

# Zaynaddn Ibn al-Aam's (591-674/1195-1276) Kitb iaz al-mun f l-alz wa-l-a : a Thirteenth-Century Arabic Riddle Book

Autor(en): **Papoutsakis, Nefeli**

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Nefeli Papoutsakis\*

## Zaynaddīn Ibn al-‘Aġamī’s (591–674/ 1195–1276) *Kitāb i‘ġāz al-munāġī fī l-alġāz wa-l-aḥāġī*: A Thirteenth-Century Arabic Riddle Book

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**Abstract:** This article presents a hitherto unnoted and unpublished thirteenth-century Arabic work on riddles. Zaynaddīn Ibn al-‘Aġamī’s (591–674/1195–1276) *Kitāb i‘ġāz al-munāġī fī l-alġāz wa-l-aḥāġī* (The Confidant’s Bemusement: On Riddles and Charades) is the first surviving Arabic collection of literary riddles by a single author. The Aleppine littérateur and religious scholar Ibn al-‘Aġamī composed this book for al-Malik an-Nāṣir Yūsuf, the last Ayyubid ruler of Aleppo and Damascus (r. 634–658/1236–1260). The work is an extensive collection of riddles in verse and prose. All the riddles were composed and subsequently solved and explained by Ibn al-‘Aġamī himself. The book, which testifies to the popularity of this genre in Ayyubid Syria, survives in a unique manuscript that has been falsely catalogued as a copy of an earlier work on riddles. Despite its importance for the history of the Arabic literary riddle, its existence has therefore remained unknown.

**Keywords:** Premodern Arabic literary riddles, Arabic literature of the Ayyubid period, Zaynaddīn Ibn al-‘Aġamī

Notwithstanding its importance as a genre of premodern Arabic literature, the riddle has so far attracted little scholarly attention. This is because its rise as a literary genre started relatively late, namely, in the Buyid era (ca. 322–448/933–1056). The Arabic literary riddle reached its heyday in the Mamluk period and continued to flourish throughout Ottoman times. Given the scholarly neglect of the literature of these late periods, it is small wonder that the riddle, too, has been little studied. This article presents a hitherto unnoted work on riddles: Zaynaddīn Ibn al-‘Aġamī’s unpublished *Kitāb i‘ġāz al-munāġī fī l-alġāz wa-l-aḥāġī*, which dates from the mid-thirteenth century and is the earliest surviving

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\*Corresponding author: Nefeli Papoutsakis, Arabistik, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster Fachbereich 09 Philologie, Schlaunstr. 2, Münster 48143, Germany.  
E-mail: nefeli@uni-muenster.de

collection of riddles by a single author.<sup>1</sup> Given that this author is very little known, I shall begin by offering some biographical data.

Zaynaddīn Abū l-Muẓaffar Ibn al-‘Ağamī (591–674/1195–1276), alias ‘Abdalmalik b. Šarafaddīn ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abdarraḥmān Ibn al-Karābīsī, belonged to a prominent Aleppine family of Shafiite scholars. As Anne-Marie Eddé has shown in a study she devoted to the history of this family in the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, the Banū l-‘Ağamī were in fact the most powerful and influential Shafiite family of Ayyubid Aleppo.<sup>2</sup> Descended from Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī al-Karābīsī (d. 245/859 or 248/862), one of aš-Šāfi‘ī’s most important disciples,<sup>3</sup> ‘Abdalmalik’s great-great-grandfather, ‘Abdarraḥmān b. Ṭāhir, moved from Nīsābūr to Aleppo in 433/1041 – hence the *nisba* al-‘Ağamī, ‘the Persian’. Already in the twelfth century, members of this family had distinguished themselves in religious sciences as well as in fighting Shiism widespread in Aleppo at that time. Even though they had already attained prominence under the Zangids, their position was strengthened under the Ayyubids, who also adhered to the Shafiite rite. Throughout the thirteenth century, they occupied several lucrative teaching, judicial, and administrative positions, socialized and intermarried with other elite Sunni families, and entertained excellent relations to the ruling Ayyubid Sultans and, after the Mongol invasions, their Mamluk successors.<sup>4</sup>

Zaynaddīn was one of the most talented scions of the family in literary matters.<sup>5</sup> Born in Ḍū l-Qa‘da 591/October 1195, he studied religious sciences under several prominent scholars, such as the great caḍī Bahā’addīn Ibn

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1 The first known collection of riddles by a single author is the now lost *Kitāb al-armāz fī l-alğāz* by the Buyid vizier Abū l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm aḍ-Ḍabbī (d. 399/1008), the protégé and successor of Ibn ‘Abbād. On this collection and more generally on the first phase of growth of the Arabic literary riddle (10th–12th centuries), see Papoutsakis 2019.

2 Eddé 1991; cf. Eddé 1999: 377–380, 614–615, 640, and 705 (Index “Ibn al-‘Ağamī”).

3 Brockelmann 1978.

4 Eddé 1991; Eddé 1999: 377–380, 481. Since its foundation in 515–6/1121–3, they retained control of the prestigious Zağğāğīyya madrasa (Nūraddīn Zangī transferred and buried there the remains of his grandfather Aqsunqur), whereas in 618/1221 they founded their own madrasa, the Šarafiyya, in the quarter where they lived. They also held positions in the Zāhiriyya, outside the city walls, besides being entrusted with several inspectorships in Aleppo and Damascus. In Mamluk times some members of this family made their careers in Egypt.

5 Eddé 1991: 69–70; Eddé 1999: 356, 379, 426–427, 481, 614; Vajda 1962: 47–48; Sourdel 1949–1950: 88, 101, 107 (no. 21, wrong death year 664); aṭ-Ṭabbāḥ 1988, 4: 487–488 (wrong death year 694); Ibn aš-Ša‘‘ār 2005, 3: 106–110; Ibn Šaddād 1983: 143–146; Ibn Šaddād 1991: 251; al-Yūnīnī 1954–1960, 3: 136–137; Ibn Ġamā‘a 1988: 361–365; Ibn Tağrībīrdī 1992, 7: 215; Ibn al-‘Imād 1986–1993, 7: 601. The following information is mainly drawn from Ibn Šaddād 1983: 143–146, the most detailed biographical notice on Zaynaddīn.

Šaddād (539–632/1145–1235),<sup>6</sup> the Ḥanafite *ḥadīṭ*-scholar Iftihāraddīn al-Hāšimī (539–616/1144–1219)<sup>7</sup> and the Shafiite ‘Abdarrahmān Ibn al-Ustād (alias Ibn ‘Alwān, d. 623/1226),<sup>8</sup> and studied grammar under the distinguished linguist Muwaffaqaddīn Ibn Ya‘īš (553–643/1158–1245).<sup>9</sup> He was first appointed as legal witness and deputy *cadi* in charge of marriage contracts in 616/1219–20 and subsequently became repetitor (*mu‘īd*) at the newly founded Sayfiyya madrasa (617/1220). To judge by two poems of his preserved in the *Qalā'id al-ğumān*, Ibn aš-Ša‘‘ār’s (595–654/1198–1256) literary anthology, and which are addressed to the Ayyubid Sultan of Aleppo al-Malik al-‘Azīz (r. 613–634/1216–1236), he must have had relations to the court since the early 1230s.<sup>10</sup> In 656/1258–9 he obtained a professorship at the Nūriyya madrasa and became head of the šūfi orders (*šayḥ aš-šuyūḥ*) – positions which he held until the second Mongol occupation of Aleppo in 659/1261. At the beginning of that year, he even held a judgeship for four months (Muḥarram – Ğumādā I 659/January – May 1261), but then fled to Damascus and deputized as *cadi* of Bāniyās for Ibn Ḥallikān (608–681/1211–1282), the great *cadi* of Damascus. In 661/1262–3, again for fear of the Mongols, he fled to Cairo, where the great *cadi* Tāğaddīn ‘Abdalwahhāb b. Ḥalaf (d. 665/1266–7)<sup>11</sup> appointed him as legal witness at the mosque of Ibn Ruzzīk. Tāğaddīn’s successor, Taqīyaddīn Ibn Razīn, made him his deputy in charge of marriage contracts and inheritances.<sup>12</sup> Zaynaddīn died in Cairo on 25 Dū l-Qa‘da 674 (11 May 1276) and was buried in a grave he had built close to aš-Šāfi‘īs tomb at the Muqaṭṭam cemetery.

According to Ibn Šaddād, Zaynaddīn authored several works, including a collection of *maqāmāt* and sermons, a book on Sufism, a volume of praise poems on the prophet, a *dīwān* of secular praise poetry and another containing his love verse, as well as a large collection of riddles of his own composition.<sup>13</sup> Apart from twenty-odd epigrams preserved in the *Qalā'id al-ğumān*,<sup>14</sup> the only

6 El-Shayyal 1971. Ibn Tağribirdī 1992

7 Eddé 1999: 374 and 703 (Index “al-Hāšimī Iftihār al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib”); aṭ-Ṭabbāḥ 1988, 4: 321–322; aḍ-Ḍahabī 1990–2000, 44: 301–302.

8 Eddé 1999: 380 and 705 (Index “Ibn ‘Alwān: ‘Abd al-Rahmān Ibn al-Ustād”); aṭ-Ṭabbāḥ 1988, 4: 472–473.

9 Fück 1971.

10 Ibn aš-Ša‘‘ār 2005: 109 (a poem dated in 629/1231–2), 106 (a poem dated in 633/1235–6).

11 Ibn Kaṭīr 1997–1999, 17: 471–472.

12 Ibn Šaddād 1983: 144.

13 Ibn Šaddād 1983: 144.

14 Ibn aš-Ša‘‘ār 2005, 3: 106–110. Most epigrams are descriptive and love poems (there are also two riddle poems not included in *Kitāb i'ğāz al-munāğī*). Two more epigrams not included in the *Qalā'id al-ğumān* are preserved in aṭ-Ṭabbāḥ 1988, 4: 487–488.

work of his to have survived is the last-named collection, the *Kitāb i'ğāz al-munāğī fī l-alğāz wa-l-aḥāğī* (*The Confidant's Bemusement: On Riddles and Charades*), which he dedicated to al-Malik an-Nāṣir Yūsuf, the last Ayyubid ruler of Aleppo and Damascus (r. 634–658/1236–1260 and 648–658/1250–1260 respectively).<sup>15</sup> The work is preserved in a *unicum* Topkapı manuscript, which is however incorrectly catalogued as a copy of an earlier riddle anthology, the *Kitāb al-i'ğāz fī l-aḥāğī wa-l-alğāz* (*The Inimitable Book on Quizzes and Riddles*) by the twelfth-century Iraqi author Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Ḥazīrī (d. 568/1172).<sup>16</sup> The manuscript is likewise incorrectly mentioned as a copy of al-Ḥazīrī's book in Brockelmann's *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*.<sup>17</sup> Together with its title and the name of the dedicatee, however, the name of the author is elaborately written on the first page of that volume: 'Abdalmalik b. 'Abdallāh b. 'Abdarrahmān (...) b. Abī 'Alī al-Ḥusayn al-Karābīsī. Apart from the similarity in the titles of the two works, the confusion arose apparently from the fact that the author, 'Abdalmalik b. 'Abdallāh, could not be easily identified, as neither his honorific, Zaynaddīn, nor his better-known patronymic Ibn al-'Ağamī are mentioned. I personally succeeded in identifying him largely by chance.

The manuscript comprises 203 folios with fifteen lines per page and is written in a beautiful *nashī* script. It seems to be an autograph<sup>18</sup> and probably the very copy that Zaynaddīn presented to the Sultan. Given that in one of the riddles Zaynaddīn addresses 'Izzaddīn al-Murtaḍā, the syndic (*naqīb*) of the 'Alids of Aleppo at that time and a close associate of the Sultan, who died in 653/1255, the work must have been written before that date.<sup>19</sup> An-Nāṣir bestowed

<sup>15</sup> Humphreys 1993.

<sup>16</sup> Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Arabic Ms. no. 2419: Karatay 1969: 239–240, 302 (nos. 8283 and 8486). Nevertheless, the name of the author is correctly given in the online catalogue of the Institute for Arabic Manuscripts (Ma'had al-Maḥṭūṭāt al-'Arabiyya) of the Arab League, which possesses a microfilm copy of it. On al-Ḥazīrī's book, the earliest Arabic treatise-cum-anthology on riddles, see Papoutsakis 2019.

<sup>17</sup> GAL S1: 441. Both Karatay and Brockelmann were misled by Rescher 1911: 710–711, who had erroneously identified the manuscript as a copy of al-Ḥazīrī's work.

I am grateful to Professor Thomas Bauer and to Dr. Hakan Özkan for procuring me a digitized copy of this manuscript.

<sup>18</sup> The colophon reads: *wa-hādā aḥīru mā nazamtuhū wa-naṭartuhū li-l-i'ğāz, fī l-aḥāğī wa-l-alğāz, wa-l-iṣārāt wa-l-armāz. Fa-ta'ammalhu bi-l-baṣari wa-l-baṣīrah, wa-bsuṭ 'uḍra ḡāmi'ihī fī l-muddati l-qaṣīrah, wa-tarahḥam 'alayhi wa-'alā wālidayh, fa-hya a'zamu yadin tusdihā ilayh.* Note the similarity with the title of al-Ḥazīrī's book (*al-i'ğāz fī l-aḥāğī wa-l-alğāz*).

<sup>19</sup> Aš-šarīf al-Murtaḍā 'Izzaddīn Abū l-Futūḥ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ġa'far al-Ḥusaynī (579–653/1183–1255): see Eddé 1999: 439 (and the sources given there), 709 (Index “'Izz a-Dīn al-Murtaḍā”); cf. aṭ-Ṭabbāḥ 1988, 4: 410–412. In the last riddle of the second part of his book (fol. 197b–199a), Zaynaddīn asks 'Izzaddīn to present this part of the work to the Sultan.

a *ṭaylasān* upon Zaynaddīn in 647/1249–50.<sup>20</sup> This may mean that Zaynaddīn presented the work to the Sultan in that year.

The work is divided into three parts that are preceded by a short introduction. In the introduction (fol. 1b–4b), Zaynaddīn praises the sciences (*‘ulūm*) in general and the riddle in particular, suggesting that riddles constitute useful knowledge. Sciences are the most precious merchandise and the best craft to exercise, while riddles are a touchstone of intelligence and an entertainment for the hearts, he argues, and hearts need recreation.<sup>21</sup> Noble assemblies are never devoid of riddle competitions and the Sultan loves pursuing sciences in his free time. He therefore composed for him witty riddles that bring praise to their author and prove his merit and excellence. Zaynaddīn names the title of the work, explains its arrangement, and stresses that all the riddles are of his own composition. To validate the topic of his book – and following in the footsteps of the above-mentioned al-Ḥaḏīrī –, he then relates nine anecdotes involving the prophet and other early figures that testify to their approval of riddling and the use of ambiguous or cryptic expressions for entertainment or for reasons of safety, when one is in danger or under duress. All nine anecdotes are apparently taken from al-Ḥaḏīrī’s introduction to his own work. Apart from these anecdotes, the similar title and a few other very minor borrowings from the earlier anthology, however, true to his word, Zaynaddīn did not include anything by another author in his book.<sup>22</sup> The introduction concludes by restating the utility of riddles as a mind-trainer – one’s ability to solve riddles has a practical application in breaking codes and reading encrypted texts.<sup>23</sup>

The first part of the work is by far the largest (fol. 4b–180a) and bears the same title as the book as a whole. It comprises 192 riddle poems amounting to 991 verses.<sup>24</sup> The length of the poems varies from two to fifteen lines, but the most commonly used forms are the five-liner (41 poems), the seven-liner (40 poems) and the quatrain (32 poems). The poems are arranged alphabetically

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**20** Ibn Šaddād 1983: 144.

**21** As convention required, he claims to have applied himself to the revival of scientific material that had become rotten bones, i. e. had fallen into oblivion.

**22** His knowledge of al-Ḥaḏīrī’s work can be inferred from the anecdotes cited in the introduction; moreover, Zaynaddīn uses the term *luġz luġawī*, which was coined by al-Ḥaḏīrī for riddles based on *double entendres*. The title is also inspired by the title of al-Ḥaḏīrī’s book and may have been conceived as a homage to that author. A riddle in rhymed prose (no. 9 of the second part of the book, fol. 187b–189a), too, is a recast of a riddle from the earlier work.

**23** Al-Ḥaḏīrī, too, argued along these lines. To many premodern Arab authors cryptography (*ta‘miya*) and riddling were related domains: see Papoutsakis 2019.

**24** One poem is lost because a folio or two are missing from the manuscript; I cannot infer how long it was.

according to the rhyme-letter. The sections of rare rhyme-letters such as *tā'*, *dāl*, *zā'*, etc. contain only three riddles each; the sections of common rhyme-letters such as *alif*, *bā'*, *tā'* etc. contain ten riddles each. Each riddle is introduced by a rubric, which states its number in the section as well as its topic, namely the solution, and is followed by a detailed verse-by-verse philological and rhetorical commentary in prose. Besides explaining the given clues and supplying the solution, the commentary discusses the use of *badī'* figures, poetic licences and rare vocabulary. The great majority of the riddles are notional, that is to say, riddles whose topic is a notion, a word's meaning (in Saussurian terms, the *signifié*), which they paraphrase and disclose in puzzling ways, mostly using metaphors and *double entendres*. In some sections there are clusters of riddles on related notions, for example, various flowers, fruits, body parts, etc. This part also includes some *mu'ammayāt* (word riddles on persons' names).<sup>25</sup> The poems often start by addressing the implied reader/hearer and typically close by urging him to solve the posed riddle.

The second part of the book (fol. 180a–199a), titled *al-Algāz al-mantūra wa-l-armāz al-ma'tūra* (*Strewn/Prose Riddles and Handed-Down Signs*), comprises twenty riddles and riddle-like, that is to say, periphrastic solutions in rhymed prose. Even though riddles in rhymed prose are much rarer than riddle poems, they often occur in the sources throughout the premodern period (the oldest specimens known to me date from the fourth/tenth century). Zaynaddīn introduces the riddles and the solutions with literary rubrics in rhymed prose. For example, the first riddle, which is on the sun, is titled *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ fī ta'miyat al-barāḥ* (*The Minds' Leisure Walk: A Riddle on the Sun*); its solution is introduced with the phrase *al-Ġawāb fī iẓhār dukā bi-mā qtaḍāhu d-dakā* (*The Answer Disclosing the Sun According to What Intelligence Requires*). The reader/hearer is addressed at the beginning and closure of the riddles, as in the previous part, as well as of the solutions. Apart from notional riddles, this part contains two juridical riddles (problems on inheritance shares and family relationships cast in the form of riddles) and two computational riddles (involving calculations).

The third part (fol. 199a–203a), titled *Ibrāz al-munāġāh fī iḥrāz al-muḥāġāh* (*Divulging Confidential Talk: On Winning the Riddle Competition*), comprises twenty *aḥāġī* (sg. *uḥġīya*), a special kind of word riddles resembling charades (see below). All *aḥāġī* are couplets and are each followed by a solution couplet.

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<sup>25</sup> Word riddles are riddles referring to the *signifiant*, i. e. to a word as such. On the basic distinction between 'notional riddles' (*Sinnrättsel*) and 'word riddles' (*Worträttsel*), see Tomasek 1994: 46–49. Riddles that encode elements of both the *signifiant* and the *signifié* are called 'mixed riddles'.

Let us first look at some riddles from the first and longest part of the book. Obviously, since the solutions are given in the introductory rubrics, before the riddles are posed, what attracts the reader's attention is how the poet paraphrases and encrypts the given notions. The first riddle of each section in this part of the book is addressed to the Sultan and is therefore very nicely wrought, while its topic is mostly a notion related to the position and the role of the addressee, namely royal insignia, prestige items and weapons. Zaynaddīn points to this feature in the introduction: "I address the first riddle of each chapter to the Sultan in order to profit from the propitiousness of his mention and fulfil my duty to praise and thank him", he says. In two instances, he actually uses the first riddle of a section to voice a petition. The first poem of the *kāf*-section, titled 'Request for a royal endowment to the author and commentator of these riddles',<sup>26</sup> is a seven-line plea for an estate cast in riddle form, whereas the very first riddle of the book, which is on dinars, is an otherwise explicit appeal for remuneration. I quote:<sup>27</sup>

اللغز الأول في الدنانير وهو <الوافر>  
 أيا مَلِكَ الزَّمانِ أَجِبْ دُعائي وَأَطِيعْ بَيْننا شُهَبَ السَّماءِ  
 وَأَظْهِرْ لي عُطارِدَ في صِباحي بِلا رَدِّ فِفي رَدِّي مَسائِي  
 وَفي بُرْجِ الخَريفِ أَبنُهُ وَأَجْعَلْ مَنارِلَهُ السَّعيدَةَ في الشِّتاءِ  
 وَحُلِّ بِحَلِّهِ رَمْزِي ولُغْزِي وَحَقِّقْ مِنْهُ تَضْحيفَ الرِّجاءِ

King of our times, answer my call and make the heavens' shining stars appear between us!

Show me Mercury ('Uṭārid) without rebuff (*radd*, i. e. -rid = 'Uṭā > 'aṭā') in the day, because rebuffing is evening time to me!

*Make it clear/Part with it* in the zodiac sign of autumn and place its auspicious Mansions in the winter!

Solve my sign and my riddle by disbursing it and realize the miswriting of hope!

This is obviously a complex riddle, which shows that a commentary was well needed. As Zaynaddīn explains, the heavens' shining stars in v. 1 is a metaphor for shiny gold coins; he asks the Sultan to let them come forth. The second verse exploits encoding techniques of word riddles, namely, changes in the vocalization (*taḥrīf*) and omission of letters (*ḥaḍf*). 'Uṭārid without *radd*, that is, *rid*, its last syllable, and a slight vocalization change becomes 'aṭā', 'donation,

<sup>26</sup> *Iltimās at-taṣadduq 'alā nāẓim hādihī l-alḡāz wa-šāriḥihā min mawlānā s-sultān*, fol. 140b–141b.

<sup>27</sup> Fol. 5a–b.



gift'.<sup>28</sup> Zaynaddīn asks the Sultan to let this truncated and altered Mercury, alias the gift, appear in the daytime, in order to make his clue more explicit, given that Mercury appears only at night. A rebuff (*radd*) would entail for him financial straits, metaphorically 'dark times', 'evening time'. In v. 3 he exploits the polysemy of the verb *abāna*, which may mean 'make clear, clarify', a meaning suggested by the riddling context, as well as 'part with', which is the intended meaning. In his commentary, Zaynaddīn points out the *tawriya*. The first autumnal zodiac sign is Libra (*al-mīzān*), the scales: Zaynaddīn asks the Sultan to weigh the coins, in order to pay them out. He also asks him to place the truncated Mercury's Mansions in the winter, thereby referring to a number of stars the first component of whose name is *sa'd*, 'auspicious', and which rise aurorally in the winter.<sup>29</sup> What he means is that through the gift the Sultan will procure happiness (*sa'āda*). The last verse urges him to solve the riddle by authorizing the donation; he will thereby realize, that is, bring to the poet, 'ampleness of means', *raḥā'*, which is the miswriting (*taṣḥīf*) of *raḡā'*, 'hope'.<sup>30</sup>

Not all riddles are this complex, however. Another riddle addressed to an-Nāṣir is worth citing because of its unusual topic: 'the prayer of the wronged', *da'wat al-maẓlūm*. The riddle is straightforward and refers to the well-known *ḥadīṭ*, according to which nothing can obstruct the prayer of a wronged man from reaching God:<sup>31</sup>

اللغز الأول في دعوة المظلوم وهو < الوافر >  
 صلاح الدين يا من جَلَّ فينا      بِمَا أَوْلَاهُ مِنْ حُسْنِ الصَّنِيعِ  
 أبى لي لا عِدْمَتِكَ مَا وَضِيعٌ      عَلَا فِيْنَا إِلَى الشَّأْوِ الرَّفِيعِ  
 سَرَى فِي اللَّيْلِ كَامِلُهُ خَفِيفًا      وَمُدَّ بِوَافِرِ الرَّمْلِ السَّرِيعِ  
 فَلَمْ يَحْجُبْهُ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ أَخْفَى      مِنَ السَّرِّ الْخَفِيِّ عَنِ السَّمِيعِ  
 أَجَلٌ فِيهِ جَوَادُ الْفِكْرِ وَأَرْذُدُّ      سُرَاهُ بِهِ مَعَ الْوَرَعِ الْمُطْبِيعِ

Ṣalāḥaddīn, you who are highly exalted among us for the favours you bestow!

<sup>28</sup> Zaynaddīn also comments on the fact that he treated 'Uṭārid as a diptote because of the metre, adding that the Kufan grammarians allow this, whereas the Basrans disallow it. Suchlike comments occur often in the commentary.

<sup>29</sup> *Sa'd aḡ-dābiḡ*, *Sa'd bula'a*, *Sa'd as-su'ūd* and *Sa'd al-aḡbiya*, collectively known as *as-Su'ūd*: see Lane 1863–1893: 1361.

<sup>30</sup> The commentary to v. 4 is lost as one or two folios are here missing from the manuscript.

<sup>31</sup> Fol. 113a–b. On the *ḥadīṭ*, see al-Buḡārī 1993, 2: 864 (*bāb: al-ittiqā' wa-l-ḡaḡar min da'wat al-maẓlūm*). Muḡammad sent Mu'āḡ (b. ḡabal) to the Yemen to spread Islam advising him: *ittaḡi da'wata l-maẓlūmi fa-innahā laysa baynahā wa-bayna llāhi ḡiḡābun*. See a riddle on the same subject in al-'Askarī 1933, 2: 214.

Explain this to me – may I not be bereaved of you: What is humble but becomes elevated among us to the highest end?

It travels by night, entire, lightweight, stretched out in a quick and ample trot. Nothing veils it even though it is less perceptible than a secret barely audible. Let the noble horse of your thought revolve around it and deter its night journey with obedient godliness!

As his comments show, Zaynaddīn was very proud of v. 3, since he had managed to use the names of five metres (*kāmil*, *ḥafīf*, *wāfir*, *ramal* and *sarīʿ*) as ordinary epithets bearing their common meaning. “This is a marvellous assemblage (of puns) that can only be achieved with great effort and strain”, he notes. The idea expressed in v. 5 is also worth noting: the poet appeals to the Sultan’s piety to urge him to stamp out injustice. He must see to it that his subjects are treated justly and thus prevent this sort of prayer from being uttered.

Typical of Zaynaddīn’s ‘descriptive riddles’, riddles that resemble descriptive poems, as do normally his riddles on fruits, flowers and various implements, is the following on the polo game. The rubric reads ‘On the Mallet and the Ball with Which One Plays While on Horseback’:<sup>32</sup>

اللغز الثالث في الصوّالجان والكُرة الملعُوب فيهما على الخَيْلِ وهو <الطويل>  
 رَأَيْتُ هَلالًا دارَ من حَوْلِ كَوْكَبٍ وقد ظَهَرَ في الأَرْضِ لا في السَّمَوَاتِ  
 يَلُوحانِ لي والشَّمْسُ في الجَوِّ قد سَمَتْ وذا عَجَبٌ في هالَةٍ بَيْنَ ساداتِ  
 يُحَاكُونَ أقمارًا سَرَتِ بِأهْلَةٍ على بارِقٍ يَجْرِي بِهِم لِلْمَسَرَّاتِ  
 وَقَدْ تَبِعُوا نَجْمًا هَوَى بَعْدَ أَنْ علا وَطارَ بِفَرَّاتِ تَوالتْ وَكَرَّاتِ  
 إِذا حَرَكَهُ مَرَّ يَرْقُصُ بَيْنَهُم على وَقَعِ ضَرْبِ أَرْدَفُوهُ بِأصواتِ  
 وَإِنْ تَرَكَهُ أَثْبَتُوا مِنْهُ آيَةً سَتُنْفِي بِنَصِّ ظاهِرٍ بَعْدَ إثباتِ  
 فَنَبِّئْ لَنَا ما أسْمُ الهلالِ الَّذِي بَدَأَ وما الكَوْكَبِ البادي لَنَا وأَقْضِ حاجاتي

I saw a crescent moon circling a star – they appeared on earth, not in the sky!  
 They shone brightly towards me in a halo among lords, while the sun was high  
 up in the sky – how strange!

The lords resembled full moons travelling at night, along with crescent moons,  
 on a flashing one that rushed with them towards pleasures.

They followed a star that had set after rising and that flew amid alternate  
 charges and retreats.

When they set it in motion, it danced in their midst to a slap beat which they  
 accompanied *vocally/with shouts*.

<sup>32</sup> Fol. 29a–30a.

If they let it alone, they *affirm a sign (of God's power)/fix a sign* (=figure) that will, however, be *gainsaid by a clear text/displaced by a clear run* after being *affirmed/fixe*d.

Explain to us what the crescent moon and the star that appeared to us are and attend to my needs!

Knowing the solution in advance helps us again to follow the imagery of the poem. The crescent moon stands for the polo stick and the star stands for the ball. It is clear why they appear on earth and in the daytime. One may stumble at the 'lords' who surround the crescent moon and the star by way of a halo in v. 2, since the players are not mentioned in the rubric. V. 3 both elucidates and obscures this component: noble men are often likened to full moons; here they travel, along with crescent moons, upon lightnings, that is, swiftly running horses, and have fun. They follow the ball-star that rises and *sets/falls* and flies amid the horses' charges and retreats. Moving away from the celestial imagery, the vocabulary used in v. 5 takes us to another world, that of music, dancing and singing. Beating, that is, hitting the ball makes it dance, the players accompany the beat with their song, i. e. they shout in joy whenever they manage to hit it. The *double entendres* in v. 6 relate to yet another context, that of the affirmation of faith and its denial: if the players let the ball's 'body' or 'figure', *āya*,<sup>33</sup> rest, they virtually fix it in a place (*aṭbatū*) albeit very briefly: the horses' run (*naṣṣ*) will soon displace it – this is the intended meaning. But referring to a star, *āya* can be construed as a sign of God's power,<sup>34</sup> which the players 'affirm', *aṭbatū*, even though a clear text, *naṣṣ*, will then gainsay and reject it. Once more, in the commentary, Zaynaddīn points out and explains the intricate *tawriya*.

*Mu'ammayāt*, word riddles on persons' names, are relatively few, twenty-one of the almost two hundred riddles. Encoding techniques such as misspelling (*taṣḥīf*), changes in the vocalization (*taḥrīf*), inversion (*qalb*) and omission of letters (*ḥadf*), which are typical of word riddles, are nevertheless employed in notional riddles as well – for example in the first riddle discussed above, in which Mercury ('Utārid) is thus metamorphosed into a gift ('*aṭā*') and hope (*raḡā*') is turned into amplex of means (*raḥā*'). Characteristic of Zaynaddīn's *mu'ammayāt* is the following on the name Raša':<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> In the commentary Zaynaddīn glosses *āya* with *šaḥṣ*.

<sup>34</sup> As Zaynaddīn explains in the commentary, *an-naḡmu āyatun min āyāti llāhi ta'ālā*.

<sup>35</sup> Fol. 170b–171a.

اللغز العاشر فيمن أسْمُهُ رَشَأٌ وَهُوَ < الوافر >  
 سَأَلْتُ الْجَبَّ مَا أَسْمُكَ جِبْنَ وَاقِي فَأَوْمَى نَحْوَ ثَغْرِ كَالْجُمَانِ  
 فَلَمَّا أَنْ بَدَا التَّأْشِيرُ فِيهِ وَبَانَ غَنِيْبٌ عَنْ نُطْقِ اللِّسَانِ  
 وَقَلْتُ الإِسْمَ وَصَفُ الثَّغْرِ فَأَفْهَمَ بِقَلْبٍ فَأَشْرَأَبَ مِنَ النَّيَّانِ  
 وَقَالَ فَهَيْمَتُهُ وَعَدَا سَرِيْعًا كَعَادَتِهِ عَلَى مَرِّ الزَّمَانِ  
 فَتَبَيَّنَ مَا أَسْمُ مَنْ نَاجَى بِصَمْتٍ لِتُكْرَمَ نَبِيْنُنَا بِالْأَمْتِحَانِ

I asked my darling, when he came, ‘what’s your name?’ and he pointed at his front teeth that resembled pearls.

When they appeared serrated (*badā t-ta’sīru fīh*), I had no need for words (i. e. to be told the name).

I said: ‘The name is a description of the teeth. Grasp it then *with (your) heart* (i. e. mind)/by inverting the letters (*bi-qalbin*)!’ Surprised at my explanation, he straightened his head

And said: ‘You’ve gotten it right!’, then went away quickly, as was his wont.

Explain the name of that person, who confided it to me without saying a word. You will be honoured, if you do, for succeeding in this test.

As in this case, *mu‘ammayāt* on persons’ names normally claim that the encoded name is that of the beloved of the poet. Since pre-Islamic times serrated teeth, a well-liked characteristic of youth, were often mentioned and praised in love poetry. Inverting the word *uṣur* or *uṣar*, ‘serration’, yields *Raša’*, the name of the beloved. This is admittedly an easy riddle, given that the solution is stated in the rubric. What makes it interesting is the clever staging, the encounter with the beloved and the dumb show that discloses his name: instead of saying his name, the beloved hints at it by silently pointing at a member or members of his body or a feature of his (in this case the serration of his teeth). Zaynaddīn exploits the same staging and the dumb show device in a number of similar *mu‘ammayāt*. In a *mu‘ammā* on the name Sa‘īd, for example, the young man gives three clues in succession: he points at his teeth, which stand for the letter *sīn*, then at his eye, the letter ‘*ayn*, and finally at his hand, in Arabic, *yad*. Taken together, these three elements yield Sa‘īd. To show that he has understood, the lover replies again obliquely: the name is an intensive adjective of a root meaning ‘happiness’.<sup>36</sup>

As I cite a riddle in rhymed prose from the second part of the book in the Appendix, I should now like to turn to the riddles of the last part, the *aḥāgī* or

<sup>36</sup> Fol. 13b–14b; cf. fol. 71a–72a, a *mu‘ammā* on the name Muḥayyā. In the eighth riddle of the *ḥā’* section on the name Baktūt (fol. 55b–56b) Zaynaddīn plays with the reader’s expectation: the lover points again at ‘his’ breast, *lit.* ‘the breast’, *ilā ṣ-ṣadri*. This time, however, Zaynaddīn means the very beginning, i. e. the first two words, of the poem.

charades. The word *uḥḡīya* may mean ‘riddle’ in general, this being its original meaning, but thanks to al-Ḥarīrī (444–516/1052–1122) it took on the additional, special meaning, of ‘charade’. *Aḥāḡī* are for the first time attested in al-Ḥarīrī’s *al-Maqāma al-Malaṭīyya*. Since then they gradually grew quite popular, especially so in the Mamluk period, from which several known *aḥāḡī* collections date.<sup>37</sup> An *uḥḡīya*, commonly a couplet or very rarely a three-liner, divides a relatively long word into two or very rarely three parts, each of which constitutes a word in its own right, and substitutes each part with a synonym. The solver must guess what the synonyms stand for and thus reconstruct the encoded word. The solution adopts the same form (couplet or three-liner), usually but not always including the metre and the rhyme. In the following charade (no. 6 of part three of Zaynaddīn’s book), for example, the word *barāḡīt* (‘fleas’) is analysed as consisting of *barā*, i. e. *baran* (‘earth’) and *ḡīt(a)* (‘it was rained upon’). The *uḥḡīya* hence asks what the equivalent of *turābun* (‘earth’) *umṭira* (‘it was rained upon’), i. e. ‘earth that has been rained upon’, is:

<الرمـل>  
 قُلْ لَنَا يَا مَنْ تُحَاجِي      مَا تُرَابٌ أَمْطِرَا  
 فَلَاكَ الْفَضْلُ عَلَيْنَا      بَلْ عَلَى كُلِّ الْوَرَى

O you who contend with us in charades, tell us what is ‘earth that has been rained upon’?

(If you do,) you will beat us – nay, everyone!

The answer reads:

<البيـط>  
 حَاجَيْتَنَا بِبِرَاغِيْثٍ نَطَقْتَ بِهَا      فِي ضِمْنِ لَفْظِكَ يَا مَنْ فَاقَ فِي النَّاسِ  
 فَأَعْلَمَ وَكُنْ يَا فَدْنَكَ النَّفْسُ ذَاكِرْنَا      وَلَا تَكُنْ لِعُهُودِ النَّاسِ بِالنَّاسِ

You tested us with a charade on ‘fleas’, of which you spoke in your speech, o you who excel among men.

Know it and remember us – may my soul ransom you – and don’t forget your promises to people!

<sup>37</sup> Al-Ḥarīrī 2012: 408–420. Other extant *aḥāḡī* collections are by Ibn Munīr at-Ṭarābulusī (473–548/1081–1153), Ibn al-Wardī (ca. 689–749/1290–1349), Ibn ad-Durayhim (712–762/1312–1361) and Šihābaddīn al-Ḥiḡāzī (790–875/1388–1471). The *aḥāḡī* collections by aṣ-Šafadī (696–764/1297–1363) and Šihābaddīn Ibn aš-Šabb at-Tā’ib (d. 861/1457) do not survive. Charades were popular in Ottoman times as well.

The above examples and the prose riddle cited in the Appendix are representative of the various kinds of riddles that Zaynaddīn produced. Given that this collection was addressed and dedicated to the Sultan, Zaynaddīn was careful not to overtax and weary his addressee. This is why he gives the solutions in advance and furnishes detailed explanations of the clues he offers in the poems, in the subsequent commentary. Both the riddles and the commentary in part one and the solutions in parts two and three thus make very intriguing and entertaining reading – a mandatory quality of belletristic works, even when they allege utility, as in this case. Zaynaddīn's riddles mostly operate with metaphors, *double entendres*, oblique descriptions and puzzling paraphrases, which are encoding strategies typical of notional riddles, the commonest type of riddles in this work. Nevertheless, he also employs techniques used in word riddles, such as *tahrīf*, *taṣhīf*, *qalb*, *ḥadf*, etc., albeit in a notably much lesser degree – all the more so as word riddles are relatively few in his collection.

Zaynaddīn's work attests to the efflorescence of the literary riddle in Ayyubid Syria and the popularity it enjoyed at Ayyubid courts and in elite circles in general. The genre had a long tradition in the region reaching back to the poets of the Ḥamdānid Sayf ad-Dawla in the mid-tenth century.<sup>38</sup> Another Syrian author that contributed greatly to the genre's growth was Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī (363–449/973–1058) – one of the most important classical Arabic riddle authors.<sup>39</sup> A number of Syrian poets closer to Zaynaddīn's times, such as Ibn 'Unayn<sup>40</sup> and Ibn Daftarḥwān,<sup>41</sup> as well as Zaynaddīn's contemporaries Ibn 'Adlān,<sup>42</sup> Ibn Qizil

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**38** Papoutsakis 2019.

**39** On the riddles of al-Ma'arrī, see Smoor 1988; Papoutsakis 2019.

**40** Ibn 'Unayn, Šarafaddīn Abū l-Maḥāsīn, Muḥammad b. Naṣr (549–630/1154–1233), a close associate of and briefly vizier to the Ayyubid Sultan of Damascus al-Malik al-Mu'aẓẓam (r. 615–624/1218–1227), was a very important riddle poet. His *Dīwān* (ed. Mardam 1946: 149–178) comprises fifty-two riddles and solution poems (incl. riddles that he exchanged with contemporaries, e. g., a one-line riddle poem on Islām addressed to him by al-Malik al-Mu'aẓẓam to which Ibn 'Unayn composed a two-line response).

**41** On Ibn Daftarḥwān (589–655/1193–1257) see Bauer 2017; on his *mu'ammayāt* on girls' names see Weil 1984.

**42** 'Afifaddīn 'Alī b. 'Adlān (583–666/1187–1268), a grammarian from Mosul, who lived and taught in Ayyubid Cairo but had also connections to the Syrian Ayyubids, is known to have composed a now lost book on riddles titled *'Uqlat al-muḡtāz fī ḥall al-alḡāz*, as well as a work on cryptography: aṣ-Šafadī 1991: 308–314. His cryptographic treatise, which he dedicated to the Ayyubid Sultan of Homs, al-Ašraf Mūsā (r. 644–658/1246–1260), has been published and studied in Mrayāti 1987–1989, 1: 261–307.

al-Mušidd<sup>43</sup> and al-Is‘irdī,<sup>44</sup> who were all patronized by Ayyubid rulers (the last two by an-Nāṣir Yūsuf, the dedicatee of Zaynaddīn’s riddle book), followed the trend of the times and boosted with their riddles the growth of this genre, which was to reach its heyday in Mamluk times. Zaynaddīn’s book is all the more important as it is the earliest surviving collection of riddles by a single author and the second oldest surviving Arabic work solely devoted to riddles after al-Ḥazīrī’s treatise-cum-anthology, which preserves riddles by ca. ninety authors (mostly from the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries).

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## Appendix: A Riddle in Rhymed Prose<sup>45</sup>

اللغزُ التاسعُ عَشْرُ  
 في المعنى القايِم في الذاتِ الموضوعِ للراحةِ واللذاتِ وهو  
 ما تقولُ يا رابِيةَ العلمِ وغايَةَ الحلمِ في صاحبِ يريخِ جودهِ ويَزيحِ وجودهِ ويَروقُ عناقهُ ويورقُ  
 فراقهُ ويشوقُ وصالهُ ويشقُّ فصالهُ فيترددُ في الناظرِ تردُّدَ الخيالِ في خاطرِ ويدبُّ في  
 النفوسِ دبيبَ المآ في العروسِ فتنتعشُ بنايلهِ العَمرِ وتمترجُ به امتزاجِ المآ بالخمرِ بسيرايةِ  
 خفيّةِ ولطافةِ وفيّةِ تستولى على عقلِ الحيوانِ في كثيرٍ من الأحيانِ وما هو جسدٌ سوى  
 ولا جسمٌ مرئيٌّ يلمخُ بكديدِ الأبصارِ ويوضخُ بكديدِ الأعصارِ بل هو معنى قائمٌ بالذاتِ وضع  
 للراحةِ واللذاتِ لا يدركُ وهو خلافُ العادةِ عندَ تحقُّقِ الإرادةِ في السَفرِ والحضَرِ إلا بكفِّ  
 النظرِ ولا يوجدُ في المحسوسِ إلا بإعدامِ النفوسِ فلا يعقلُ حضورهُما معاً عندَ من فهم  
 ووعى بل إذا أثبتَّ أحدهما انتفى الآخرُ معنى فيبينهُما لي ورأيك أسما وأسنى والسلام

الجوابُ عن الرايقِ عناقهُ الموزقِ فراقهُ وهو  
 اعلمُ أيها الوافرُ علمهُ السَافرُ حلمهُ أن هذا الذي وقعت إليه الإشارةُ واتسعت فيه العبارةُ  
 وارِدٌ يَغشى الأرواحَ فينبُلُها الغدوُ والرواحُ ويَوزُرها عندَ المسأِ بعدَ صلاةِ العشاءِ وتارةً يقصدها نهاراً  
 ويَرضدها جهاراً فيقبضُها إليه عندَ إقبالها عليه ويُلقى أجسادها عندَ لقاءه بما يردُّ من تلقاياه ويكفها عن

43 Sayfaddīn al-Mušidd, ‘Alī b. ‘Umar Ibn Qizil (602–656/1205–1258), Egyptian poet and chancery secretary: aṣ-Ṣafadī 1991: 353–365 (and the sources given there); Eddé 1999: 254 note 445, 268. His *Dīwān* contains twenty-five riddle poems (counting riddles found in both ed. al-Ḥabbāzī 2002 and Sallām 1999).

44 Nūraddīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Is‘irdī (619–656/1222–1258), poet and boon companion of the Sultan an-Nāṣir Yūsuf: see Rosenthal 2004. His *Dīwān* (Ms. Escorial ar. 472) contains eight riddles.

45 Fol. 197a–b. I have retained the orthography of the manuscript, which is extensively vocalized. I very rarely add *šaddas* or vocalization signs for ease of reading.

التَّصْرُفِ لَا بَكَفِهِ مَعَ قُوَّتِهَا وَصَعْفِهِ وَإِذَا أَرَدَتْ كَشْفَهُ وَقَدْ أَخْطَاكَ نُورُهُ فَتَوَهَّمَتْ كَشْفَهُ فَتَطَلَّبَهُ  
فِي يَوْمٍ غَيَّرَتْ أَوْلَهُ وَلَا تَتَأَوَّلِ النَّصَّ فَمَا أَصَابَ مَنْ أَوْلَهُ وَالسَّلَامُ

## The Nineteenth Riddle on the Notion That Exists by Itself and Was Created for Rest and Pleasures

What do you say, o banner of knowledge and the utmost end of forbearance, about a companion whose largesse offers rest and whose existence eliminates, whose embrace delights and whose separation causes insomnia? One longs to be united with him, to separate oneself from him is difficult. He presents himself often to the eye the way the beloved's apparition visits the mind. He creeps into souls the way water creeps into plants, so that souls become revived thanks to his abundant gift and they mix with him the way water mixes with wine – in a clandestine night travel and with great delicateness that truly often overwhelms the minds of living beings. It is not a well-proportioned body nor one that sharp eyes can see or that becomes visible every time a new day begins. Rather, it is a notion that exists by itself and was created for rest and pleasures. It cannot be achieved – and this is extraordinary – when the wish for it materializes on a journey or at home unless (this is done) with obstructed eyes. Furthermore, it does not exist in the perceptible world unless the souls are effaced. The presence of these two together (the companion and the souls, i. e. self-awareness) is inconceivable to those who are knowledgeable and cognizant. Rather, whenever one of the two is affirmed, the other is negated as a notion. Identify these two to me, for your judgment is most lofty and radiant. Regards.

## The Solution Regarding Him Whose Embrace Delights and Whose Separation Causes Insomnia

Know, o you who possess ample knowledge and whose forbearance is a mediator, that the one to whom the indications point and about whom ample explanation has been given is someone who comes and overwhelms the souls and steals them in the mornings and the evenings. He visits them at close of day after the evening prayer and sometimes comes to them in the day, lies in wait for them in public and embraces them as they turn to him and pelts their bodies, when he encounters them, with something that repels those who confront him and prevents them from acting freely – but not with the palm of his hand – and despite their strength relative to his weakness. If you wish to uncover him but his light has so far missed you so that you think that it has been eclipsed, search



for him in (the word) *yawm* (day) the first letter of which I have changed (i. e. search for the solution in the word *nawm* = sleep). And do not interpret this clear text – for he who interprets it, misses the target. Regards.

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