the authorial voice is resounding throughout the text, in the form of numerous verbs in the first person, cross-references to his *Adab al-kātib*, expressions of authorial intentions, apostrophes. But this tangible presence of the authorial voice is not so common in other works, where brevity and an impersonal tone are prevailing.[23]

Notwithstanding this general trend, there are some cases where – although Roland Barthes proclaimed the death of the author – the author seems to be alive and well, cases in which the author's voice is clearly perceptible both *in the text* and *behind the text*. One is *Ghurar al-khaṣāʾiṣ al-wāḍiḥa wa-ʿurar al-naqāʾiḍ al-fāḍiḥa*, the literary anthology written by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Waṭwāṭ: here the authorial voice seems to be much more present than in other works of the same genre, both in the prologue and throughout the whole text. It often takes the form of explicit linguistic signs like the authorial interventions within the text and the expression of his personal opinions; but it can also be concretized in references to autobiographical events and to his own condition, or in the choice of

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Concept, 158).

21 Freimark, *Vorwort*, 58.

22 "In literary Arabic, the introduction did not allow for lengthy autobiographical statements" (Riedel, *Searching*, 99).

23 See e.g. Thomas, *Concept*, 227-228: "Ibn Qutayba writes in a prose bearing the hallmarks of high-minded authority: elaboration, *isnād*s, sustained *sajʿ*, parallelistic syntax, rhetorical devices, and didactic phrasing. This latter includes the frequent use of the royal "we," exhortation of the reader with imperatives such as *wa-ʿlam*, *wa-ʿrif*, and *tafahham al-amrayn wa-fruq bayn al-jinsayn* (1:40). In contrast, al-Rāghib's prose is unadorned and the *sajʿ* sporadic. He does not address the reader, refers to himself mostly in the first person singular, and his preface is brief where Ibn Qutayba's is long."

themes apt to parallelize his personal situation. In the first case, we are dealing with what we call – in Foucault's terms – the *implicit author* i.e. the authorial function, the subject of the grammatical proposition manifesting itself in the text. In the second case, what we have is the *historical author*, the real subject of the utterance, in attendance behind the text. For sake of simplicity we will call the first "author" and the second "writer".

3 The Historical Author: Biographical Data

When questioning the matter of the presence of the author and the signs of his subjectivity in texts, the importance of biographical details (social relations, economic context, patronage, personal situation) cannot be eluded. Hence, before moving to the textual signs of the author and then to the way the writer emerges in his work, it will be convenient to give a brief sketch of the life of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Waṭwāṭ.[24]

Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Yaḥyā b. ʿAlī al-Anṣārī al-Kutubī, known as al-Waṭwāṭ,[25] was a man of letters highly appreciated by some of his contemporaries: al-Ṣafadī e.g. counted him among "the great *adīb*s and the intelligent personalities"[26] of his times. Born in 632/1235 in Egypt, where he died in 718/1318, he earned his living as a stationer and bookseller (*warrāq/kutubī*). As a *warrāq* he probably also had "his sense of importance both as a representative of the world of learning and as an independent entrepreneur".[27] But he also had his sense of importance as a writer, something not unusual in the milieu of the *warrāqūn* considering that the roles of the bookseller and the writer often merged.[28] He as-

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24 For further biographical details see Maury, "Ǧamâl al-Dîn al-Waṭwâṭ."

25 GAL G vol. 2, 54-55; S vol. 2, 53-54; Kaḥḥāla, *Muʿjam,* vol. 8, 222; Ziriklī, *Aʿlām* vol. 5, 297.

26 Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān*, vol. 4, 202. All the following biographical data are based on the biography of al-Waṭwāṭ in al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān,* vol. 4, 201-207.

27 Pedersen, *Arabic Book*, 49.

28 Pedersen, *Arabic Book*, 50; see also the comments of Maury, "Ǧamâl al-Dîn al-Waṭwâṭ," 229: "Le lien entre l'activité du libraire et celle de l'écrivain est clair: le livraire est en quelque sorte la plaque tournante du milieu des lettrés [...] al-Waṭwāṭ est un libraire qui s'intéresse au contenu des livres". Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr,* 26-27 reports an

pired all his life long to be recognized by the cultural élite, but never succeeded, and was regarded with haughtiness by its members. Contemporary poets like Ibn Dāniyāl (d. 710/1310) and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī (d. 730/1330) hint at his ophthalmic disease and his state of misery, and some other members of the élite made puns on his name (al-Waṭwāṭ: "the bat").[29] Muḥyī l-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (d. 692/1292) hated him and constantly belittled the "poor al-Waṭwāṭ",[30] something that al-Waṭwāṭ's biographers take as an open bitter criticism against our author.[31] Nor was al-Waṭwāṭ on better terms with others: Ibn al-Khuwayyī (d. 693/1293), himself a good prose writer,[32] refused to help him to obtain material advantages.[33] When al-Waṭwāṭ tried to obtain a *fatwā* against him and wrote to this purpose to Athīr al-Dīn (the master of al-Ṣafadī, who relates the story), Ibn Dāniyāl and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, he collected only refusals. This correspondence became a book, *Fatā al-futuwwa wa-mirʾāt al-muruwwa*,[34] which al-Ṣafadī copied in his *Tadhkira*.

Al-Waṭwāṭ was a gifted prose writer and mastered the art of *inshāʾ*, but had no gift for poetry.[35] In Mamluk society poetry was considered a mark of distinction[36] and the lack of poetic talents could preclude the individual from any access to the intellectual élites. Perhaps partly because of this, al-Waṭwāṭ never succeeded in being admitted into their circles and remained marginalized.[37] Or perhaps his marginalization was due to his

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interesting case concerning the *Book of songs* attributed to the father of Ḥammād b. Isḥāq but in fact written by one of his *warrāqūn*.

29 This nickname could derive from his ophthalmic disease or from his intense nocturnal activity (Maury, "Ǧamâl al-Dîn al-Waṭwâṭ," 244).

30 Al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfī,* vol. 2, 17 (267).

31 Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān,* vol. 4, 204.

32 Al-Dhahabī, *ʿIbar,* vol. 3, 380.

33 Maury, "Ǧamâl al-Dîn al-Waṭwâṭ," 237, puts forward the hypothesis that Ibn al-Khuwayyī commissioned al-Waṭwāṭ the composition of his encyclopaedia *Mabāhij al-fikar wa-manāhij al-ʿibar,* but withdrew when the work was still unfinished. This would be the reason for al-Waṭwāṭ's bitter disappointment.

34 *Fatā al-futuwwa wa-mirʾāt al-muruwwa* in Ḥājjī Khalīfa, *Kashf,* col. 1241 but *ʿAyn al-futuwwa wa-mirʾāt al-murūʾa* in Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar* vol. 3, 386.

35 Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān* vol. 4, 202.

36 Bauer, "Mamluk Literature," 109-110.

37 This hypothesis seems to be held true also by Maury, "Ǧamâl al-Dîn al-Waṭwâṭ,"

social position: he belonged to that broadened layer of people which possessed disposable income, some education and could neither be considered to belong to the illiterate masses nor to the religious or military élite.[38]

His renown is connected with *Mabāhij al-fikar wa-manāhij al-ʿibar* (*The joys of ideas and the methods of giving lessons*), an encyclopaedia of natural sciences that had a major influence on later encyclopaedic treatises, including that of al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333).[39] He also wrote a commentary on Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī l-tārīkh*, and *Ghurar al-khaṣāʾiṣ al-wāḍiha wa-ʿurar al-naqāʾiḍ al-fāḍiḥa* (*The blazes of bright qualities and the shameful things of ignominious defects* or, briefly, *Of vices and virtues*),[40] the literary anthology based on *al-maḥāsin wa-l-masāwī* pattern that we intend to investigate in these pages.

4 Signs of the Author's Voice: Authorial Intentions

What Medieval authors thought they were doing is perceptible in the prologue and other meta-discursive elements that "provide rich material for studying the ways authors define their activity and their role".[41] The most obvious manner of presenting themselves, for Arabic writers, is to put ahead a preamble or an introduction; but anthologists also make an appearance throughout the text shaping it, manipulating the direction of the narration or influencing the reception. Al-Waṭwāṭ is not an exception and the *muqaddima*, similar in length and details to that of Ibn

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esp. 243.

38   Egyptian society has generally been portrayed as being split between a small educated élite (*ʿulamāʾ* and military administrators), on the one hand, and the illiterate "masses", on the other. For the early modern period Hanna's *In Praise of Books* works to break down this traditional dichotomy, which seems to be a historical reality even before the early modern period.

39   Samiuddin and Singh, eds., "Encyclopaedic Historiography," 716; Muhanna, *Encyclopaedism,* chapter 4 and passim; Maury, "Ǧamâl al-Dîn al-Waṭwâṭ," 233 note (the author also puts forward the hypothesis that al-Nuwayrī took some materials from *Ghurar al-khaṣāʾiṣ* without quoting it).

40   "Über Tugenden und Laster" (Bauer, "Literarische Anthologien," 111, n. 2); on this see Ghersetti, "On Mamluk anthologies."

41   Greene, "Introduction," 2.

Qutayba's *'Uyūn al-akhbār*, is scattered with authorial interventions expanding on the purpose and audience of the work.[42] These enlighten the way the author is involved in the making of the text, how he uses and understands his position as an anthologist, and all in all, show a deep consciousness of the kind of activity involved in the process of anthologizing.[43]

The single steps of the authorial implication in the writing process are detailed by means of words referring to the author's agency. Verbs and pronouns in the first person punctuate the pages and effectively emphasize the authorial function: "*fa-innī lammā ra'aytu [...] ḥadānī [...] fī sirrī [...] fī ṣadrī [...] an ajma'a [...] wa-aj'alahu [...] fa-shammartu [...] wa-ḥasartu [...] wa-'amadtu [...] fa-talammaḥtu [...] fa-taṣaffaḥtu [...] wa-staftaḥtu [...] wa-stabaḥtu [...] wa-jama'tu wa-azhartu [...] wa-ja'altuhu [...] wa-kasawtuhu [...] wa-abda'tuhu fīmā awda'tu fīhi [...] wa-ja'altuhu [...] wa-jannabtuhu [...] wa-ja'altuhu [...]*". Just to give an example of the insistence on the central position of the subject in this passage, a quick reckoning of the grammatical elements gives the following results: in 24 lines (including 4 lines of poetry quotations) there are 19 verbs in the first person and 4 pronouns in the first person.

The density of linguistic signs in this passage, paralleled in the rest of the prologue, is by no means accidental: it aims at giving the impression of a frenetic, passionate intellectual activity. It is worth noticing that the same tones pointing at the enthusiasm of the author for his literary occupations can also be found in the prologue to his encyclopaedia, *Mabāhij al-fikar*.[44] Such a remarkable accumulation of words that function as signs of the author's voice aims at offering a vivid representation of the author at work and of the different steps of his authorial interaction with the received texts and the new text he intends to write. Their

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42 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 7-19; the examples quoted below are taken from 7-8.

43 Authorial interventions revealing the writer's way of conceiving his activity can be found in the prologue of al-Waṭwāṭ's other work, *Mabāhij al-fikar wa-manāhij al-'ibar* (edition and French translation in Maury, "Ǧamāl al-Dīn al-Waṭwāṭ," 245-255).

44 See e.g. the third paragraph of the prologue in Maury, "Ǧamâl al-Dîn al-Waṭwât," 245-7 (Arabic)/246-8 (French).

order also is by no means accidental. First are mentioned the reasons
driving him to compose the book, i.e. the diversity of people's disposi-
tions due to differences in their temperament (*lammā raʾaytu [...]*); then
the resolution of compiling, on vices and virtues, a comprehensive work
(*ḥadānī gharaḍun ikhtalaja fī sirrī wa-amalun iʿtalaja fī ṣadrī ʿalā an ajmaʿa
[...] wa-ajʿalahu [...]*). After that are described the author's personal in-
volvement (*fa-shammartu ʿan sāq al-jidd wa-ḥasartu ʿan sāʿid al-kadd [...]*),
the choice of the best sources (*ʿamadtu ilā ḥisān al-kutub [...]*), the inclu-
sion/exclusion of the different types of materials (*jamaʿtu fī hādhā l-kitāb
[...] aẓhartu [...] jaʿaltuhu [...] kasawtuhu [...]*), the arrangement of the ma-
terials and so on. All these are given as the consecutive phases of a com-
plex and careful process of construction of the anthology. Literary con-
ventions of course dictate a certain progression in describing the criteria
and the steps of the compositional process, but what seems remarkable
here is the completeness of the list, the detail in which each single oper-
ation is described and, above all, the fact that grammatical forms point-
ing at subjectivity are chosen instead of impersonal forms.

5 Signs of the Author's Voice: Authorial Interventions

The main body of the text is also punctuated with authorial interventions
consisting of comments on the reported material, apostrophes or clarifi-
cations. Clearly indicated by linguistic signs like the first person, singu-
lar or plural, in the verbs and in the pronouns, they are an obvious hint
at the author's intention to show his control over the text and his ability
in building a coherent textual arrangement.

Some of them aim at explaining the criteria of inclusion or exclusion of
the materials or at elucidating the essence of the topic treated. The fol-
lowing are telling examples. The first one is a statement explaining why
some available materials have been left out on the basis that they are not
relevant to the author's intention: in the chapter on mad people and on
their witty sayings the author asserts that even if the stories of Mānī (a
famous "intelligent madman") are delightful, to present them in full

would not fit the intended purpose.[45] The second example is a commentary on the exhaustive treatment of the topic he is dealing with and on the educative function of amusing stories, used as an introduction to the last story of the chapter. The author affirms that he has already said enough concerning the theme treated, but since relaxation of the mind is a useful tool to educate "I deemed proper to add this story to this section".[46] The third is a commentary on the necessity to write a brief preface to the materials contained in the section in question, in order to elucidate the topic he discusses and to give it the proper conceptual frame. The passage is contained in the section on intelligent men misled by their intelligence. Al-Waṭwāṭ says: "we must now mention an introduction explaining the real meaning of what we decided to write and the purpose we intended".[47]

Other frequent passages are those where al-Waṭwāṭ makes statements concerning his way of organizing the text: for instance, the type of material or the topics he decides to start a certain section or chapter with. Declarations like "we must begin with stories about [...]"[48] or "we must now mention [...]"[49] are recurrent through the text, sometimes coupled with apostrophes pointing at the writer's authority: "know that the first thing we must start with is [...]."[50]

Internal cross-references are also recurrent, such as "we have already given in the first part of this section some information about [...]",[51] "we have already given at the beginning of this book [...]".[52] These declara-

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45 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 171: *wa-akhbāru Mānī aḥlā min musāmarati l-amānī lākin istīfāʾuhā rubbamā yakhruju ʿani l-gharaḍi wa-yubaddilu jawhara mā sharaṭnāhu bi-l-gharaḍ.*

46 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 229: *qultu: wa-fī mā dhakarnāhu min hādhā l-fanni kifāyatun wa-maqnaʿun ʿalā anna l-khāṭira idhā nsharaḥa nqāda wa-idhā kalla tamannaʿa wa-raʾaytu ṣawāban ilḥāqa hādhihi l-ḥikāyati bi-hādhā l-faṣli.*

47 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 265: *yanbaghī lanā an nadhkura muqaddimatan tuntaju ʿanhā ḥaqīqatu mā tarjamnā ʿalayhi wa-sāqanā al-gharaḍu ilayhi.*

48 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 281: *wa-wājibun an nabdaʾa bi [...].*

49 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 371: *yajibu ʿalaynā an nadhkura awwalan mā ṣadara ʿan [...].*

50 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 555: *iʿlam anna awwala mā yanbaghī an nabdaʾa bihi mā [...].*

51 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 358: *qad kunnā qaddamnā fī awwali faṣlin min hādhā l-kitābi jumlatan mimmā warada ʿani l-kuramāʾ.*

52 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 439: *qad kunnā qaddamnā fī ṣadri l-kitābi mā [...].*

tions clearly aim at showing the author's capability for recalling previous passages whenever necessary, thus showing his control over the text and representing him as a qualified man of letters. Other interventions point at displaying his ability to assess the value and the consistency of the material, thereby emphasizing his literary taste. Examples of such statements are for instance the following, where the author remarks the parallelism between similar stories: "I said: what was blamed is similar to this anecdote [...]".[53] On the whole, all these authorial interventions fulfil what is called a "meta-literary function", i.e. the author's discourse on the nature of his work. This can be taken as an indication of the author's desire to emphasize his acute awareness of the techniques and the processes implied in writing fine pieces of literature.

Some other authorial interventions, by far less neutral, seem to fulfil instead what is called an "ideological function" in that they convey the author's moral and ideological convictions, sometimes expressing bitter criticism of dubious behaviours. A case in point is the comment on al-Mutanabbī's verses of lampoon against Kāfūr, which are quoted in a section on people lacking intelligence.[54] The section opens with some sayings ascribed to al-Jāḥiẓ, who features listing the categories of silly people, with primary school teachers and eunuchs making up the first rank.[55] When these are mentioned, al-Waṭwāṭ seizes the opportunity to report some verses of lampoon by Ibn al-Rūmī and, immediately after, a selection of verses by al-Mutanabbī, taken from the lampoons on Kāfūr. Immediately after this quotation of nine verses comes an authorial intervention of a markedly vehement character. First, the author curses poets for their hypocrisy, then he launches into in a severe reproach of al-Mutanabbī accusing him of being self-serving, greedy and false for having praised and subsequently lampooned his patron.[56] The tone of this commentary is extremely coarse and even if it is given in an impersonal

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53 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 288: *qultu wa-qad ashbaha mā ʿība mā ḥukiya anna [...].*

54 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 157 ff.

55 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 157, 158. This was a *topos* in *adab* literature. On this see Ghersetti, "Wick of the lamp."

56 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 159.

manner and there is, properly speaking, no linguistic sign of the author's voice one has the overwhelming impression that the author's voice is distinctly present.

6 Author's Voice or Writer's Voice? Text and Autobiography

One of the possible criteria used to cast "old materials" into a new and relatively original literary form is using autobiography: Hoyland discussed this in relation with the pseudo-Iṣfahānī's *Book of Strangers*, and he affirms that "originality lies in having brought together, and connected with an autobiographical thread, two very common literary *topoi* – the happening upon an inscription of relevance to one's own situation, and the theme of nostalgia and homesickness – that would seem never to have been connected before".[57] If we substitute "originality" with "subjectivity" and consider that not only connecting two *topoi* but also simply mentioning one in a certain context can stand for the authorial voice, we can easily see that certain topics treated in *Ghurar al-khaṣāʾiṣ* are by no means devoid of significance. Autobiographical elements can thus be a means to leave room for expression of the author's voice, both directly and indirectly.

If we trust his biographers, al-Waṭwāṭ had a hard life and felt unhappy: a clear sensation of his distress can be perceived in many passages where his voice emerges to point at his state of misery. A direct reminder of this can be found in the last section of the anthology serving as an epilogue. This is actually a long prayer full of linguistic signs of the author's voice which are a tangible manifestation of his subjectivity: there is a remarkable occurrence of the pronouns in the first person,[58] especially in connection with indications of personal conditions of difficulty (for instance *ijʿali l-yaqīna fī qalbī wa-l-nūra fī baṣarī*[59] *wa-l-naṣīḥata fī ṣadrī wa-dhikraka fī lisānī [...] asʾaluka l-rafāhiyata fī maʿīshatī [...] la tarzuqnī rizqan*

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57   Hoyland, "History, fiction and authorship," 39.

58   To give an example, in 8 lines of one page (610) we counted 18 of them; the rest of the text is as rich as the sample we checked.

59   Literary conventions apart, this could well be a reference to the ophthalmic disease that affected al-Waṭwāṭ.

yutghīnī wa-la tabtalinī bi-faqrin yudnīnī [...] and so on) and of verbs in the first person, both plural and singular. In conformity with the literary convention in use, al-Watwāṭ largely employs the modesty *topos* that is typically used in the preface: in this epilogue the writer emphasizes his weakness by means of a rich gamut of terms referring to his frailty and vulnerability (*daʿuftu, lā quwwata lī, muqirran bi-sūʾi ʿamalī [...]*)[60] and asks God to grant him his livelihood and to remove him from poverty. This kind of personal justifications and apologetic statements for weaknesses, shortcomings or inadequacies are no doubt commonplaces and can be considered part and parcel of the range of topics the writers had at their disposal. The same al-Watwāṭ seems to consider the final invocation to God among the canonical features of a book ("it is recommendable for those who have written a book to close it with a prayer, just like they began it by praising God").[61] But in this case the allusion to his condition of distress, the insistence on the theme and the accumulation of references to personal situations give to the author's invocations an unusual autobiographical flavour and the author's voice seems to merge with that of the writer.

This is all the more the case when there is no linguistic sign of the author's voice, but the inclusion of certain topics and their arrangement function as an indirect indication pointing to the presence of the writer.

One of the means the author can use to show his presence in the text is the use of metaphors or the use of renewed *topoi* that "allow authors to depict themselves at work both in the material world in which books are produced, and in the immaterial world where books are conceived and dreamed".[62] In our case both the *topos* of "the misery of the men of letters" and its collocation serve as a kind of self-representation and are a clear hint at al-Watwāṭ's intention to manifest his presence in the text. The chapter on *faṣāḥa* and *balāgha* (a meaningful context, since they are the pre-eminent qualities of the distinguished men of letters) contains a

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60 Al-Watwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 610.
61 Al-Watwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 607.
62 Greene, "Introduction*,"* 9-10.

section on *ḥirfat al-adab* "the misery of the profession".[63] *Ḥirfat al-adab* is an expression used "to express the disappointment felt by a poet when he leads a life of poverty and full of uncertainties",[64] but it is also suitable for secretaries, grammarians and in general all the professionals of the "art of the word". The *topos* has been extensively treated by S. A. Bonebakker, but nowhere in the sources he quotes, *ḥirfat al-adab* appears to be connected with booksellers and/or stationers. The application of this specific theme to the professionals of the art of the book (*ahl al-wirāqa*) thus seems something peculiar to *Ghurar al-khaṣāʾiṣ*. Al-Waṭwāṭ devotes a distinct sub-section of the part on *ḥirfat al-adab* to the misery of *ahl al-wirāqa* and indeed gives it a distinct title.[65] Even in the absence of any overt reference to the events of his life, one has the impression that this part of the book has much to do with his personal experience and should be taken as a hint at his desire to be recognized as a man of letters and not as a simple bookseller. As a matter of fact, the materials quoted contain allusions to the low standard of living of *ahl al-wirāqa* and, more interestingly, sad remarks on the unappreciated literary merits of the *warrāq*. These are some examples:

> I [Aḥmad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥabīb known as Abū Hiffān] asked a bookseller 'How are you?'; he replied: 'My life is narrower than an inkwell, my body is thinner than a ruler (*misṭara*), my rank is more fragile than glass, my fortune is darker than oak apples when they are mixed with vitriol, my misfortune is more stuck to me than resin, my food is more bitter than aloe, my drink is more roily than ink and anxiety and pain flow in my heart's blood clot like the ink in the pen nib'. When I exclaimed: 'My friend, you mentioned one affliction after the other!', he recited:

> > Money hides every defect of men // money raises every scoundrel who is falling

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63   Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 204-209.

64   Bonebakker, "The Misery of men of letters," 147.

65   Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 207-209.

> You must have money. Seek to make money // and hurl the book of science against a wall.[66]

And:

> *Wirāqa* and studying // and occupying oneself with knowledge are the origins of humiliation, financial // straits, disgrace and afflictions.[67]

> As for *wirāqa*, it is the most unhappy profession // its branches and fruits are deprivation
> The one who practices it is comparable to the tailor's needle // that clothes the naked, being itself nude.[68]

These passages clearly depict *wirāqa* as something dealing with the intellectual, immaterial side of books more than with their materiality, something obviously contrasting with the everyday occupation of the writer of *Ghurar al-khaṣāʾiṣ*. And in fact he desired to be recognized more as an author than as a bookseller.[69] The choice of the *ḥirfat al-adab topos* and its connection with *ahl al-wirāqa* therefore is not fortuitous at all since it parallelizes autobiographical details of al-Waṭwāṭ's life. The core of the matter seems to be the underestimation of the cultural and literary merits of *ahl al-wirāqa*, and this points at the sense of seclusion which – we understand from his biography – al-Waṭwāṭ must have felt. The choice of this particular theme and its inclusion in the wider context of *faṣāḥa*, a means of social promotion and a way to obtain a high rank even for people of inferior birth, is a significant – although indirect – sign of the writer's voice.

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66 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 207-208.

67 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 208 (anonymous verses).

68 Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar*, 208; the verses are by Abū Muḥammad b. Sāra (Ibn Diḥya, *al-Muṭrib fī ashʿār ahl al-Maghrib*, 78).

69 Maury, "Ǧamâl al-Dîn al-Waṭwâṭ," 230: "Waṭwâṭ desire fortement être écrivain [...] il a envie de se faire un nom [...]".

7 Conclusions

In pre-modern Arabic anthologies there are many ways for the author to reveal his subjectivity in the text: in the case in point, which aimed at investigating the presence of the author's voice and the manifestations of his subjectivity in a Mamluk literary anthology, we have seen that both linguistic signs (e.g. verbs and pronouns in the first person, apostrophes) and non-linguistic signs (e.g. the selection, inclusion or exclusion of certain topics or materials and their collocation) can contribute to convey the author's presence. Even sticking to the conventions in use and respecting the limits imposed by the literary canons of works mostly consisting in compilation like *adab* anthologies, authors had a wide gamut of options to manifest themselves in their texts, and they used them with great awareness in order to offer a vivid self-representation and to proclaim their role as accomplished men of letters. The author, both historical and implicit, continues to be unavoidable, affirms Umberto Eco in his *The limits of interpretation*. This is true even in texts that a hasty evaluation would perceive as devoid of any trace of subjectivity: perhaps it is not time yet to proclaim the "death of the author".

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