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Alchemical stanzaic poetry (*muwashshah*) by Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s (fl. twelfth century)

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Abstract: The twelfth-century alchemist Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s is best known for his collection (*dīwān*) of alchemical poems entitled *Shudhūr al-dhahab* (“The Splinters of Gold”). However, he is also credited with other works, including stanzaic poetry (*muwashshahāt*) on alchemy. This paper presents the current state of the scholarship concerning life and works of Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s, and then focuses on three strophic poems attributed to this alchemist. It includes first editions and English translations of all three poems, and argues that at least two of the poems are likely to have been authored by Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s, while one is a literary imitation (*mu‘āraḍa*) and therefore probably not a work of Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s himself. Furthermore, the article discusses the literary features of the poems as well as their historical contexts and their – somewhat limited – reception. This also allows us to think of Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s in a less regional Andalusī-Maghribī context, and consider if he perhaps moved east at some point of his life, which would explain the reception history of his poems, both those included in the *dīwān* and the *muwashshahāt*.

Keywords: alchemy; Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s; *mu‘āraḍa* (literary imitation); *muwashshah* (Arabic stanzaic poetry); reception history

Although research activities in the so-called occult sciences have increased considerably over the last few years, alchemy is still a field where many questions remain open.¹ The role that literary forms play in alchemy has been recognised already by Ullmann,² yet very little work has been done on the literary aspects of Arabic alchemy.³ Therefore, this paper focuses on the literary aspects of three strophic poems on alchemy that have been neglected by scholarship so far and

¹ Important recent research on the “occult” sciences include the volumes by Melvin-Koushki/Gardiner 2017; El-Bizri/Orthmann 2018; Günther/Pielow 2018; Saif 2019.

² Ullmann 1972: 143.

³ On the dialogue as form in alchemy, see Forster 2017: *passim*.

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which are attributed to the famous alchemist Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s, better known as the author of an alchemical *dīwān*, entitled *Shudhūr al-dhahab*. In the first section, I present the scholar and alchemist Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s and his work. In the second section, I discuss at some length three strophic poems that have been attributed to him: I include a first edition and English translation of all three. Finally, the literary and historical contexts will be considered in detail in order to try to locate both the poems and their author historically and geographically.

1 Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s: life

Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s⁴ is the author of a collection of alchemical poems, a *dīwān* entitled *Shudhūr al-dhahab* (“The Splinters of Gold”). Juliane Müller and I have, by studying bio-bibliographical and manuscript sources, suggested that the alchemist probably should not be identified with his near-namesake, a specialist in qur’ānic readings and Mālikī *fiqh*, ‘Alī b. Mūsā b. al-Naqirāt, as happened in the bio-bibliographical works starting as early as Ibn al-Abbār.⁵ If we no longer hold up this identification, we must admit that we know only very few things about the alchemist for sure: ‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Anṣārī, known as Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s, probably lived in the twelfth century. He came from an Andalusī family which settled in Morocco. Differently from Ibn al-Naqirāt, he probably was not a religious scholar, although he must have had a profound knowledge of the Qur’ān, *hadīth* and the *qīṣāṣ al-anbiyā’*, as his works are replete with references to these religious texts. However, in several passages he seems to insist on the fact that alchemy might be more important than religion.

2 Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s: works

In the sources, Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s is praised for his style and his education. The historian al-Kutubī (d. 764/1363) writes: “If he does not teach you the art of gold, he still teaches you the art of style (*in lam yu‘allimka ṣan‘ata l-dhahab, ‘allamaka ṣan‘ata l-adab*).”⁶ He also calls him “the poet of the sages and the sage of the poets

⁴ The meaning as well as the grammar of his name poses problems. It could mean “the son of the one who held his head very high” (Ullmann 1972: 231, n. 5), “lofty’s son” (Todd 2016: 119) or might have become a family name (Forster/Müller 2020b: 401–402). On the grammatical problem of the name, see Ullmann 1972: 231, n. 5.

⁵ Forster/Müller 2020b.

⁶ al-Kutubī 1951–1953: vol. 2, 181.

(*shā‘ir al-ḥukamā’ wa-ḥakīm al-shu‘arā’*)”.⁷ Al-Kutubī’s contemporary, the biographer al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363), goes so far as to compare favourably the poems by Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s with those by the preeminent ‘Abbāsid poet al-Mutanabbī.⁸

This section will treat all his works with the exception of his strophic poetry on alchemy, which is the object of the next section.

2.1 *Shudhūr al-dhahab*

His magnum opus is the alchemical *dīwān* called *Shudhūr al-dhahab*. This is a collection of 43 poems and more than 1,400 verses. The poems are, as is usual for a *dīwān*, ordered according to their rhyming letters, and every letter of the alphabet is represented by at least one poem. The shortest poem is four verses long, the longest 66.⁹ *Shudhūr al-dhahab* is not, therefore, a long didactic poem as could perhaps be expected, but a collection of several shorter poems (all standard forms of classical Arabic poetry are present, i.e. *qīṭ‘a*, *ghazal*, *qaṣīda*, and *urjūza*). Given that they are sometimes alchemical renderings of *ghazal* poems, it seems also questionable whether this is didactic poetry strictly speaking.

In our Zurich-based project, we have identified 94 complete manuscripts of the *dīwān*, dating to the time between the fourteenth¹⁰ and the twentieth¹¹ centuries. This means that the poems were still copied in a time we are used to thinking of as “modern”. While many younger manuscripts stem from the west of the Islamicate world,¹² none of the older manuscripts is in Maghribī script. This could mean that the text was – at least in an earlier period – primarily read in the Islamic east.

⁷ al-Kutubī 1951–1953: vol. 2, 181. Al-Maqqarī calls Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s’s *dīwān* a “guide to eloquence (*dalīl ‘alā l-balāgha*) for the Andalusīs” (al-Maqqarī 1855–1861: vol. 2, 410).

⁸ al-Ṣafadī 1983: 264. In fact, one manuscript of Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s’s *dīwān* also contains that by al-Mutanabbī (MS Uppsala, Universitetsbiblioteket, 133, dated 1062/1652, cf. Tornberg 1849: 76–77).

⁹ I will cite the text of the edition currently under preparation by Svetlana Dolgusheva (Berlin), but will indicate variations in the edition by Ghazzālī (Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s, ed. Ghazzālī 2018).

¹⁰ Most manuscripts are not dated; of those dated the oldest is Tinduf, Zāwiyyat Sīdī Bel‘amash, 31 (29 Jumādā I 704/28 Dec. 1304). Other fourteenth century manuscripts are Oslo, National Library, Ms. fol. 4313 (dated 731/1331); Manchester, John Rylands, 809 (Mingana no 338) (c 750/1350); Rome, Vatican Library, Sbath 144 (14th century).

¹¹ These include (dated manuscripts only): Karachi, University Library, 19994 (dated 1340/1921); Princeton, Princeton University Library, Garrett, MS. 1090Y (1327/1909); Qom, al-Ma‘had al-‘āli li-l-‘ulūm wa-l-thaqāfa al-islāmiyya, no 281/6 (dated 1345/1926–1927). The manuscripts of *Shudhūr* are discussed at length in the contribution “The alchemist’s work” by Christopher Braun and Regula Forster, in the present volume.

¹² Maghribī manuscripts include Cairo, Dār al-kutub, Majāmi‘ Taymūr 288 (1799) (partly dated to the nineteenth century); Chinguetti, Maktabat Ahl Ḥabat, 546; Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Laleli, 2772; Rabat, National Library, 103d (catalogue no 477) (dated 1267/1851); 2468 (1460d); 2469 (1495d); Rabat, al-

Shudhūr al-dhahab is highly praised in the bio-bibliographical literature,¹³ and has been the object of commentary at least 12 times. The oldest commentary is by Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s himself.¹⁴ Afterwards, it was commented by famous alchemists such as al-Sīmāwī (mid-thirteenth century)¹⁵ and al-Jildakī (fourteenth century) who wrote four commentaries on *Shudhūr al-dhahab*,¹⁶ but also by otherwise unknown or anonymous authors. Furthermore, there are at least two *takhmīs* versions, i.e. amplifications adding three hemistichs after every verse.¹⁷ *Shudhūr* also served as a model for a Turkish collection of alchemical poems.¹⁸

2.2 *Ḩall mushkilāt ‘Shudhūr al-dhahab’* (“The Unravelling of the Difficulties of ‘The Splinters of Gold’”)

Shudhūr al-dhahab’s poems are quite difficult to understand, both on a thematic and on a linguistic level. Therefore, Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s seems to have written a self-commentary, entitled *Ḩall mushkilāt ‘Shudhūr al-dhahab’*.¹⁹ However, the attribution to Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s has been doubted by Todd, who argues that the work gathers the alchemical knowledge of several later generations.²⁰ Müller, who has prepared a critical edition of the work, shows that, although the text certainly contains later interpolations, it is very probably an authentic text, especially as it is cited as such by al-Sīmāwī (fl. thirteenth century).²¹

Khizāna al-Ḥasaniyya, 1035/Majmū‘; 1109 (dated 1303/1885); 1116; 1520; 2252 (dated 1232/1817); 5326; 7384; Tunis, National Library, 4558 (dated 1303/1885–1886); 4644 (dated 1246/1830–1831).

13 For example by al-Kutubī 1951–1953: vol. 2, 181–184; al-Ṣafadī 1983: 260–264; al-Maqqarī 1855–1861: vol. 2, 410.

14 See below, Section 2. 2.

15 *Sharḥ al-Shudhūr* is extant in at least 18 manuscripts, but not mentioned by Ullmann 1972: 235–237.

16 These are *Maṭālī‘ al-budūr fī sharḥ ṣadr dīwān al-Shudhūr*, also known as *Qalā‘id al-nuḥūr*, written in Cairo before 737/1336, on the beginning of *Shudhūr*; *Kitāb al-Badr al-munīr fī ma‘rifat asrār al-iksīr*, again written in Cairo before 737/1336, on the ninth verse of the poem on *lām* and *alif*; *al-Durr al-manthūr fī Sharḥ ṣadr dīwān al-Shudhūr*, written in Cairo between 742/1341 and 743/1342; and *Kitāb Ghāyat al-surūr fī sharḥ dīwān al-Shudhūr*, finished in 744/1343, in four volumes. On al-Jildakī see Forster/Müller 2020a.

17 One by Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Qudsī (fl. fourteenth century, cf. Schippers 2009: 92) and one by Jalāl al-Naqqāsh (written in 810/1408, and taken for a commentary by Wehr 1940: 23–24). – On *takhmīs* as literary form see Kennedy 1998.

18 *Dīwān-i ḥikmet*, written before c 1000/c 1600, cf. Artun 2013: esp. 36.

19 Ullmann 1972: 232 mentions two commentaries by Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s, yet these are only different recensions of *Ḩall mushkilāt* (see Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s (forthcoming), *Ḩall*, ed. Müller: ch. 1.5).

20 Todd 2016: 123.

21 Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s (forthcoming), *Ḩall*, ed. Müller: ch. 1.2.

In his self-commentary, Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s comments on all the poems of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, yet only on a very selective set of verses.²² Most verses are left out, sometimes with the comment that their meaning is understood anyway.²³ *Hall mushkilāt* is not as prominent as *Shudhūr*, yet we have identified no less than 30 manuscripts, which is still a considerable amount.²⁴

2.3 Other prose works

Besides *Hall* Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s seems to have written other prose works on alchemy. Whether these are authentic and whether some of them might be the same work under different titles, are open questions.²⁵ What is clear is that *al-Wasm al-wasīm* (“The pretty mark”), a work attributed to Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s by al-Baghdādī,²⁶ is not completely lost, but neither is it a work by Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s: rather, as we can judge from the fragment extant at Staatsbibliothek in Berlin,²⁷ this is some sort of abbreviation of *Hall mushkilāt* by a later author.

Finally, two works on magic that have been attributed to Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s should be considered spurious: *al-Jihāt fī ‘ilm al-tawajjuhāt* (“The directions on the science of facing”) is a commentary on a magical poem by one Thābit b. Sulaymān that emphasises the importance of magic above all other sciences, including alchemy, and seems inconsistent with *Shudhūr al-dhahab*.²⁸ *Al-Tibb al-ruhānī bi-l-Qur’ān al-rahmānī* (“The spiritual medicine by the Merciful’s Qur’ān”), a magical work, is clearly influenced by (Pseudo-)al-Būnī and therefore certainly not a work by Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s.²⁹

²² I have used the text prepared by Juliane Müller (Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s (forthcoming), *Hall*, ed. Müller), but cite it according to the “Leithandschrift” (MS London, British Library, Or 11592), as Müller indicates the folios in the margins of her edition.

²³ E.g. at the end of his commentary on the poem on *hā’*, Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s simply says: “and the rest of the speech is understood (*wa-bāqī l-kalām mafhūm*)” (MS London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 6r).

²⁴ All of those dated or datable stem from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, see Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s (forthcoming), *Hall*, ed. Müller: ch. 1.3.

²⁵ We know of the following prose works on alchemy: (1) *Fī Tarkīb al-iksīr al-ḥayawānī al-insānī* (“On the composition of the animal and human elixir”), MS Tehran, Malik, 3119, fol. 91–94; (2) *Mas’ala fī ṣifat al-ta’fin* (“The problem of the peculiarity of putrefaction”), MS Cairo, Dār al-kutub, Kimiyā’ wa-ṭabī‘a 7760; (3) *Risāla fī l-kīmiyā’* (“Epistle on alchemy”), MS Cairo, Dār al-kutub, 763, fol. 37v–41r; (4) *Tartīb al-iksīr* (“The preparation of the elixir”), formerly Baghdad, Khizānat Qāsim Muḥammad al-Rajab (current location unknown); see <http://kohepocu.cchs.csic.es/flipbooks/12/#p=26> [27 April 2021] and ‘Awwād 1965: 182 (no 146/2).

²⁶ al-Baghdādī 1945: vol. 2, 705; al-Baghdādī 1951: vol. 1, 694.

²⁷ MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, Lbg. 96, fol. 106v.

²⁸ On the work see Braun/Forster 2020.

²⁹ See Coulon 2017: 259–260.

3 Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s’s stanzaic poetry on alchemy: transmission and interpretation

Besides his *dīwān*, Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s is credited with at least one stanzaic poem on alchemy, a so-called *muwashshah*. Strophic poetry is typical for the west of the Islamicate world,³⁰ and Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s is sometimes considered to be a relative of a well-known Andalusī *muwashshah* poet: the alchemist might have been a great-great-grandchild or great-great-grandnephew of Muḥammad ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s(ah) (or: Ibn Rāfi‘ Ra’s). This poet lived in the eleventh century and was a court poet to Ma’mūn b. Dhī l-Nūn (r. 435–467/1043–1075), ruler of Toledo, and was famous for his *muwashshahāt*.³¹ Therefore, strophic poetry could have been a kind of family tradition which the alchemist would have been continuing by writing an alchemical *muwashshah*.

To choose this poetic form for alchemy is quite interesting, as *muwashshahāt* are usually not written on scientific topics, but are concerned with either love and wine or panegyrics.³² They were also used in a Ṣūfi context, as for example Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) and al-Shushtarī (d. 668/1269) do extensively in their *dīwāns*.³³

Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s seems to have used the *muwashshah* form at least once, perhaps even more often, but none of these poems has ever become a part of his *dīwān*, as *muwashshah* poems were not usually included in *dīwān* collections.³⁴

3.1 *Muwashshah ṣan‘awī* (“Stanzaic poem on ‘the Art’”)

In several manuscripts, the “author of ‘The Splinters’ (*sāḥib al-Shudhūr*)” is credited with the composition of a *muwashshah* on alchemy, sometimes entitled *Muwashshah ṣan‘awī*, a title I adopt here. We know 23 manuscripts that contain this strophic poem. Most of these manuscripts, namely 16, are composite manuscripts (*majmū‘a*) that also contain *Shudhūr al-dhahab*. Among them are the oldest manuscripts to

³⁰ Schoeler 1992: 812.

³¹ His poems are cited by Ibn Bishrī al-Agharnāṭī 1992: 362–364 (no 241) and 401–403 (no 268); Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb 1967: 73–85; Ibn Khaldūn 1425/2004: vol. 2, 425–426; one of them with English translation: Monroe 1974: 224–227; cf. Hartmann 1897: 26–27; Marín 1992: 238–239; Aït Salah Semlali 2015: 156.

³² Schoeler 1992: 810; ‘Isā 2007: 332–389.

³³ Schoeler 1992: 810–812; ‘Isā 2007: 389–405.

³⁴ Alvarez 1998: 563; Rosen 2000: 170–171. There are exceptions to this rule besides Ibn al-‘Arabī; for example, Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Hillī (d. c 750/1349) and ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731) both included their *muwashshahāt* in their *dīwāns* (Schoeler 1992: 812).

contain the *Muwashshah ṣan‘awī*. These are (in chronological order as far as possible):³⁵

1. Istanbul, Topkapı, A 1718, fol. 52v–53r (dated 853/1449–1450) [ض]
2. Istanbul, Topkapı, A 2572, fol. 69v–71v (dated 880/1475) [ط]
3. Cairo, Dār al-kutub, 177, pp. 166–167 (dated 997/1588) [ح]
4. Madrid, Escorial, 530 (= Casiri 527), fol. 295v–296r (dated 991/1583) [ف]
5. Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, Ms. orient. A 1289, fol. 60r–61r (“rather old”³⁶) [ر]
6. Baghdad, Dār al-Kutub wa-l-wathā’iq al-waṭāniyya, Dār al-Makhhṭūṭāt al-‘Irāqiyya, 8554, fol. 79r (dated 1083/1672) [ِ]
7. Qom, Kitābkhāna-yi ‘Umūmī-yi Āyat Allāh Gulpāyigānī, 39/58–7678/1, fol. 134–135 (dated 1101/1690) [ن]
8. Tavşanlı, Zeytinoğlu İlçe Halk Kütüphanesi, 631, fol. 59v–60r (dated 1175/1761) [و]
9. Cairo, Dār al-kutub, Ṭabī‘iyyāt Taymūr 71, pp. 94–96 (dated 1204/1789) [ث]
10. Cairo, Dār al-kutub, 129, no foliation or pagination (dated 1206/1792) [ج]
11. Mashhad, Kitābkhāna-yi Āstān-i Quds-i Raḍawī, 10955 ፩, fol. 172r (dated 1256/1840) [ق]
12. Cairo, Dār al-kutub, 70, p. 83 (dated 1276/1859) [ت]
13. Isfahan, Ganjīna, 1521 (?), no foliation or pagination (dated 1303/1885) [ش]
14. Hyderabad, Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Center, Kīmiyā’ 56, pp. 140–142 (other parts of the manuscript are dated to 1313/1895 and 1315/1897) [س]
15. Sine loco [original location of the manuscript unknown] = Dubai, Juma al-Majid Center, 305319, pp. 139–141 (the next text contained in this manuscript is dated to 1330/1912) [ه]
16. Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Or. 2840 (= Lb. 480), fol. 45r–45v (modern looking manuscript) [خ]

The remaining seven manuscripts do not contain *Shudhūr*, but other works on alchemy (again in roughly chronological order):

1. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 2623, fol. 17v (dated 1087/1676), a manuscript that also contains a commentary on *Shudhūr al-dhahab* [ر]

³⁵ The manuscript Mosul, Awqāf Library, 6157 (no 9/14 Ṣā’igh) contains a combination of *Shudhūr* with a *muwashshah* attributed to Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s as well (cf. Ahmad 1975–1978: vol. 7, 158). As I have had access to parts of this manuscript only (i.e. its beginning), we cannot be sure that this is the same poem, although it seems very likely.

³⁶ Pertsch 1859–1893: vol. 3ii, 469 (discussing the script).

2. Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, Ms. orient. A 1257, fol. 86v–87r (second half of the seventeenth century), part of an alchemical collection, containing poems by Ibn Umayl and Ibn Abī l-Isbā‘, but also Ps-Zosimus’s *Risāla fī Tafriq al-adyān* [ذ]
3. Tunis, National Library, 3252, fol. 165r–165v (eighteenth century), this volume also contains al-Jildakī’s *Ghāyat al-surūr* and Jābir b. Ḥayyān’s *Kitāb al-Rūh* [ع]
4. Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, 1369 (949), fol. 262r (dated 1300/1882–1883), the volume also contains al-Jildakī’s *Ghāyat al-surūr* [ب]
5. Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, Ms. orient. A 1298, fol. 18v (fragment, “rather new”³⁷) [ج]
6. Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, Ms. orient. A 1288, fol. 20v (“new”³⁸), a collection of alchemical works in prose and poetry, e.g. Ibn Umayl [ذ]
7. Istanbul, Nuruosmaniye, 3634, fol. 87v–88v (no indication of date), a volume that contains a selection of alchemical poems (e.g. Ibn Umayl) and prose (Biyūn al-Barhamī, Ibn Wahshīyya, Zosimus, Hermes) [ص]

Some of these multi-text-manuscripts seem to have been compiled with the goal of having a good collection of alchemical poetry, especially Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, Ms. orient. A 1257 and Istanbul, Nuruosmaniye, 3634. In three cases, the *muwashshah* is combined with commentaries to *Shudhūr al-dhahab* (Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, 1369 (949); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2623; Tunis, National Library, 3252) which might reveal a special interest in works by the author Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s.

These 23 manuscripts date from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries. This is quite a solid transmission, yet this poem has, so far, never been the object of any study nor even been mentioned beyond the descriptions in library catalogues.

The *muwashshah* has never really become a part of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, probably because strophic poetry was always considered to be something quite apart from those poems that would be collected in a “decent” *dīwān*.³⁹ The most notable exception is the scribe of the manuscript Cairo, Dār al-kutub, Ṭabī‘iyyāt Taymūr 71, dated 1204/1789, who put the explicit of the *dīwān* (*tamma dīwān*; “here ends the *dīwān*”) only after the *muwashshah*, therewith signalling that the *muwashshah* actually belongs to the *dīwān*.⁴⁰ An even more interesting case is another scribe of the eighteenth century who has tried to make the poem look like it were part of the

³⁷ Pertsch 1859–1893: vol. 3ii, 476 (again discussing the script).

³⁸ Pertsch 1859–1893: vol. 3ii, 467 (again discussing the script).

³⁹ See above n. 34.

⁴⁰ The scribe of Baghdad, Dār al-Kutub, Dār al-Makhṭūṭat al-‘Irāqiyya, 8554, fol. 79r signals the end of the *dīwān* both after the last poem of *Shudhūr* and again after *Muwashshah ṣan‘awī*.

dīwān:⁴¹ he has written it in two strict columns, therewith suppressing the strophic structure of the poem. Like in the Cairo manuscript, the closing formula *tamma kitāb Shudhūr al-dhahab* (“here ends the book ‘The Splinters of Gold’”) is added only after the *muwashshah*. Yet, the heading of the *muwashshah* highlights the fact that this is indeed an addition, because it does not simply give the rhyming letter of the poem as all the other headings do (which would be difficult anyway, as there is not one single rhyming letter in the *muwashshah*). Rather, the heading reads: *wa-li-ṣāhib al-Shudhūr aydan*, “also by the author of ‘The Splinters’”. This seems to make clear that the poem really is not a part of *Shudhūr*, even for this scribe, although he considered it an important part of Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s work.

The attribution to Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s, although generally accepted for this poem, has been doubted by at least one reader: there is a remark in a Gotha manuscript by a reader indicating that the style of the poem was not consistent with that of Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s, neither as a poet nor a prose writer, and that al-Jildakī had not mentioned the poem.⁴² The stylistic difference, if there is any, could be explained easily be the fact that different rules apply to *muwashshahāt* than to a classical *qaṣīda* or *ghazal*.⁴³ The reader of the Gotha manuscript is also wrong when saying that al-Jildakī was not aware of Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s as a *muwashshah* poet: in fact, al-Jildakī, although probably unaware of this particular *muwashshah*, knew of another one by Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s (see below Section 3.3).

In the following, I will present a critical edition and translation of *Muwashshah ṣan‘awī* as well as a close reading of its text, before discussing the other *muwashshahāt* ascribed to Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s and the historical context and factors which might have led to the relatively limited success of his strophic poetry on alchemy.

After having compared all the manuscripts of the text to which I had access, I argue that the manuscript Istanbul, Topkapı, A 2572 (dated 880/1475) (↳) that Svetlana Dolgusheva (Berlin) has chosen as “Leithandschrift” for her critical edition of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* also offers the best text of this poem. Therefore, the edited text below offers a “Leithandschriftenedition”, based on the Istanbul text, yet with all variants of the extant manuscripts in the apparatus. However, I have normalised the orthography according to modern usage, i.e. mainly inserted *hamza* and normalised the writing of *alif mamdūda*, without signalling it in the apparatus. I have not usually indicated different consonant pointings of letters (especially *yā'* and *tā'*).

⁴¹ Tavşanlı, Zeytinoğlu İlçe Halk Kütüphanesi, 631, fol. 59v–60r.

⁴² Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, Ms. orient. A 1289, fol. 60r.

⁴³ Alvarez 1998: 564.

3.1.1 Text and translation

1. **maṭla'** خذ إلينك العلم يارجل
فسيأتي بعده العمل

لَيْسَ فِي الْبَيْضِ الَّذِي ذَكُرُوا
لَا وَلَا فِي سِرَّهُمْ شَعْرٌ
أَعْجَبُ الْأَشْيَاءِ مَا سَتَرُوا
إِنْ يَكُنْ فِي حَقِّنَا حَطَلٌ
فَهُمْ وَاللَّهِ مَا جَهَلُوا

2. مُدَعٌ صِبْعًا مِنَ الْدَّهْبِ
أَشْبَهُ الْأَشْيَاءِ بِالْكَذْبِ
فِي الْهَوَى صِبْغٌ وَفِي السُّخْبِ
فَلَّا يَجْرِي بِهِ رُحْلٌ
فِيهِ أَحْفَثُ عِلْمَهَا الْأُولُونَ

3. شَاهِدٌ مِنْ قَوْلِ ذِي الْثُوْنِ
صَاحِبُ الْكِبْرِيَّتِ فِي هُونِ
خَسِيرُ الْدُّنْيَا مَعَ الْدِينِ
وَكَذَا الرَّزْنِيَّ يَارَجُلٌ
لَيْسَ فِي الْمِيزَانِ يَعْتَدُونَ

4. كُلُّهَا بِالثَّارِ تَحْتَرُ
وَلَدَا تَثْبِرُهَا حُمُقُّ
قَدْ تَصَخَّنَا مَنْ لَهُ رَمَقٌ
فَلْ لِمَنْ يَحْقُى وَيَتَعَلَّ
لَيْسَ فِيهَا كُلُّهَا عَمَلٌ

5. أَيُّهَا الْمَشْغُوفُ بِالْعَذِيرَةِ
عَدِ عَنْهَا إِنَّهَا قَذَرَةٌ
إِنَّمَا الْأَسْنَارُ فِي الشَّجَرَةِ
الَّتِي أَخْصَانُهَا مُثْلُ
وَلَنَا فِي حَلَّهَا حِيلٌ

6. حَجْرٌ فِي جَوْفِهِ حَجْرٌ
مِنْ ثَبَاتِ الْقَوْمِ يُعْتَصِرُ
قَدْ تَصَخَّنَا مَنْ لَهُ نَظَرٌ
كَمْ أَنْادَيْهُ وَيَسْتَغْلُ
حَسْبُهُ لَوْ كَانَ يَمْتَلِّ

Learn the science, O man,
And the work will follow.

Neither in the egg, that they mention,
Nor in their secret, is understanding.
The most wonderful thing is what they hide.
If there is idle talk about us,
They are, by God, not ignorant.

If someone claims a golden dye,
This is most similar to a lie.
In the air is my dye and in the clouds
A sphere on which Saturn roams.
There, the ancients have hidden their knowledge.

There is evidence in the word of Dhū l-Nūn:
The lord of sulphur is in disgrace,
He has lost the world together with religion.
In the same way, O man, arsenic
Is not balanced in its weights.

All of them are burnt by fire.
Therefore, their preparation is nonsense.
We have counselled the one who is still alive.
Tell the barefoot and the shod:
“In none of them all is a work.”

O infatuated lover of a virgin!
Leave her, for she is dirty.
The secrets are only in the tree,
Whose branches are similes,
And we have tricks to unravel them.

A stone with a stone inside it
Is squeezed from the plants of the people⁴⁴.
We have counselled the one who has insight.
How often do I call him while he is busy.
It would suffice for him to follow the example!

44 I.e. the alchemists cf. Ibn Arfa' Ra's (forthcoming), *Hall*, ed. Müller: glossary, s. v. *qawm*.

7. زَيْقُ بِالنَّارِ أَعْصِرُهُ
وَبِهَا أَيْضًا أَحْمَرُهُ
وَبِهَا حَقًا أَصْنِرُهُ
حَجَرًا إِكْسِيرُهُ عَلَى
لِلَّذِي فِي جَوْفِهِ عَلَى

8. وَالَّذِي بِالْمَاءِ أَهْلَكُهُ
حَجَرٌ بِالدُّهْنِ أَسْبَكُهُ
وَبِهِ يَخْبِنَا وَأَمْلَكُهُ
وَبِهِ وَاللَّهِ يَتَغْبِيلُ
إِنْ غَرَأَهُ الصَّبَرُ وَالْمَهْلُ

9. ذَهَنُهُ بِالْمَاءِ يَخْتَلِطُ
لَيْسَ فِيمَا قُلْتُهُ غَلَطُ
كُلُّ شَيْءٍ دُونَهُ سَقَطُ
يَا وَلِيَا حُسْنَهُ جَلَّ
وَبِهِ قَدْ يُضْرِبُ الْمَثَلُ

10. حَجَرٌ بِالطُّورِ مَرْكُزُهُ
جُوَهْرٌ مَا عَشَّثُ أَزْمَرُهُ
وَبِكَهْفِ الْقَلْبِ أَكْنِرُهُ
لَيْسَ بِالنَّيْرَانِ يَشْتَعِلُ
عَنْهُ كُلُّ الْخُلُقِ قَدْ غَلُوا

Mercury that I squeeze with fire,
With which I also make it red
And truly turn it into
A stone whose elixir is a second draught
For the one who is sick inside.

And the one I destroy with water.
A stone that I melt with oil,
By which it lives, while I possess it.
And by this, by God, it is washed,
If patience and leisure grip it.

Its oil is mixed with water.
There is no mistake in what I have said.
Everything else is null and void.
O friend, its beauty is important,
There is an example in it.

A stone whose centre is in the mountain [Sinai],
A substance that I will talk about in symbols all
my life,
And that I will treasure in the inner of the heart.
It does not ignite from the fires,
And all mankind ignores it.

3.1.2 Critical apparatus

مطلع 1 سقط من و | يا رجل: سقط من ش

مطلع 2 فسيائي: وسياتي ث، فياتي أ و

1 ، 2 سقط من ث ج ح س ع، في ب في الهاش

1 ، 2 سره: عاسيرهم ز | شعر: شعرواز ق من ي، شعرو ش

1 ، 3 أعجب: احسن ي | ستروا: فعلوا ب ح ع، فعل ج

1 ، 5 فهم: فهموا ج د ز ص ض ع و، فهموا م | جهلو: جهل ج ن ه، غفلوا د

بعد 1 ، 5 واحطوا حقا ولم يصلوا د ز (ومذه نهاية نسخة ز)

2 ، 1 مدع: مدعى ض م ، امدع ث | الذهب: ذهب ج

2 ، 2 اشيه: شبه و

2 ، 3 الهوى: الهوى | صبغي: اصفعى ر، الصبغ ن ه، صبغأ (في الهاش)

2 ، 4 فاك: ملك ش ق

3 ، 4 - 5 سقط من ت

3 ، 1 شاهد: شاهدا د، شاهدوا م | من: في ذ | من قول: للقول د | ذي: ذا ب م ن، ذو ي | التون: نون د، لون م

3 ، 2 صاحب: صاحق ب ح، صاحن ث ج رع، طالب ذ هون: الهون ب ث ج ح رع م
 3 ، 3 سقط من ش إلا كلمة "الزرنيخ"
 3 ، 4 ليس ان الزرنيخ باول ق | الزرنيخ: زرنيخ ه
 3 ، 5 سقط من ق | الميزان، النيران د | يعتدل: تعتدل أ
 4 ، 1 كلها: لها ض، كلماش ق | بالنار: في النار ب ج ح دع
 4 ، 2 ولذا: وكذا أث ج دذش ص ض ف ق م ن ه وى | تدبيرها: تدبيرهم س
 4 ، 3 قل لمن: ط (في الهاشم)، قال من ط (في أصل النص) ب ث ج ح دذر ص ض ع ف م ن ه | يتنقل: يتنقل ه
 5 ، 1 المشعوف: ط (في الهاشم)، المتعوب ط (في أصل النص) أ (في الهاشم) ض ف م، المشعوف أ (في أصل النص) ب ث ح ذر ص ع ه
 5 ، 2 عد: قد عد ج، حدد | إنها: فإنها ث
 5 ، 3 الاسرار: الاعمال دم | الشجره: شجره ه (و هذه نهاية نسخة ت)
 5 ، 4 التي: الذى ن | أغصانها: في غصانها ض م | مثل: ط (في الهاشم)، ميل ط (في أصل النص) أب ث ج ح دذر (في أصل
 النص) س ش ص ض ع ف ق م ه وى
 5 ، 5 في: من أ (في أصل النص)، وبين السطرين "في" س ش ق و | حلها: حلنا حيل: ط (في أصل النص) و في الهاشم: حلها من
 حيل ، جلبيها حل س | حيل: حول ه
 6 ، 2 بيرد 6 ، 2 بعد 6 ، 3 في ي
 بعد 6 ، 5 في ث ج ع ي: حجر في حجفة يفق (ييق ث ج ع) / وأخيه (أخوه ج) أبيض شرق (سرق ج) / طبق من فوقه طبق / (حيو ج) مثل
 (سل ع) قشر البيض في المثل / قد يسمى عندهم زحل (في يمنى عنه هم زحل: ي)
 7 ، 1 سقط من ذ
 7 ، 2 زبيق: كلمة غير واضحة في ش | زبيق بالنار: برفق النار ق |
 7 ، 3 وبها ع | وبها أيضا: كلمتان غير واضحتان في ش | أيضا: الضياق، حقا م | أحمره: أحمره أحمره ث، أحمره س، أصيده م
 7 ، 4 حجرا: حجر ج ذ ع م (وفي ط في الهاشم بالنسبة إلى حجرا: كذا في جميع النسخ)
 7 ، 5 في أ في الهاشم (وهناك كلمة "حجر" محفوظة قبل كلمة "عل")، سقط من و | الذي: لا الذي س
 8 ، 1 سقط من ي | والذي: هو الذي ر ض، الذي س
 8 ، 2 حجر: حجرا ض ف ه
 8 ، 3 به ا | يحييا: أحيا س
 8 ، 4 والله ينغلض: ينغلض والله: في ش في الهاشم | ينغلض: ينغلض ر (في أصل النص) ص (في الهاشم)،
 يتصل ص (في أصل النص)
 8 ، 5 إن عراه: اعراد د | عرابة: عواه ح ع، عراكه ذ
 9 ، 1 دهنه: دهنة ض | يختلط: تختلط ض ق، مختلطه د
 9 ، 2 فيما: فيها أ (في الهاشم) و
 9 ، 3 سقط: فعل ق، كلمة غير واضحة في ش
 9 ، 4 شيئا حسنه جلل أ (في الهاشم) | يا ولية: ط (في الهاشم)، يا ولية أب ج ح ذر ش ص ض ع ه و، يا ولية ق، فابع شيئا ط (في أصل
 النص) دس ف ل، حال لي من ث، حالي من ي | حسنه: حسبه ض، جنسه س | جلل: حل رف ه و
 10 ، 1 حجر: حجرا دق
 10 ، 2 عشت: شنت دس | أرمذه، استره د
 10 ، 3 أكزنه: اركزه ث ي
 10 ، 4 بالنيران: بالنار ع، في النيران س
 10 ، 5 الخلق: الناس س | غفلوا: غفل ث ج دن ه

3.1.3 Literary analysis

Formally, the poem's rhyme scheme is AA (*matla'*) BBB (*aghṣān*) AA (*simt*) CCC AA DDD, etc. This means that this is a *muwashshah tāmm*, a complete *muwashshah*, having a *matla'*, an anacrusis, in the same rhyme as the refrain, the so-called *simt*.⁴⁵ The last *simt*, called *kharja*, is in classical Arabic, rather than in a dialect or a romance language as is the norm for *muwashshahāt*.⁴⁶ The *muwashshah* is in the metre *madīd* (*fā' ilātun fā' ilun fā' ilātun*). This might be somewhat unexpected, yet it is not unusual for a *muwashshah* to use a classical Arabic metre, although scholarship focuses much more on those strophic poems which do not and might therefore offer a link to romance language poetry.⁴⁷ However, even when classical metres are used, changes in the metre are more common than the persistent use of a single metre that is observable here. That the poem is long – it consists of 10 stanzas, while traditional *muwashshahāt* usually are limited to five⁴⁸ – is another indication that this poem is, although a representative of the genre *muwashshah*, certainly not a typical one.

The poem is, except for its form, quite similar to the poems in *Shudhūr al-dhahab*: It offers an elegant play with central literary topoi of alchemy, such as knowing, hiding, and the ignorant masses. The author alludes to the planets (v. 2, 4), he uses some of his most beloved motives, such as the tree (v. 5, 3) and the mountain (v. 10, 1), and he even gives some technical points, although well hidden, such as the treatment of mercury (v. 7, 1).

Already central in the *matla'* is the interplay of knowledge (*ilm*) and the (alchemical) work (*'amal*), easily presented as paronomasia (*tajnīs*): whether or not knowledge should be spread remains problematic. Although in the first nine stanzas, the lyrical voice seems to distance himself from the hiding and secret keeping of his predecessors (v. 1, 1), the false alchemists who speak in code (v. 1, 1) – stressing that their knowledge (or rather ignorance, see v. 1, 2) does not lead to the work, while he himself counsels the adept (vv. 4, 3; 6, 3) – he admits, in the last stanza, that he too uses a code language and hides (the knowledge of) a substance in his own heart (vv. 10, 2–3). The truth of the lyrical voice contrasts with the lies of the others (vv. 1, 4; 2, 2), but is supported by the authority of the famous Egyptian Ṣūfi Dhū l-Nūn (d. 246/861) whom alchemists held in high esteem and considered the

45 On rhyme schemes and terminology see Schoeler 1992: 809–810; Alvarez 1998: 564.

46 Schoeler 1992: 810.

47 On the scholarly debate about *muwashshah* prosody see the summary in Schoeler 1992: 810–811.

48 Schoeler 1992: 809; Alvarez 1998: 564; Schippers 2011.

author of several treatises on the divine art (v. 3, 1).⁴⁹ Dhū l-Nūn is adduced to stress that neither sulphur nor arsenic can be used as basic components of the elixir (vv. 3, 2–5): the speaker here sets himself apart from the more commonly applied mercury-sulphur-theory, prominent already in the *Corpus Jābirianum*.⁵⁰ In fact, this might be an indication of the authorship of the poem, as Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s utters his doubts on Jābir in his commentary on *Shudhūr al-dhahab*.⁵¹

As the lyrical voice swears by God (v. 8, 4) and stresses that the stone has its centre at “the mountain” (v. 10, 1), most probably Sinai,⁵² we may assume that alchemy and religion are not seen as separate entities, but rather as narratives that complement each other. Likewise, the simile, present in varied grammatical forms, i.e. as singular *mathal* (v. 9, 5), plural *muthul* (v. 5, 4) and in the verb *imtathala* (v. 6, 5), evoques a qur’ānic language, as the simile is a common element of the qur’ānic revelation.⁵³

The text becomes surprisingly technical when discussing the processes necessary for the Work: instead of sulphur (v. 3, 2), the *muwashshah* focuses on pure mercury (v. 7, 1), which is transformed by the application of fire (v. 7, 1), water (v. 8, 2), and oil (v. 8, 3) to the “real” philosophers’ stone, the only matter that matters (v. 9, 3).

While a traditional *muwashshah* – like a *qaṣīda* – is tripartite,⁵⁴ no such structure can be identified in this poem. Only a very few of the typical features of *muwashshahāt* identified by Schippers (the use of imperatives and addresses to the public, descriptions, enumerations, repetitions of keywords, direct speech)⁵⁵ can be discerned here. The most striking feature is the address with which the poem begins in the *matla‘* (“O man”, *matla‘* 1), and which is repeated in the third stanza (v. 3, 4). This address is varied at the beginning of stanza 5, where the addressed is called an “infatuated lover” (v. 5, 1), perhaps a reference to the fact that *muwashshahāt* traditionally are love poems. Finally, in the penultimate stanza, the “you” becomes a “friend” (*walī*, v. 9, 3): having distanced himself from the “virgin”, i.e. the “spirit”, which cannot serve as the basis for the alchemical work, the address becomes more intimate. It is as though the reader is appealed to under the assumption that now, being friends with the author, he must truly believe in the author’s way of doing

⁴⁹ See Ullmann 1972: 196–197.

⁵⁰ On the theory see for example Ullmann 1972: 260–261; Artun 2013: 75–79.

⁵¹ Cf. Forster/Müller 2020b: 401–402.

⁵² The mountain is very prominent in *Shudhūr* see poems on *khā‘*, v. 1; on *ṭā‘*, v. 2; on *fā‘*, v. 38 [Ghazzālī v. 37]; on *qāf*, v. 34 [Ghazzālī v. 31]; on *kāf*, v. 41 [Ghazzālī v. 40] (Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s, ed. Ghazzālī 2018: 134, 188, 218, 229, 245).

⁵³ Zahniser 2004.

⁵⁴ Rosen 2000: 170.

⁵⁵ Schippers 2011.

alchemy. Also typical for the genre is the frequent repetition of keywords, not only the aforementioned simile (*mathal*) and the knowledge ('ilm), but also most prominently the “stone” (*hajar*) (vv. 6, 1; 7, 4; 10, 1).

This poem – just like those of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* – might be easily learned by heart, yet it is not a piece of didactic poetry. Although even classical Arabic didactic poems in *rajaz* often present their contents in a very condensed form and are therefore difficult to understand, they usually offer the most central elements of the science they present in an orderly form. In comparison, Ibn Arfa' Ra's's poems offer important information on alchemy in a far less structured form, making its contents difficult to grasp. His poetry serves as an aide-memoire yet is only partly didactic as it only teaches the one who already knows: this is not a piece written for students, but for colleagues.

3.2 A second alchemical *muwashshah* attributed to Ibn Arfa' Ra's

In one of the Istanbul manuscripts of *Shudhūr*, another alchemical *muwashshah* follows after *Muwashshah ṣan'awī*, without attribution or any indication of an author.⁵⁶ The same combination of *Shudhūr* and *Muwashshah ṣan'awī* with this second *muwashshah* poem is found in the somewhat younger Madrid manuscript,⁵⁷ while the Paris manuscript contains two *muwashshah* poems, but not *Shudhūr*;⁵⁸ a manuscript from the Azhar Library offers only the beginning of this second *muwashshah* after *Shudhūr*, but does not contain *Muwashshah ṣan'awī*.⁵⁹ In the manuscripts from Madrid, Paris and Cairo, this second poem is explicitly attributed to Ibn Arfa' Ra's.⁶⁰

In the following, I give the complete text of the poem based on the Istanbul manuscript [ص] as it is the oldest of the four. All non-orthographic variants of Madrid [ـ], Paris [ـ] and Cairo [ـ] are indicated in the apparatus.

⁵⁶ MS Istanbul, Topkapı, A 1718, fol. 53r–53v (dated 853/1449–1450).

⁵⁷ MS Madrid, Escorial, 530 (= Casiri 527), fol. 296r–296v (dated 991/1583).

⁵⁸ MS Paris, BNF, 2623, fol. 17v (dated 1087/1676).

⁵⁹ MS Cairo, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, 5926, fol. 65r. The manuscript looks modern, but bears no date or indication thereof.

⁶⁰ MS Madrid, Escorial, 530, fol. 296r: *wa-lahū aydan* (“and also by him”); MS Paris, BNF, 2623, fol. 17v: *wa-li-ṣāḥib al-Shudhūr aydan* (“and also by the author of ‘The Splinters’”); MS Cairo, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, 5926, fol. 65r: *wa-lahū takhmīs* (“and a poem in pentastichs by him”).

3.2.1 Text and translation

أَيُّهَا الْمَشْغُوفُ بِالْطَّلْبِ
كَمْ تَرَى فِي الدَّهْرِ دَا نَصَبِ
كُلَّمَا تَرْجُوهُ فِي الدَّهْبِ
وَلَعْنَرُ اللَّهِ فِي السَّخَرِ
صَنْعَةٌ مَا أَنْ لَهَا مَثَلٌ

قَسْمٌ بِالْوَاحِدِ الصَّمَدِ
لَنْ تَنَالُ السَّرَّ مِنْ أَحَدٍ
غَيْرَ أَنْ تُعْطِي يَدًا بِيَدٍ
فَالْسَّمْعُ وَصْنَاعَةٌ مِنَ الْحَجَرِ
إِنْ تَكُنْ لِلْقَوْلِ تَمْتَلِّ

خَجْرٌ فِي لَوْنِهِ يَقْعُ
وَأَخْوَهُ أَحْمَرُ شَرْقٌ
وَعَلَى هَذَا وَذَا طَنْقٌ
مِثْلُ قِشْرِ الْبَيْضِ فِي الْخَبْرِ
قَدْ شَمَّى بَيْتَهُمْ رَجُلٌ

كَلَّسَ الْأَجْسَادَ يَجْمُدُهَا
فَإِذَا مَا أَيْيَضَ أَسْوَدَهَا
وَبَدَا لِلْعَيْنِ فَرْقَدُهَا
أَيُّ وَرَبِّ الْبَيْتِ ذِي السَّرِّ
فَلْتُ ثَمَّا قَدْ قَالَهُ الْأُولُونَ

وَقَتَّى قَدْ خَالَفَتِ الشَّهَادَا
لَمْ يَرِلْ يَطْلُبُهُ مُجْتَهَدَا
قَالَ فِي التَّوْشِيحِ حِينَ بَدَا
عَدَ عِنْ بَيْضٍ وَعَنْ شَعْرٍ
لَيْسَ فِي هَذَا وَذَا عَمَلٌ

1. O infatuated lover of the search!
How often do you see someone unfortunate in affliction,
Although you wish him in gold.
By the everlasting existence of God! In the dawn
Is an art to which nothing is alike.
2. An oath by the One, the Eternal!
You will not obtain the secret from one
Unless you submit your hand to his.
So listen closely to a description of the stone
If you subject yourself to the speech.
3. A stone, very white in its colour,
And its brother, red and bright,
On both of them is a cover,
Like an eggshell, it is said.
Between themselves, they call it a man.
4. He calcified the bodies and made them solid,
Thus, whenever he whitens the black one white
And whenever their guiding star appears to the eye,
That is, by the Lord of the veiled house,
That I have said what the ancients said.
5. A young man, who has just contradicted the witnesses
And still continues hard in his search for it,
Said in *muwashshah*, as it appeared:
Leave eggs and hair,
In neither of them is the work.

3.2.2 Critical apparatus

قبل 1 ، 1 مم يصبح الشمس يا بطل واستعن بالله يا رجل ف
1 ، 1 المشغوف: الحروف المشغف في ض بالحبر الأحمر، وتحتها بالحبر الأسود "العش"
1 ، 3 الذهب: الدنيا تعب ع
1 ، 5 صنعة ما أن لها: الذي يسرى به ف
1 ، 4 ولعمر: لعمر ع
2 ، 2 قسم: قسماف م
2 ، 2 تثال: يثال م
2 ، 3 غير: دون ع ف م | يدا: يد م

2 ، 4 فاسمع: فاسمع ف | من: عن ف
 2 ، 5 للقول: للنصح ف | تمثل: ممثل ع
 3 ، 2 احمر: اشقر ض (بين السطرين فوق كلمة احمر) م ع، اصفر ف
 3 ، 4 الخبر: النظر ف
 3 ، 5 قد تسمى: واسمه ما ف
 بعد 4 ، 3 في ف: وبدت كالنجم في الظهر / مثل نور الشمس تشتعل / خلد الارواح في الجسد / ولتكن في زي مجتهد / لتنال العيش في رغد
 4 ، 4 ورب: وحق ف | ذي ع: ذا ض م
 5 ، 1-5 سقط الباقي من نسخة ع.

3.2.3 Literary analysis

Again, the metre is *madīd* throughout the poem. However, as it only consists of five stanzas, it conforms more strongly to the *muwashshah* genre, especially if we were to accept the *matla'* given in the manuscript from Madrid as authentic. This, however, is somewhat problematic given that its rhyme is not consistent with the refrain of the poem. Stanza 3 has been taken as part of *Muwashshah ḥan'awī* by several scribes who inserted it into that poem after stanza 6.⁶¹ Indeed, the similarities of the two poems are striking, so that this second poem should be considered an imitation (*mu'āraḍa*), the writing of which was a typical element of “*muwashshah* culture”.⁶² As a *mu'āraḍa*, it should not be attributed to Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s as it is unlikely that he wrote a *mu'āraḍa* to his own poem. The “he” in v. 5, 3 would then be Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s, the reference being to *Muwashshah ḥan'awī*’s first stanza (vv. 1, 1–2), where Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s indeed mentions the “egg”, and somehow also the “hair” (*sha‘ar* meaning both, “understanding”, as translated in *Muwashshah ḥan'awī*, and “hair” as translated here).

The *mu'āraḍa* character is already obvious in v. 1, 1, which is an answer to *Muwashshah ḥan'awī*’s v. 5, 1. However, the *mu'āraḍa* addresses a lover – of the alchemical search – instead of the “virgin” (i.e. the “spirit”) of *Muwashshah ḥan'awī*. The motif of the search is taken up again in v. 5, 2 as a continuing process, while in *Muwashshah ḥan'awī*, the stress is on the accomplishment of the work. In between, the poem clearly focuses on the preparation and description of the stone, not unlike *Muwashshah ḥan'awī* in stanzas 6–10. While *Muwashshah ḥan'awī* stresses the themes of hiding and secrecy, these are only alluded to here (v. 2, 2). The trustworthiness of the first-person speaker here is emphasised by the double oath in vv. 1, 4 and 4, 4, contrasting with the single oath of *Muwashshah ḥan'awī* (v. 1, 5). Similarly, the “man” of *Muwashshah ḥan'awī* (vv. 1, 1 and 3, 4),

⁶¹ See above, 3.1.2: the stanza is found in the following three eighteenth century and modern looking manuscripts: Cairo, Dār al-kutub, Ṭabī‘iyyāt Taymūr 71, p. 95; Cairo, Dār al-kutub, 129, no pagination; Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Or. 2840, fol. 45v (in the margin); Tunis, National Library, 3252, fol. 165r.

⁶² Rosen 2000: 172.

referenced or perhaps cited here in v. 3, 5, has become “a young man”, *fatā*, by the last stanza. This perhaps combines the alchemical idea of the “young man” as an active principle with that of the original author Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s, who is clearly meant by the “he” of v. 3, 3. This fits the genre, as according to its rules,⁶³ the *kharja* should be introduced by a verb of speaking or singing in the preceding verse (here v. 5, 3),⁶⁴ while the *kharja* itself should consist of a quotation of an older song (or poem), here *Muwashshah ṣan‘awī*.

3.3 The *muwashshah* cited by al-Jildakī

Despite the remark in the Gotha manuscript alleging that al-Jildakī did not mention Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s as an author of strophic poetry,⁶⁵ al-Jildakī indeed cites some verses from a *mukhammas* poem he attributes to *ṣāḥib al-Shudhūr* (“the author of ‘The Splinters’”) in his *al-Miṣbāḥ fi ‘ilm al-miftāḥ* (“The lamp on the science of the key”).⁶⁶ However, these verses fit neither into the famous long *Muwashshah ṣan‘awī* nor in the second, probably not authentic *muwashshah* just discussed. It is therefore a third *muwashshah* poem attributed to Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s.

Al-Jildakī also makes clear that these verses are not part of *Shudhūr*, as he introduces them as *mukhammas lahū fi ghayri dīwānihī* (“a stanzaic poem in pentastichs by him that is not part of his *dīwān*”).⁶⁷

As the text cited starts with an address, I would argue that this is indeed the first verse of the poem, as addresses are typical for the beginning of *muwashshahāt*.⁶⁸ If this were the case, it must have been a *muwashshah tāmm* for reasons of rhyme and stanzaic form. In what follows, I present all the verses al-Jildakī cites according to the Leiden manuscript, while the stanza numbers are purely fictional since al-Jildakī could have cited verses from any part of the poem.

⁶³ Schoeler 1992: 810.

⁶⁴ See Hartmann 1897: 100–101.

⁶⁵ See above Section 3.1.

⁶⁶ I cite *al-Miṣbāḥ* from MS Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Or. 1274, fol. 33v–35r. This manuscript, as so many others, only contains the first part of *al-Miṣbāḥ*. I am grateful to Juliane Müller (Tübingen) for pointing me to this passage.

⁶⁷ MS Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Or. 1274, fol. 33v.

⁶⁸ Rosen 2000: 170.

3.3.1 Text and translation

يَا طَالِبَا عِلْمَ الْأَخْيَارِ بِالْأَخْتِيَارِ
إِسْمَعْ هُدِيَّتَ فِي الْأَمْلَاحِ سِرُّ الْفَلَاحِ

maṭla' O searcher of the science of the best of folk!
Listen, you were guided, for in the salts is the secret of success.

إِسْمَعْ مَقَالَ ذِي الْأَرَاءِ لَا تَرْدِيهِ
وَرَوْجَ الْفَيْلِ بِالْعَنَقَاءِ عَلَى التَّبَدِيهِ
وَصَبَرَ النَّازَرَ وَسَنَطَ الْمَاءَ وَأَغْمَرَهُ فِيهِ
رَوْجُ حُكَّاسَكَ بِالْأَبَارِ وَالرَّوْقَدَارِ
يَبْدُو سَاهَ فِي الْأَقْدَاحِ كَالصُّبْحِ لَاهِ

Listen to the speech of someone rational whom you should not despise!

Marry quickly the elephant to the bird 'anqā'
And put the fire in the middle of the water and cover it in it.

Marry your copper with lead and with what contains mercury.³

Its sparkle appears in the glasses like the morning breaking.

2. المُلْحُ سِرُّ الْأَسْنَارِ عِنْدَ الْحَكَمِ
هُوَ الْمُقِيدُ بِلِلْفَرَارِ وَسَنَطُ الْجَحِيمِ
مُتَبَّثًا رُوحًا قَدْ جَازَ عَلَى الْأَلَيْمِ
يَسْنُطُ بِهِمْ سَطْرَةً حَبَّارِ فِي وَسْطِ نَارِ
يَفْعُلُ فِعَالَ ذِي الْأَرْمَاحِ بِلَا سِلَاحِ

Salt is the greatest secret of the sage,
It binds that which flees in the middle of the fire
And solidifies a spirit that oppresses the sad.
It attacks them like a giant in the middle of fire,
Like a spear-bearer does, but without weapons.

3.3.2 Critical apparatus

1 ، 2 زوج: وازوج (في لأصل)
1 ، 4 زوج: ازوج (في لأصل)

3.3.3 Literary analysis

The poem does not fit the classical Arabic prosodical system, which is not unexpected for a *muwashshah*. It seems to be closest to some sort of *basīṭ*.⁷⁰ The rhyme scheme is AB CCC AB DDD AB.

The poem contains elements already present in *Muwashshah ṣan‘awī*, especially in the discussion of speech as a possibility for the instruction of alchemy: While *Muwashshah ṣan‘awī* warns of lies and false assertions (vv. 1, 1 and 2, 1–2), here the

⁶⁹ *Zawq* is a synonym of *zi’baq*, “mercury”, cf. Dozy 1927 [1881]: vol. 1, 614. To which the Persian suffix *-dār* (“containing”) seems to have been added. In his *Miṣbāḥ* (MS Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Or. 1274, fol. 35r), al-Jildakī explains *zawqadār* as “pure white lead” (*al-isfidāj al-ṭāhir*).

⁷⁰ See on the prosody of *muwashshahāt* above n. 45.

addressed person, the adept of the “best science” (*matla’ 1*), is urged to listen to the lyrical voice and act upon his instructions. While *Muwashshah ṣan’awī* begins with an enumeration of things that will not lead to success (stanzas 1–4), here the student seems already a step advanced, having been guided to the salts as source of success (*matla’ 2* and again v. 2, 1). Unlike in *Muwashshah ṣan’awī*, the processes described are not centred on the “stone”, which is not even mentioned. The fusion process described as “marrying” in v. 1, 2 is interesting as it refers to substances using “Decknamen” only partially known from other works. Although the elephant appears both in *Shudhūr al-dhahab*⁷¹ and in *Hall mushkilāt*,⁷² it is not used as a “Deckname” there, but in a comparison to indicate something particularly heavy (in comparison with a *ghūl* in *Hall* and in comparison with a *dāniq*, a sixth of a *dirham*, in *Shudhūr*). ‘*Anqā’*, on the other hand, the mystical bird, is rather often connected with alchemy⁷³ and may, according to Siggel, be used as a “Deckname” for mercury, copper, or sulphur.⁷⁴ Given this width of possible identifications, the exact sense of the verse remains unclear, but the text, like *Muwashshah ṣan’awī*, is clearly intended to be read as a technical instruction and not merely as mystical rendering of psychological processes. That “salt” (*milh*) is called the “greatest secret of the sage” (v. 2, 1) is quite striking, as the common opinion is that only Paracelsus introduced salt into his alchemical system as a central principle.⁷⁵ Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s, in this poem, is quite clearly not to be seen as part of “the tradition of the nearly incomprehensible allegorical-mystical poetry”, as Ullmann states,⁷⁶ but has, again, a very clear idea of alchemical procedures.

4 Historical context

From the above we can deduce that Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s probably authored at least one alchemical *muwashshah*, *Muwashshah ṣan’awī*, and perhaps others as well. The *Muwashshah ṣan’awī* was at any rate “popular” enough to have become the base text for a *mu’āraḍa* by a later author. Al-Jildakī only cites parts of a poem, which, however, could well be by Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s. Yet while Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s is famous for his

⁷¹ Poem on *hā’*, v. 38 (Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s, ed. Ghazzālī 2018: 280).

⁷² MS London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 51v (cf. Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s (forthcoming), *Hall*, ed. Müller).

⁷³ Al-Jildakī complains that there are people who think that alchemy is just as imaginary as *Kalila*, *Dimna* or ‘*anqā’*, cf. al-Jildakī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, MS Istanbul, Topkapı, A 2111, fol. 71r. For more passages connecting ‘*anqā’* and alchemy see Ullmann 1979: 89. – I wish to thank Guy Ron Gilboa (Berlin/Jerusalem) for generously sharing his ‘*anqā’* material with me.

⁷⁴ Siggel 1951: 46.

⁷⁵ Priesner 1998: 320–321.

⁷⁶ Ullmann 1972: 231 (“die Tradition der fast unverständlichen, allegorisch-mystischen Poesie”).

alchemical *dīwān*, his alchemical *muwashshah*(āt) are almost completely forgotten, although their content and literary style is quite similar to that of his *Shudhūr*.

I argue here that this relative negligence is due less to Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s being an Almohad-Moroccan author and more to his emigration to the east, namely Egypt. As Juliane Müller and I argue elsewhere, his works offer several hints that he indeed left the Islamicate west at some point of his life. Already in *Shudhūr*, Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s tells of long-distance travels:⁷⁷

قَدْ تَعَنَّيْتُ بِهِ قَبْلَكُمْ
وَحَرَقْتُ الْأَرْضَ طُولًا ثُمَّ عَرَضًا

Even before you I have suffered because of it [i.e. the alchemical knowledge]
And have crossed the length and breadth of the Earth.

This might well be a literary *topos* for the search for knowledge, to which Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s might also be referring, when he mentions at the end of his self-commentary that he has travelled “east and west” (*al-mashāriq wa-l-maghārib*).⁷⁸ However, in one of the manuscripts of this self-commentary, there is a remark that the author dictated the text to his pupil while in Alexandria.⁷⁹ And in the unique manuscript of the treatise *Fi tarkib al-iksīr*, Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s says that he tried out a certain procedure while in Alexandria: *fa‘altu hādhā wa-anā fī l-Iskandariyya* (“I did this while I was in Alexandria”).⁸⁰ Finally, a relatively early, yet anonymous commentary of *Shudhūr* mentions that Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s’s pupil Abū Ja‘far was from Alexandria.⁸¹

In leaving Morocco for Egypt, Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s would still fit the larger picture of Almohad intellectual history, being one of many Andalusī and Moroccan intellectuals to have left the Almohad realm for the east – as for example Fierro has shown – among them many with occultist or Ṣūfī leanings who were suspected of sympathising with uprisings against the Almohads.⁸² Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s would, given his intellectual character, as detectable in *Shudhūr* and in *Hall mushkilāt al-Shudhūr*, fit with this group of scholars. If he did (indeed) leave the Islamicate west, this would explain several interesting phenomena.

⁷⁷ Poem on *dād*, v. 3; text established by Svetlana Dolgusheva (Berlin); Ghazzālī reads *taghan-naytu* with *ghayn* instead of *‘ayn* (cf. Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s, ed. Ghazzālī 2018: 186).

⁷⁸ MS London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 77v (cf. Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s (forthcoming), *Hall*, ed. Müller).

⁷⁹ MS Bethesda, National Library of Medicine, A65, fol. [7v] (no date indicated, perhaps seventeenth century).

⁸⁰ MS Tehran, Malik, 3119, p. 93. See on these issues in detail Forster/Müller 2020b: 397–400.

⁸¹ MS London, British Library, Add 22756, fol. 45r. The year 706/1306, when this manuscript was written, can be considered a terminus ante quem for the composition of this commentary.

⁸² Cf. Fierro 2010: 85.

Firstly and generally speaking, texts from the Islamicate west encounter difficulties in being accepted in the Mashriq. Exceptions are usually connected with the author himself or a close pupil travelling east.⁸³ The existence of more than 90 manuscripts of *Shudhūr*, still mostly kept in libraries in the Middle East, is more easily understood if Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s in fact travelled east himself.

Secondly, it could be down to sheer coincidence that no old *Shudhūr* manuscript from the Islamicate west is known: this could be due to them having been read often and therefore worn out, yet, in other cases, such as *Urjūza fil-ṭibb* by Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s’s contemporary Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 581/1185–1186), the only extant manuscript is in Maghribī script.⁸⁴ As the Moroccan sultan Moulay al-Ḥasan I. (r. 1290–1311/1873–1894) had at least one scribe copy *Shudhūr* for him in Cairo,⁸⁵ it seems likely that he could not gain access to a copy of the text in Morocco, so we can guess that it was not very prominent – perhaps because the author had left his homeland.⁸⁶

Thirdly, there is a rich tradition of writing commentaries to *Shudhūr* – by authors from the east: the earliest commentary is by the thirteenth century alchemist Abū l-Qāsim al-Ṣimāwī al-‘Irāqī, a clear indication that the *dīwān* reached the Mashriq some 50 years after the death of its author at the latest – and very likely during his lifetime.

Finally, while *Shudhūr al-dhahab* as a typical *dīwān* spread widely, the *muwashshahāt* remained somewhat obscure. As neither their content nor their style explains this fact satisfactorily, I would suggest that it was due to their literary form: strophic poetry is typical for the Islamicate west; in the east, it never gained the same prominence except as a genre for poetry in the local dialects.⁸⁷ If Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s had left Morocco at some point, he would have come into a society where *dīwān* poetry was honoured, while stanzaic poetry was considered too lowly to be admitted.⁸⁸

⁸³ Fierro 2018. On the problematic anecdote concerning *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*’s circulation in the east and the possibility that the work reached the Mashriq only in Ayyūbid times, see now Toral-Niehoff 2018: 86–87.

⁸⁴ See on this text and the manuscript Forster (forthcoming).

⁸⁵ MS Rabat, al-Khizāna al-Ḥasaniyya, 1116 see also the contribution “The alchemist’s work” by Christopher Braun and Regula Forster in the present volume.

⁸⁶ Yet *Shudhūr* must have been known in sixteenth century Fez, as Leo Africanus mentions a group of alchemists reading this work (Leo Africanus 2014: 316; cf. Forster/Müller 2020b: esp. 398).

⁸⁷ Heijkoop/Zwartjes 2004: x. On the eastern *zajal*, see Özkan 2020.

⁸⁸ On the status of *muwashshah* poetry see Alvarez 1998: 564; Heijkoop/Zwartjes 2004: x.

5 Conclusion

Alchemy promises its adepts richness, as already the first poem of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* indicates:⁸⁹

وَقَارَنَ بِالْبَدْرِ الْمُنِيرِ دُكَاءَ إِلَى رُحْلٍ كَيْ يَسْقِيَدْ ضِيَاءَ صُخْرَوْ رَأْصَارَتْهَا الْمِيَاهُ هَبَاءَ يَرُخُ وَهُوَ أَغْنَى الْعَالَمِينَ مَسَاءَ	إِذَا تَلَّثَ الْقَرَبَيْنَ بِالْأَرْضَهَ أَمْرُؤُ وَوَاصَلَ سَعْدَ الْمُشْتَرِي بِعُطَارِدَ وَأَجْمَدَ أَدْهَائَنَا وَحَلَ بِحَكْمَهَ فَدَاكَ الْأَذِي إِنْ يُضْحِي أَفَقَرَ مُغَنِّدَ
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If one triples Mars with Venus,
 And unites the sun with the shining full moon
 And connects the benefic Jupiter with Mercury
 And makes them join Saturn, so that he may gain brightness,
 If he makes oils solid and liquefies with wisdom
 Rocks that the waters have turned into dust,
 He will be, even if he was very poor in the morning,
 The richest in the worlds in the evening.

Yet to become rich cannot have been the alchemists' only goal: rather, they were searching for knowledge of God and the world.⁹⁰ But Ibn Arfa' Ra's and his audience also had other concerns, most importantly literary aesthetics. Ibn Arfa' Ra's's manner of speaking about alchemy in the form of classical *dīwān* poetry seems to have been attractive to a sizeable audience for several centuries, in an area stretching from Morocco to India. That his *muwashshahāt* were less successful by far, might have been due to the same fact: their form was, as stanzaic poetry, not acceptable to many.

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⁸⁹ Text established by Svetlana Dolgusheva (Berlin); the differences to the edition by Ghazzāli for this poem are minimal except for the fact that he adds a verse between lines 3 and 4 (cf. Ibn Arfa' Ra's, ed. Ghazzāli 2018: 93).

⁹⁰ On the goals of alchemists, see Forster 2020.

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