

[#1] Abū Naṣr al-Bāhilī (d. 231/846):

When seekers of knowledge went to the gathering of al-Aṣmaʿī, they bought dung in a pearl market, and when they went to Abū ʿUbayda they bought pearls in a dung market, meaning, al-Aṣmaʿī was good in reciting and embellishing poor reports and poetry until the ugly became beautiful, but there was little benefit in it. Abū ʿUbayda had bad expression, but the benefit from him was great and his scholarship boundless.

al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), *History of Baghdad (Taʾrīkh Baghdad)*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwār Maʿrūf, 16 vols., rpt. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī 1422/2001, 15:344.

[#2] The grammarian al-Māzinī (d. 249/863) relayed Abū ʿUbayda's telling of the event as follows:

I was ushered into the presence of al-Rashīd who said to me: "I have heard you have a beautiful book about the description of horses, I want to hear it from you." Al-Aṣmaʿī said: "What will you do with books? A horse shall be brought and we place our hands on each of its limbs, name them, and mention what [poetry] exists on it." Al-Rashīd said: "Servant, a horse!" A horse was brought. Al-Aṣmaʿī rose, began to place his hand on it limb after limb and say: "This is such and such, and a poet said about it such and such," until he had finished. Al-Rashīd said to me: "What do you say about his words?" I said: "He was right in some [places] and erred in others. Whatever he was right in he learnt from me (*minnī taʿallama*), and what he erred in is something I ignore whence he took it.

Ibid., 15:343.

[#3] Abū l-ʿAmaythal ʿAbdallāh b. Khulayd (d. 240/854), *Transmission on Identical Looking Words that Differ in Meaning (al-Maʿthūr fīmā ttafaqa lafzuhu wa-khtalafa maʿnāhu)*, a dictionary of polysemic homographs; parchment codex MS Suleymaniye/Veliyüddin 3139, dated 280/893 in stroke-modulated book script. Ed. F. Krenkow, London 1925.

Layout features:

- Spaced words
- Set-off paragraphs
- Lemmata marked with indents at the beginnings and paragraph signs at the end, world-long blanks in the middle of the line separating the different meanings of a term within one lemma
- Proof verses, spaced by caesura and stretched to width of page

Script optimization:

- Full diacritics and vocalization
- *Muḥmal* signs
- Paraphrase of orthography (*dabṭ*).

[#4] The courtier and man of letters Abū l-ʿAynāʾ (d. 283/896) related al-Aṣmaʿī's telling of the event:

I and Abū ʿUbayda entered into the presence of al-Faḍl b. al-Rabīʿ, and he said: "O Asmaʿī, how many [volumes] is your book on horses?" I said: "One volume (*jild*)." He asked Abū ʿUbayda about this, and he said: "50 volumes." So he ordered both books to be brought, then he ordered a horse to be brought and said to Abū ʿUbayda: "Read your book word by word (*ḥarfan bi-ḥarfin*) and put your hand on [the horse] place after place." Abū ʿUbayda said: "I am not a veterinarian (*laysa ana bayṭār, sic*), this is something I heard and took from the Arabs and wrote it up (*allaftuhū*)." The vizier said to me: "O Aṣmaʿī, rise and put your

hand on place after place of the horse.” I rose, bared my forearms and legs, then jumped up to reach the ears of the horse, then I put my hand on its forelock and proceeded to touch item after item of it and say: “The word for this is soandso,” and recite about it, until I reached its hoof. He ordered me to receive the horse, and when I wanted to anger Abū ‘Ubayda, I rode the horse to visit him

*History of Baghdād*, 13:162; var. Ibn al-Anbārī, Abū l-Barakāt (d. 577/1181), *Promenade of the Hearts (Nuzhat al-alibbā’)*, ed. al-Sāmarrā’ī, Baghdād 1959, ed. Ibrāhīm, Cairo 1967, 75f.; Yāqūt (d. 626/1229), *Dictionary of Literati (Mu‘jam al-udabā’)*, ed. D.S. Margoliouth, 20 vols., Leiden-London 1923–31, rpt Beirut: Dār lhyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d., 19:160.

[#5a] *The Definitions (al-Hudūd)*, a compendium on the basics of syntax and the ‘arabiyya, was commissioned by caliph al-Ma’mūn from the grammarian al-Farrā’:

He had him placed in his own room in the palace and charged female and male servants with tending to his needs, so that his heart would not lack nor his soul crave anything; even the prayer times were announced to him. The caliph appointed stationers (*warrāqūn*) for him and delegated treasurers and buyers to him. Al-Farrā’ would dictate, and the stationers wrote till he had compiled (*ṣannafta*) *The Definitions* over several years (var. over two years), and al-Ma’mūn ordered his volumes (*kutub*) to be placed in the treasury (var. to be copied in the treasury).

*History of Baghdād* 16:225; Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), *Death Dates of Famous People (Wafayāt al-a’yān)*, ed. I. ‘Abbās, 8 vols, Beirut 1968–72, rpt. Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, n.d., 6:177f.; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud, Tehran 1391/1971, 73 gives an alternate genesis.

[#5b] Regarding the same book’s genesis, Abū Budayl al-Waḍḍāḥī described the dictation as taken by a large crowd:

Al-Farrā’ went out to the people and began to dictate the book *The Meanings [of the Qur’ān]*. His two copyists were Salama [b. ‘Aṣim] and Abū Naṣr [M. b. al-Jahm]. The transmitter said: We wanted to count the people who had gathered for the dictation and could not put a figure to them, so we counted [only] the judges, who were eighty, and al-Farrā’ did not stop dictating until he completed it.

*History of Baghdād* 16:225; *Death Dates* 6:177f.

[#5c] Negotiation over intellectual property in its written form:

When [al-Farrā’] had finished *The Meanings*, the stationers withheld it from the people to profit from it. They said: “We produce it only for someone who wants it copied for [var. Yāqūt: “so that it be” *‘alā an yakūna;*] five sheets per *dirham*. People complained to al-Farrā’ who summoned the book-sellers and mentioned the matter. They said: “We assist you only to benefit from you, and from everything you compiled (*ṣannafta*) people need nothing more than this book. Let us have an income from it (*da’nā na’ish bihī*) [MS var. *na’ish bihī*]. Al-Farrā’ said to them: “Make a compromise, so that you profit and let them profit” [var. they profit], but they refused. So he said: “I will show you.” He said to the people: “I will [var. Yāqūt “I want to”] dictate a *Book of Meanings* that is more comprehensive and accessible than what I had dictated. He sat and dictated on [the opening word of] “praise” a hundred sheets. So the book-sellers came to him and said: “We will let (*nuballighu*) [var. Yāqūt: *nublighu*] people have what they want” and copied ten sheets per *dirham*.

*History of Baghdād* 16:225; *Death Dates* 6:177f., var. *Dictionary of Literati*, 20:13.

[#6] Abū ‘Ubayd’s composition of books

Ibn Durustawayhi said: He was preceded in all his compilations (*muṣannafāt*), among them the (1) *Gharīb –Muṣannaf*, which is his greatest (*ajall*) book on lexicon. He modeled it on (*iḥtadhā fīhi*) the book of al-Naḍr b. Shumayl al-Māzinī, who had entitled it *The Qualities*. [Al-Naḍr] began it with the human anatomy, then the anatomy of the horse, then the camel, mentioning category (*ṣinḥ*) after category until he had exhausted all that, and it is larger and better than Abū ‘Ubayd’s book.

Among them is his book on (2) *Proverbs* in which all Basrans and Kufans preceded him: al-Aṣma‘ī, Abū Zayd [al-Anṣārī], Abū ‘Ubayda, al-Naḍr b. Shumayl, al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī, and Ibn al-A‘rābī, but he gathered their transmissions into one book, divided it into chapters (*abwāb*) and gave it the best arrangement (*ta’līf*).

Regarding the (3) *Rare Lexicon of Ḥadīth*, the first to produce (*‘amila*) it were Abū ‘Ubayda, Quṭrub, al-Akhfash, and al-Naḍr b. Shumayl, though they did not cite the chains of transmission. The Basran grammarian Abū ‘Adnān produced (*‘amila*) a book on *Rare Lexicon of Ḥadīth*, mentioning the chains of transmission and he organized it according to the headings of tradition and jurisprudence, except that it is not large. Abū ‘Ubayd collected the bulk of their books, explained it, cited the chains of transmission, and wrote up each authority (*musnad*) separately, i.e., the traditions of every single Companion, and Follower by itself, making an excellent compilation (*taṣnīf*), and the traditionists, jurisconsults, and lexicographers desired [the book] because it reunited what they needed.

Likewise his book on the (4) *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān*; the first who compiled [books] on this among the lexicographers were Abū ‘Ubayda, then Quṭrub, then al-Akhfash, and among the Kufans al-Kisā‘ī and then al-Farrā’ compiled [books on this], then Abū ‘Ubayd combined their books and presented the traditions (*āthār*), their chains of transmission, and the explanations of the Companions, Followers, and jurisconsults. He transmitted half of it but died before the rest was heard from him, and most of it is not transmitted.

In his (5) books on jurisprudence, he pursued the method of Mālik and al-Shāfi‘ī and imitated most of it (*taqallada*), presenting proof verses, collecting his *ḥadīth* and transmissions, and arguing in them with lexicon and syntax, and he rendered this well.

(6) He has a good book on the Reading of the Qur’ān no Kufan has the like of.

(7) His Book on [*Types of*] *Wealth* belongs to the best and most excellent compiled in jurisprudence.

Abū al-Ṭayyib –Lughawī, ‘Abd al-Wāhid b. ‘A. (d. 351), *Ranks of Grammarians (Marātib al-naḥwiyyīn)*, ed. M. Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Cairo: Maṭba‘at Nahḍat Miṣr 1954, 93 (only on (1) *Classified rare Words*, (3) *Rare Lexicon of Tradition*, and (4) *Meanings of the Qur’ān*; *History of Baghdād* 14: 394; = Ibn al-Qiftī (d. 646/1248), *Information for Transmitters (Inbāh al-ruwāt)*, ed. M. Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 4 vols., Cairo 1369-93/1950-73, 2:14f.

[#7] Table of contents of Abū ‘Ubayd’s *Classified Rare Words (al-Gharīb al-muṣannaf)*.

Categories alter between synonymic–semantic chapters (human culture, 1–16; animals, 21–24) and linguistic chapters (morphological, synonymic etc., 17–20, lexical roots, 25). The horse (7) is placed between man and weapons, separately from the other animals (21–24).

The chapter number is followed by the page numbers in the Tunis MS in parentheses:

1 (pp. 2–56 MS Tunis long, 55 sect.) Human body (includes also morals, behavior, reproduction, genealogy.)

- 2 (57–71) Women
- 3 (74–86) Clothes
- 4 (86–107) Foods
- 5 (108–22, long) Illnesses
- 6 (123–37, short, 9 sect.) Tents (*dūr*) and terrains (*arāḍī*)
- 7 (137–44) Horses (qualities in anatomy and motion, sounds, flocks, defaults, stasis, wild vs. tamed, utensils of riding; the headings are similar but not identical to Abū ‘Ubayda’s *Khayl* monograph.)
- 8 (145–65, long) Weapons
- 9 (165–76) Birds and insects/reptiles (*hawāmm*; bee, cricket, queen bee (*ya’sūb*), locust, lizard, snake, scorpion, ant, louse (*qaml*), fly, tick (*ḥalam*), camel tick (*qurd*), turtle, frog)
- 10 (177–91) Pots (*quḍūr*) and vessels (*awānī/āniya* sg. *inā*) (includes also sun, moon, fire, *nawādir*.)
- 11 (199–218) Mountains
- 12 (218–31) Shrubs and plants
- 13 (232–253) Bodies of water and canals (*qinā*)
- 14 (254–62) Palm trees
- 15 (263–69) Clouds and rain
- 16 (269–75) Times and winds (week days, months, climate)
- 17 (275–309, long, 69 sect.) Morphological noun types (*amthilat al-asmā*)
- 18 (310–364, long, 23 sect.) Morphological verb types (*amthilat al-af‘āl*)
- 19 (348–93, long, 42 sect.) Terms that mean a thing and its opposite (*aḍḍād* [from here the order in MS Tunis varies from the other MSS]; it also includes metathesis, gender, dialectal variants in sound and meaning, foreign words (*mā dakhala min ghayri lughāt al-‘arab fī l-‘arabiyya*), commoners’ diverging uses (*mā khālafat al-‘amma fīhi lughāt al-‘arab*), *i‘rāb* of names, &c.)
- 20 (393–465, very long, 162 sect.) Synonyms (*asmā’ mukhtalifa lil-shay’ al-wāḥid*; in thematic order)
- 21 (465–520, long) Camels
- 22 (520–30) Goats and sheep (*ghanam*)
- 23 (530–535, short, 9 sect.) Wild animals (gazelle, antelope, herds, onager, ostrich, their motions)
- 24 (535–44) Predatory animals (lion, jackal, fox, hyena, lizard and hedgehog, rabbit, dog, polecat (a stench emitting feline, *zaribān*), cat, ibex, females, copulating, pregnancy, beasts/quadrupeds (*bahā’im*), offspring, sounds, burrows, genitals (*qaḍīb*/"stick" and *ḥayā*/"vulva"), chasing them away, epithets, hunters, motion). The order resembles that of Abū ‘Ubayda’s *Khayl* monograph and likewise includes types of behavior.)
- 25 (544–610, very long, 180 sect.) Triliteral lexical roots (*ajnās*; no order)

‘Abdattawwāb, Ramaḍān (1962), *Das Kitāb al-Gharīb al-muṣannaf von Abū ‘Ubaid und seine Bedeutung für die nationalarabische Lexikographie*, Heppenheim [Diss. München], 42–77.