

Book Review

Ramzi Baalbaki. 2014. *The Arabic Lexicographical Tradition: From the 2nd/8th to the 12th/18th Century*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. Pp. 489. €178.00/\$234.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9789004273979.

Reviewed by [Zeinab A. Taha](#), American University in Cairo

The Arabic lexicographical Tradition represents a major contribution to the field of Arabic lexicography. The author states that with this work, he was trying to fill a gap in the tradition since most books were either outdated or lacking in their treatment of important lexical categories such as *hurūf* “particles”, *ḥaddād* “words with two contradictory meanings” and *ḥawāt* “sounds/voices”. The author also states that another important goal is to illustrate the similarities and complementarity of both lexicographical and grammatical traditions. While the first goal was successfully addressed, the second goal was only dealt with sporadically.

The author divides the book into three chapters and an epilogue. Chapter one examines early lexicographical activity and factors which led to the compilation of lexica. The following two chapters are each focused on one of the two types of lexical writing: the *Mubawwab* “onomasiological” and *Mugannas* “semasiological” in Ibn Sīdā’s (458 H.) terminology. *Mubawwab* lexica where meaning leads to sign had mostly been arranged in thematic fashion, while *Mugannas* lexica, in which sign leads to meaning, listed all roots or lexical items of the language.

The first chapter introduces the significance of the book, and the topics it addresses. It gives an introduction about the difference between the two types of genres: the *Mubawwab* lexica as dealing with specific area or genre and arranged according to *lafdh* “form”, e.g. alphabetically, but also thematically, and the *Mugannas* which exhausted the roots of all items in the lexicon. The chapter surveys the development of various genres of lexical writing—each genre was dedicated a section tracing historical development and highlighting the relationship between lexicographical issues and grammar.

Chapter 2, the largest in the book, constitutes 224 pages and deals in details with *Mubawwab* lexica. It ends with the 7th century of Hijra works, while chapter three (123 pages) is much shorter and addresses the second type of lexica in the *Mugannas* genre lexica covering works up to the tenth century, and then reference to al-Zabīdī’s *tāz al-ḥarūs* of the 12th century of Hijra. Both chapters include all sources that are deemed representative of the genre at hand. Genres are divided by subcategories. Boundaries between the two types are not always clear. *Mubawwab* is numerous while *Mugannas* is fewer in number but multi-volumes.

The epilogue summarizes the main characteristics of each type of lexica, reinstates the relationship between lexicography and grammatical traditions and gives a critical account of the approach followed by lexicographers in compiling their data.

The book includes a huge number of citations represented by 658 notes. Its bibliographical references lie in 47 pages, and the index of names occupies 22 pages. This is

rather remarkable and reflects the author's effort in documenting not only the review of major sources on lexis but also numerous anecdotal pieces of information on the subject over the course of ten centuries of lexicographical compilation and production.

The wealth of information is extremely useful for anyone working in the field, and certainly relinquish any desire to know the detailed circumstances around the compilation of important resources of both *Mubawwab* and *Mugannas* types. Although it may seem a bit lengthy at times with all the details surrounding the compilation of works and the relationship between the different works, the author provides subtitles and sub sections to help readers spot their specific points of interest and to have better access to the material.

One of the goals set by the author, beyond the compilation of a comprehensive account of the Arab lexicographical tradition, was to show that both lexicographical and grammatical traditions proceeded along history hand in hand. The author thus mentions, especially throughout the chapter on *Mubawwab* lexis, several incidents that do link both traditions. However, this was not part of any elaborate discussion in the following chapter on *Mugannas* lexis. Consequently, no concrete results are drawn at the end. The author is, however, commended for bringing this to the attention of specialists as it is a very ambitious goal and calls for future research.

The main goal, however, was to present all the major works and the way lexis was arranged from the 2nd to the 12th century of Hijra. The author did a great job going through works one by one showing their characteristics and comparing them to each other and to the major other genre. Some of the important points addressed in Chapter One are:

1. The role of *lahn* "linguistic error" in compiling lexis
2. The relationship between lexicography and the Quran, Hadith and poetry
3. Lexicographers stance vis-a-vis the use of *sawāhid* "citations" and *ʔisnād* "source/attribution"
4. Lexicographers stance vis-à-vis the Arabization of items and dialectal variants
5. The effect on *ʔuṣūr ʔal-ʔiḥtizāz* "epochs of reliable usage" on the collection of data
6. The role of *ʔarīb* "uncommon" in compiling *Mubawwab* lexis.

Chapter Two, on *Mubawwab* and specialized lexis, traces the historical development of the two lexis. The first type embraces lexis and thesauri in which meaning leads to sign, and includes specialized dictionaries such as those containing Arabized words, solecism, and morphological patterns. Each section deals with a particular genre of a single topic lexis. Section two deals with multithematic works, some of which are complete thesauri. The discussion includes all extant sources that are representative of each group.

A large section in this chapter was given to the *ʔarīb*. The author explains that the *Mubawwab* type includes a huge body of dialectical data which constitutes a large portion of the *ʔarīb* "uncommon" and *nādir* "infrequent". A lot of the *sawāhid* come from poetry and *ragaz*, in particular. Poetic license gave rise to the existence of *ʔarīb*. There were three types of *ʔarīb*. An attempt to collect *ʔarīb al-Qur'an* as early as the first century by Ibn Abbās (68 H.) and Zayd Ibn Alī (122 H.). The first authentic book was that of al-Gurayrī (141 H.). The most important sources of the third century were those of Ibn Qutayba (276 H.) and al-Yazīdī (237 H.). Both were arranged to follow the Quranic suras and verses. Later works followed the arrangement by first letter (al-Sigstānī 255 H.), whereas full alphabetical arrangement was followed by al-Harawī (401 H.). Later, al-Gawharī (400) and al-Rāzī (666 H.) arranged lexicon according to the last letter.

Throughout the tradition, authors adopted different approaches with respect to arrangement. Semantic and morphological information were sometimes included which represents an overlap with how patterns were introduced in early grammatical treatises. The

chapter proceeds to include sections on *Ḥarīb al-Quran*, *Ḥarīb al-ḥadīth*, general *Ḥarīb* materials, proverbs, plants, animals, human body, Arabized words, synonyms antonyms, items that denote more than one meaning, morphological patterns, and multithematic works. In all sections, major philologists and major works on *Mubawwab* lexis were reviewed. In each type, the author illustrates how Arab lexicographers approached both arrangement and addressing of the notions they were trying to explain. Attention to shades of meanings, contextual information, variation of pronunciation, and useful morpho-phonemic information present in these original sources are also included.

The last section on multithematic lexis is very useful as it combines all the cited monographs, books and thesauri that dealt with different types of lexis, but followed a multithematic approach to the arrangement of content. The author follows a chronological approach to review these multithematic works starting with the second century and ending with the seventh century.

Chapter Three introduces *Mugannas* lexis. According to the author, *Mugannas* genre refers to unspecialized works in which sign leads to meaning. It appeared shortly after *Mubawwab* but coexisted side by side. Both were closely related to philological studies of the Qur'an. In spite of this affinity, each type had a distinct purpose to achieve. *Mugannas* lexicographers wanted to exhaust the Arabic linguistic corpus. Thus, the amount of *Mugannas* lexis is much less than those found in *Mubawwab*. Three major ways of arrangement are discussed: phonetic permutative system, alphabetical system, and rhyme system. The three arrangements are overlapping and concurrent, not signifying successive works or period of time. They overlap because many works were based on rhyme arrangement, but also employed alphabetical arrangement. Likewise, alphabetical arrangement words often relied on phonetic permutative approaches.

The author goes on to review in details the three systems and the major works that were compiled on the basis of each type. The beginning was with the most prominent *kitāb al-Ḥayn* of al-Khalīl (175 H.) as the first *Mugannas* work based on phonetic permutation. The chapter proceeds to review all the major works based or affected by al-Khalīl's approach.

Works based on the alphabetical system were few in number and were reviewed by the author. Among the highlighted works are those of Ibn Fāris (395 H.), al-Zamakhsharī's *ʿasās al-balāḡa* (538 H.) (The first to arrange roots in full alphabetical order, and consistently, which was not the case with his predecessors), and Bandanīgī's *al-taqfiya fi al-luḡa* (284 H.). The author maintains that Ibn al-Sikkīt (244 H.) was the first to introduce arrangement according to rhyme in one full chapter of his *ʿiṣṣāḥ al-manṭiq*. Bandanīgī followed the same system extensively. He draws on the previous tradition from al-Khalīl, and *kitāb al-ḡim*, included corpus that rhymes, but with no explanation of meaning. The volume was helpful to poets and writers of rhymed prose. As for *tāz al-Ḥarūs wa ṣiḥāḥ al-Ḥarabiyya* by al-Gawharī (400 H.), certain lexicographical principles established by earlier scholars were standardized. Al-Gawharī facilitated the search for items since the only morphological knowledge required from the user was to know the radicals of the root. He also separated between nominal and verbal patterns, and included morpho-syntactic arrangement. Al-Ṣāghhanī's *al-Ḥubāb al-zāxir* (650 H.) included alphabetical list of lemmas, biographies on all philologists, critique of previous work, and exhaustive list of lemmas. The most amazing feature is the internal organization of lemmas. *Lisān al-Ḥarab* by Ibn Manzūr (711 H.) was the most comprehensive published Arabic lexicon, with the exception of *tāz al-Ḥarūs* by al-Zabīdī six centuries later. Ibn Manzūr cites five major earlier works as his sources, but explains that their approach was either too concise, good at *gamʿ* "data collection", but not *waḍʿ* "internal arrangement", or vice versa. The book was an encyclopedic dictionary. On the other hand, *al-qamūs al-muḥīt* by al-Firūzabādī (817 H.) sought to write a lexicon that was both simple and comprehensive: "comprehensive" refers to inclusion of both common and

less common words and “simple” refers to brevity of explanation and arrangement. He relied mainly on two earlier sources, *al-muḥkam* and *al-ṣubāb*, and added names of poets, prophet companions, plants and medical terms. He followed al-Gawharī's organization and overlooked the inclusion of any reference to *al-lisān*. *Tāz al-ṣarūs* by al-Zabīdī (1205 H.) took 14 years in the making until appearance in 1188 of Hijra. Although not medieval in time, it is certainly so in method. It crowns the “classical” period of Arabic lexicographical writing as the most comprehensive lexicon in the tradition. The book combines all earlier works on *Mugannas*. It includes all of al-Firūzābādī's content and adds *ziyādāt* where it further explains, adds information, or adds lemmas that were excluded from al-Firūzābādī's work. It relied on “*ziyādāt*” to include information related to “basic” meanings as introduced by Ibn Fāris, and rhyme as introduced by al-Zamakhsharī. In addition, it also included phonetic and morphological characteristics of the letters as introduced in *al-lisān*.

The author concludes the book with an epilogue where he summarizes the characteristics of the two main types of lexica, the *Mubawwab* and *Mugannas*, reviews some of the most important works and lexicographers, reinstates the relationship between lexicography and grammar, and ends with a critique of the lexicographers' production throughout the tradition. Although the book makes clear distinction between *Mubawwab* and *Mugannas* lexica, the author explains that there is much overlap between the two types of genres. He gives examples of *Mubawwab* lexica that was arranged formally and alphabetically, although it was meant to be arranged according to concepts, and *Mugannas* lexica that included thematic categories. The book claims to have drawn attention for the first time to arrangement according to the last letter in Ibn al-Sikkīt chapter, an observation that is of extreme chronological value for the history of lexicographical tradition. The author emphasizes that the varieties and subvarieties of arrangement do not correspond to successive years of development and that much chronological overlap exist in the material. The author concludes that in order to best understand the Arabic lexicographical tradition, it is best to put it within the wider context of Islamic tradition. This was indeed demonstrated in the book by illustrating how the genre on *Ṣarīb al-Quran*, *ḥisnād*, use of *sawāhid*, and the cultural context which relied on *gamṣ* period and Bedouins' life had all contributed to the emergence of the lexicographical tradition. The author criticizes the approach of early lexicographers that *Mugannas* lexica included much confusion and obscurity of what words mean due to lack of shared contexts. Moreover, *Mugannas* did not include all derivatives of roots due to absence therein of a template that determined the patterns to be included. Had this been present, the author argues, verbal and nominal patterns would have been more systematically arranged.

This criticism reflects the fact that lexicographers did not rely on grammatical treatises for help. Several grammarians during the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries had arranged their verbal and nominal patterns according to morphological rules. This was done to serve syntactic purposes as in illustrating verb transitivity. Lexicographers could have made use of this and used the morphological information to guide them in their arrangement of lexica. Another area where *Mugannas* lexicographers did not rely on the grammatical tradition was with the use of the terminology of *ḥaṣl* and *qiyās* as synonyms to mean “basic meaning”. The term *qiyās* was used by grammarians to mean analogy, while their interest in *ḥuṣūl* had to do with areas of syntax, morphology and semantics. No attempt was made here to link this possible overlap with early grammarians.

The book, however, illustrates the complementarity between both grammatical and lexicographical traditions in several incidents where the author was successful in illustrating that connection. For example, the author mentions that although Sībawayhi had been influenced by his teacher, the founder of the lexicographical tradition, grammar in *al-kitāb* and subsequent works did not focus on lexicography except when morphological patterns

were explained. Although the two disciplines made use of the same corpora of language that existed, they kept their focus distinct from each other. Only the part on *ḥabniya* “morphological patterns” in lexicography had little to do with grammar. Hadith was only quoted several times in *Sībawayhi*, while it constituted a very large *ḥisnād* in lexicography. Another example of the complementarity between the two traditions, according to the author, is that at the early stages, lexicographical attempts to gather the uncommon and strange is matched by grammarians’ considerable attention devoted to irregular and patterns not conforming to the norm.

Ramzi Baalabaki has compiled a very detailed and informative reference and has indeed filled a long standing gap in the field of lexicography. Rightly stated, history of Arabic lexicographical tradition has been addressed comprehensively in one major work by Nassar’s *al-Qāmūs al-ṣarabī* in 1968. It is also true that other later works had addressed the different types of early dictionaries and their arrangement of lexica such as Yacoub’s *al-maṣāzīm al-luḡawīyya, badāʾatuhā wa taṭawwuruhā* in 1981, which addressed mainly *Mugannas* lexica. Thus, not a single comprehensive study had been produced since the sixties relying on primary and original sources and dealing with both types of lexica.