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Šawqī Ḍayf (1910–2005). Biography, Method, Bibliography

Abstract

The Article contains a biography and full bibliography of an eminent Egyptian scholar in the field of literature and linguistics, Šawqī Ḍayf.

There is not a single arabist in the world, who has not heard about Šawqī Ḍayf, an Egyptian historian and a critic of literature. Everyone who has ever been interested in Arabic literary studies or Arabic literature at any stage of its development, has definitely come across him.

Aḥmad Šawqī ‘Abd as-Salām Ḍayf was born on January 13th 1905 in Awlād Ḥammām Šimālī, Dumyāt (Damietta) district. He fell ill when being only few years old, which resulted in him being unable to see using one of his eyes for the rest of his life.

His education in primary school has begun in Dumyāt, and he finished it when he was 10, moving on to high school in Az-Zaqāzīq. He studied at the Arabic Language Institute of Cairo University Literature Faculty. Šawqī Ḍayf’s master’s degree thesis was entitled (1)¹ *Al-Fann wa-maḍāhibuhu fī an-naṭr al-‘arabī* [“Artistic Movements in Arabic Prose”] (Al-Qāhira 1960). Eventually he finished his studies in 1942 with a Ph.D. degree. His Ph.D. thesis was devoted to Arabic poetry: (2) *Al-Fann wa-maḍāhibuhu fī aš-šīr al-‘arabī* [“Artistic Movements in Arabic Poetry”] (Al-Qāhira 1960). His supervisor, Ṭaḥa Ḥusayn², was highly confident about the great future awaiting his pupil. Ṭaḥa

¹ Numbers in brackets denote the publication number in the full published books bibliography of the scholar.

² I do not know to what extent was the bond between two scholars influenced by the fact that Ṭaḥa Ḥusayn was blind. This sickness seems to occur frequently in the history of Arabic literature – it might be worth devoting

Ḥusayn was one of the most remarkable writers of the Arabic world, as well as a historian and a critic of Arabic literature. However, he was not the only authority for Šawqī Ḍayf, who wrote about his teachers in an autobiographic, two-volume book (3) *Ma'ī* ["With me"], Al-Qāhira 1981.³

Like his Master, Ṭaha Ḥusayn, Ḍayf writes about himself in the mentioned book from third person perspective: *fatā* [boy]. In Arabic culture it is perceived as an act of modesty and propriety. With great respect he mentions Aḥmad Amīn (1886–1954), one of the most notable Arabic intellectualists in the first half of the XX century, who introduced philosophy lectures, while himself being an ethics expert. Muṣṭafā 'Abd ar-Rāzīq (1885–1947) was another of Šawqī Ḍayf's teachers, a very broad-minded scholar who pursued to accommodate the requirements of Islam with contemporary world. Yet another of his lecturers, to whom *fatā* owed a lot, was Amīn al-Ḥūlī (1895–1966), literary historian and a lawyer. Those three scholars were extremely influential and had a crucial role in the formation of Arabic intelligentsia in the XX century, even beyond the borders of Egypt. However, Šawqī Ḍayf gave the most attention to his greatest master – Ṭaha Ḥusayn. It was him, who has shown him his way, and it was him as I already mentioned, who has foreseen his great future. Šawqī Ḍayf mentions the crowds coming to Ṭaha Ḥusayn lectures, who were listening to his characteristic, resounding voice, trained during the Koran reciting lessons, which he had taken in his childhood. Subsequently, Šawqī mentions his nearly friendly relations with Ṭaha Ḥusayn. Even though there was a teacher-pupil distance between them, Ṭaha Ḥusayn was always open to hear any of his students opinions. Šawqī Ḍayf shared a similar approach to his students, described by Ġābir al-'Uṣfūr as "a sole model of an academic teacher who has dedicated all of his life to the university."⁴

The scholar was a language and literature professor at the University of Cairo and at the Dār al-'Ulūm University in Cairo. Šawqī Ḍayf took many posts in Egyptian and generally Arabic academic life. In 1968 he became a member of the Egyptian Academy of The Arabic Language (*Mağma' al-Luġa al-'Arabiyya*). In 1988 he took the position of secretary-general of the Academy. He was also a member of the Egyptian Academy of Sciences (*Al-Mağma' al-'Ilmī al-Miṣrī*). In 1996 he was nominated as the chairman of the Union of Arabic Linguistic Scientific Academies (*Ittiḥād al-Mağāmi' al-Luġawiyya al-'Ilmiyya al-'Arabiyya*). Finally, he was also a member of the National Council of Culture, Art and Literature (*Al-Mağlis al-Qawmī li-at-Taḳāfa wa-al-Funūn wa-al-Adab*).

Šawqī Ḍayf was a laureate of the most notable Egyptian and generally Arabic awards in the field of literature. In 1955 he was granted the national 2nd degree award

a separate study to this physiologically-literary phenomena – Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī and Baššār Ibn Burd were also among blind poets.

³ Raġā' an-Naqāš, *Ḥaddatānā Šawqī Ḍayf qala*, Al-Ahrām, March 27th, 2005. It is often hard to acquire detailed bibliographical information concerning Arabic books. In this text I'm going to try and introduce a chronological bibliography of Šawqī Ḍayf. Works which years couldn't be established will be located at the end of the list.

⁴ Tahānī Šalāḥ (ed.), *Ḍayf... Zahid fi mihrāb al-'ilm*, „Al-Ahrām”, March 22, 2005; opinions on Šawqī Ḍayf of few Egyptian scholars are quoted in this text.

(“encouraging, honorable”, *tašğī'iyya*), afterwards in 1979 the 1st degree award (“in acknowledgement of contribution”, *taqdīriyya*), then in 1983 Saudi Fayṣal Award in the field of literature, and finally in 2003 the Ḥusnī Mubārak Award – at that time the most important award in Egypt.⁵

The scholar died in Cairo at evening of March 13th 2005, remaining, as Rağā' an-Naqqāš stated – *Al-Ġā'ib al-Ḥādīr* – “The Eternally Present Absent One”.

Šawqī Dayf's multipronged academic activity, which resulted in over 50 books, can be divided into few main thematic fields.

The first one is Arabic linguistics. He began his research in this area in 1947/1948 (2nd edition 1982) by publishing a critical edition of a work (4) *Ar-Radd 'alā an-nuḥāt* by Ibn Maḏā' al-Qurṭubī (XIIth C.). In the introduction to the abovementioned edition the autor emphasizes the innovation of the Andalusian scholar, which can be seen in his work. Šawqī Dayf's edition drew the attention of both Eastern and Western researchers to this work, which is enormously important for Arabic grammar and criticizes primitivism and backwardness of those, who call themselves experts in Arabic language. This edition also recovered Ibn Maḏā', known also as *Imām an-Naḥw* or *Imām an-Naḥwiyyīn* to the history of Arabic linguistics.⁶

The following works from this thematic area are:

(5) *Al-Madāris an-naḥwiyya* [“Gramatic Schools”], Al-Qāhira 1968;

(6) *Tağdīd an-naḥw* [“The Reform of Grammar”], Al-Qāhira 1982;

(7) *Taysīr an-naḥw at-ta'limī qadīman wa-ḥadīṭan ma' naḥğ tağdīdihī* [“Simplifications of Grammar in Past and Contemporary Teaching with Reform Propositions”], Al-Qāhira 1986;

(8) *Taysīrāt luğawiyya* [“Facilitations in Language”], Al-Qāhira 1990;

(9) *Taḥrīfāt al-'ammīyya li-al-fuṣḥā fī al-qawā'id wa-bunya wa-al-ḥurūf wa-al-ḥarakāt* [“Negative Influence of Dialect on the Literary Language in the Aspect of Consonants and Vowels Structures”], Cairo 1994;

(10) *Tağdīd an-naḥw al-'arabī* [“The reform of Arabic Grammar”], Al-Qāhira 2003;⁷

(11) *Al-Fuṣḥā al-mu'āṣira* [“Contemporary *Fuṣḥā*”].

It is worth mentioning that in few of his works the author emphasizes the propositions of changes in Arabic grammar in order to make it simpler and easier for those who teach or learn literary Arabic. Languages are not something absolutely invariant and they undergo alterations with time, so we should note this aspect of them instead of staying

⁵ Šawqī Dayf's academic activity was depicted in many monographs, for example: Aḥmad Yūsuf 'Alī, *Qirā'a awwaliyya fī kitābāt Šawqī Dayf* [?]; 'Abd al-'Azīz ad-Daṣūqī, *Šawqī Dayf, rā'id ad-dirāsa al-adabiyya wa-an-naqd al-'arabī* [?]; Taḥa Wādī, *Šawqī Dayf. Strā wa-taḥiyya*, Cairo 1992; Maḥmūd Mūnawī, *Šawqī Dayf. Lamaḥāt wa-kalīmāt*, Cairo 2007; Ḥilmī Buda'ir, *Ar-Ru'yā aš-šumūliyya fī tāriḥ al-adab 'inda Šawqī Dayf*, 1985.

⁶ See F. de la Granja, *Ibn Maḏā'*, in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, CD-ROM Edition v. 1.1.*

⁷ My resources do not allow me to certify if it is not the second edition of the book from 1982.

in the chains of tradition. When it comes to Arabic and its complicated culture-linguistic situation, an enormously important issue is the correlation between literary language and spoken language (Modern Standard Arabic), to which the scholar devoted a separate monograph. Šawqī Ḍayf was sure, that this form of language will become the most popular in the Arabic world. At the same time he focused on the fall of Arabic language connected (among others) with the fact, that in many disciplines, especially in sciences, western languages are commonly used.⁸

Another field, most vast and internally varied is Arabic literature – as classic as contemporary. His interest in this discipline reach the times of Šawqī Ḍayf's studies – both of his dissertations are devoted to aspects of past Arabic literature. Of course, the final outcome of this field is ten-volume *Tārīḥ al-adab ai-'arabi* ["The History of Arabic Literature"], which covers over one thousand years of history of Arabic literature. This series, often called as "Encyclopedia of Arabic literature" includes:

- (12) *Al-'Aṣr al-ğāhili* ["Old Arabic Period"], Al-Qāhira 1960;
- (13) *Al-'Aṣr al-islāmī* ["Islamic Period"], Al-Qāhira 1963;
- (14) *Al-'Aṣr al-'abbāsī al-awwal* ["First Abbasid Period"], Cairo 1966;
- (15) *Al-'Aṣr al-'abbāsī al-tānī* ["Second Abbasid Period"], Al-Qāhira 1973;
- (16) *'Aṣr ad-duwal wa-al-imārāt: Al-Ğazīra al-'Arabiyya, Al-'Irāq, Irān* ["The Period of Minor Countries and Emirates: Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Iran"], Al-Qāhira 1980;
- (17) *'Aṣr ad-duwal wa-al-imārāt: Al-Andalus* ["The Period of Minor Countries and Emirates: Andalusia"], Al-Qāhira 1989;
- (18) *'Aṣr ad-duwal wa-al-imārāt: Miṣr* ["The Period of Minor Countries and Emirates: Egypt"], Al-Qāhira 1990;
- (19) *'Aṣr ad-duwal wa-al-imārāt: Libyā, Tūnis, Siqilliyya* ["The Period of Minor Countries and Emirates: Libya, Tunis, Sicily"], Al-Qāhira 1992;
- (20) *'Aṣr ad-duwal wa-al-imārāt: Al-Ğazā'ir, Al-Mağrib al-Aqṣā, Mūrītanyā, As-Sūdān* ["The Period of Minor Countries and Emirates: Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Sudan"], Al-Qāhira 1995;

It would be worthy mentioning here that the division created by Šawqī Ḍayf regarding history of Arabic classical literature is used as in homeland Arabic studies as in western, although it doesn't mean of course, that it has been fully accepted everywhere.

Other of his works in the field of literature and literary criticism are:

- (21) *Tatawwur wa-tağdīd fī aš-ši'r al-umawī* ["Development and Renewal in the Umayyad Poetry"], Al-Qāhira 1952;
- (22) *Šawqī: šā'ir al-'aṣr al-ħadīḥ* ["Šawqī: A Poet of Present"], Al-Qāhira 1953;
- (23) *At-Tarğama aš-šaḥsiyya* ["Biography"], Al-Qāhira 1956;

⁸ For extended information on this subject see: A.O. Altwarjri, *Future of the Arabic Language*, ISESCO 2004, passim.

- (24) *Dirāsāt fī aš- šī'r al- 'arabī al- mu' āsir* ["Studies on Contemporary Arabic Poetry"], Al-Qāhira 1959;
- (25) *Al-Adab al- mu' āsir fī Mišr* ["Contemporary Literature in Egypt"], Al-Qāhira 1961;
- (26) *Fī an- naqd al- adabī* ["On the Literary Criticism"], Al-Qāhira 1962;
- (27) *Ma' Al- 'Aqqād* ["With Al- 'Aqqād"], Al-Qāhira 1964;
- (28) *An- Naqd* ["Literary Criticism"], Al-Qāhira 1964;
- (29) *Maqāma*, Al-Qāhira 1964;
- (30) *Al- Bārūdī: rā'id aš- šī'r al- ḥadīṭ* ["Al- Bārūdī, the Pioneer of Contemporary Poetry"], Al-Qāhira 1964;
- (31) *Aš- Šī'r wa- al- ġinā' fī Al- Madīna wa- Makka li- 'ašr Banī Umayya* ["The Poetry and Singing in Mecca and Medina in the Times of Umayyads"], Al-Qāhira 1967;
- (32) *Ibn Zaydūn*, Al-Qāhira 1967;
- (33) *Ar- Riṭā'* ["Elegy"], Al-Qāhira 1968;
- (34) *Buṭūla fī aš- šī'r al- 'arabī* ["Heroism in Arabic Poetry"], Al-Qāhira 1970;
- (35) *Fuṣūl fī al- adab wa- naqdihi* ["Literature and Literary Criticism"], Al-Qāhira 1971;
- (36) *Al- Baḥṭ al- adabī: ṭabī' atuhu, manāhiġuhu, uṣūluhu, maṣādiruhu* ["Literary Research: Its Nature, Methodology, Basis, Sources"], Al-Qāhira 1972;
- (37) *Al- Balāġa: taṭawwur wa- tāriḥ* ["Rhetorics: Development and History"], Al-Qāhira 1976;
- (38) *Ar- Riḥla* ["Journey"], Al-Qāhira 1979;
- (39) *Aš- Šī'r wa- ṭawābi' uhu aš- ša' biyya 'lā marr al- 'uṣūr* ["Poetry and Its Folk Nature over the Ages"], Al-Qāhira 1984;
- (40) *Al- Fukāha fī Mišr* ["Anecdote in Egypt"], Al-Qāhira 1985;
- (41) *Fī at- turāṭ wa- aš- šī'r wa- al- luġa* ["On Heritage, Poetry and Language"], Al-Qāhira 1987;
- (42) *Min Al- Mašriq ilā Al- Maghrib: buḥūṭ fī al- adab* ["From East to West: Studies on Literature"], Al-Qāhira 1998;
- (43) *Fī aš- šī'r wa- al- fukāha fī Mišr* ["On Poetry and Anecdote in Egypt"], Al-Qāhira 1999;
- (44) *Fī al- adab wa- an- naqd* ["On Literature and Literary Criticism"], Al-Qāhira 1999;
- (45) *Al- Ḥubb al- 'udrī 'inda Al- 'Arab* ["Udrī Poetry among Arabs"], Al-Qāhira 1999;
- (46) *'Aġā'ib wa- asāṭīr* ["Wonders and Legends"], Al-Qāhira 2004;
- (47) *Balāġa* ["Rhetorics"], Al-Qāhira, [?].

Walīd Munīr stresses that the importance of Šawqī Dayf for our knowledge on literature lies in the fact, that "like all of the pioneers of the new Arabic culture, he stood out with his encyclopedic knowledge, which enabled him to make a panoramic

presentation of the history of literature along with the social context and the civilizational and cultural phenomena. In this way he shed light on the ages of classical literature as a heritage which covers the history of the nation in its lingual and ideological aspect, he has shown the ways of reasoning and feeling.”⁹

About his research on the history of Arabic literature Šawqī Ḍayf writes succinctly in the introductory chapter of *Tārīḥ al-adab al-‘arabī. Al-‘Aṣr al-ğāhili*. I will now quote the main parts of this text, which characterizes Šawqī Ḍayf’s research method – a method that he obeyed for his entire life.

“While researching the literature (*adab*) of some nation historian might analyse it in general sense, as history of the representants of culture, thought and literature, or in a narrow sense (*ḥaṣṣ*). The latter approach covers the history of poets and writers, literature (*adab*), its development and phenomena with regard to general historic, social and cultural introductions. Critical and analytical studies of certain characters and their artistic beliefs are also of great importance. [...]”

A historian of Arabic literature can follow either the general notion or stude the literature in its narrow sense, concentrating on the poets and writers, analysing their literary personalities as well as social, economic, religious and political factors. Additionally, trends and literary movements which were dominant in given peroid should also be presented. It should be noted, that a historian of the Arabic literature in the narrow sense also describes one of the most beautiful branch of the wider sense literature, the one which maintains artistic beauty, forms the literary taste of a reader and listener by influencing his various feelings and emotions. He is a historian of literature in the ideal sense, a researcher who does not limit himself to short references on movements and literary genres or biographic notes about all of the poets and writers [...], but he writes voluminous chapters about their artistic achievements, according to the latest methodology of literary studies.

[...] In the following chapters of this book we will try to depict the history of Arabic literature in its narrow sense, drawing from various methodologies of literary research. We will stop on the issue of sex, time and place of a given writer, as well as on his literary personality and talents, which Saint-Beuve pinpointed in his book. The theory of the development of literary genres also wont be overlooked, because without a doubt those genres evolve from age to age, some of them create new ones, which were seemingly inexistent. However, if we went deeply into research, we would realize, that they had originated from other, diffrent genres. It is visible in *maqāma* from the Abbasid period, which, as we see it, has originated from *urğūza*. The style, vocabulary and aesthetics values of writers should also be noted, along with the comparison of subsequent stages of the deelopment of Arabic literary tradition.”¹⁰

He presented his methodology in detail in the book *Al-Baḥṭ al-adabī: ṭabī‘atuhu, manāḥiğuhu, uṣūluhu, maṣādiruhu* (36), which in introduction he himself treats as an

⁹ Tahānī Ṣāliḥ, op. cit.

¹⁰ Šawqī Ḍayf, *Tārīḥ al-adab al-‘arabī. Al-‘Aṣr al-ğāhili*, Al-Qāhira, n.d., 8th edition, pp. 11, 13–14.

academic handbook for the students of Arabic literature.¹¹ The title of the work itself points to its structure, since it is a direct reflection of the inner division of the handbook. The author in a systematic manner presents the method of literary studies according to his rules, a general description of which was made above. The book starts from the research material problem (*Ṭabīʿat al-baḥṭ al-adabī*, pp. 9–78) and ends at the method of creating annotations and bibliographies (*Maṣādir*, pp. 212–269). The “research material” is, of course, literature. On few pages (*Māddat al-baḥṭ al-adabī*, pp. 9–17) Šawqī Ḍayf presented his view on the nature of literature in as brief and unambiguous manner as he did in the case of the history of literature, which parts were quoted above. Subsequently he focuses on the issues of the research methodology. For instance, when analysing the problems concerning the choice of subject for the literary analysis (*Iḥtiyār al-baḥṭ al-adabī*, pp. 17–26) he warns young adepts of the literary studies that they should not fully rely on their professors in this issue. “They should choose their subjects by themselves and those subjects should be an outcome of a comprehensive reading. Their research should not cover a subject too extensive. It should be remembered, that the narrower the subject, the better it is for analysis, since the researcher is able to see the whole issue and fully plunge into it” – the scholar sums up in the “Ending”.¹² I couldn’t agree more. We can find many of such accurate and universal remarks in Šawqī Ḍayf’s work. In the fifth chapter devoted to the methodology (*Manāhiġ*, pp. 79–145) Šawqī Ḍayf stresses the connections between literary studies and other disciplines – he cites among others: nature sciences, sociology, psychology, aesthetics. The fourth chapter, “Sources” (*Al-Uṣūl*, pp. 146–211) is devoted to the issue of the critic of the sources in the studies on Arabic literature. Šawqī Ḍayf acutely analyses the topic of relation (*riwāya*) and record (*tadwīn*) in the Arabic literary output, as well as redaction and edition (*taḥqīq*). The last chapter stands as a set of technical tips.

It should be stressed, that *Al-Baḥṭ al-adabī* is a book outright extraordinarily firm and systematic, what is not always a feature of Arabic works which are ment to represent the methodology of research in the humanities. Those usually seem more similar to the medieval *adab* works (and more in the style of Al-Ġāḥiẓ than Ibn Qutayba), than contemporary systematic science lectures.

Contemporary Egyptian and Arabic literature critics often state, that Šawqī Ḍayf was adverse to all of the methodological news and his works were a typical example of the old, classic school of studies. Aḥmād Muġāhid, an Egyptian literature critic answers those comments saying that these opinions are not fully justified since they should be seen in the context of their time of creation. Additionally it seems that this old classic school has not really lost any of its actuality. Ḍayf’s *Al-Baḥṭ al-adabī* can without a hitch serve today as an introduction to the literary studies, which later on can be continued on one’s own from a solid ground.

¹¹ Šawqī Ḍayf, *Al-Baḥṭ al-adabī: ṭabīʿatuhu, manāhiġuhu, uṣūluhu, maṣādiruhu*, Al-Qāhira 1979, 4th edition, p. 5.

¹² Ibid.

For the present scholars who undertake literary analysis in the modern spirit, classic works of Šawqī Ḍayf can serve as an ideal starting point – they don't have to worry about collecting proper materials.¹³ And that seems to be very true.

The third field of Šawqī Ḍayf's studies and publications were works devoted to muslim topics. They were created in the last phase of the Scholars life. His last work is the monograph on the Prophet Muhammad. The works from this field:

(48) *Sūrat Ar-Raḥmān wa-suwar qīṣār* ["The Sūra Most Gracious and "Short Sūras". Presentation and Analysis"], 2nd edition, Al-Qāhira 1980;

(49) *Ālamiyyat al-islām*, Al-Qāhira 1996 / English transl.: *The Universality of Islam*, by A. El-Affendi, Marroco ISESCI 1998 / French transl. *L'Universalite de l'islam*, trans. A. Dhimene, n.d. ["The Universality of Islam"];

(50) *Al-Ḥadāra al-islāmiyya min Al-Qurān wa-as-sunna* ["Islamic Civilisation from Koran and Sunna"], Al-Qāhira 1997;

(51) *Muḥammad Ḥatam an-Nabiyyīn* ["Muḥammad, the Seal of the Prophets"], Al-Qāhira 2000;

(52) *Mu'ğizat Al-Qurān* ["Miracle of Koran"], Al-Qāhira 2002;

(53) *Mu'ğam muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadī an-nabawī* ["The Prophet's Tradition Dictionary"] [?].

Fully outside mentioned fields stays the (54) *Mu'ğam al-qānūn* ["The Dictionary of Law"], Al-Qāhira 1999.

Editor's activity of Šawqī Ḍayf is also very important. Beside abovementioned treatise of Ibn Maḍa' the scholar published three more editions of other classical works of the Arabic literature and works of the contemporary clasics:

(55) Abū al-Qāsim Ismā'īl Ibn 'Abbād Ṣāḥib at-Talqānī, *Rasā'il* ["Letters"], Al-Qāhira 1947;

(56) 'Alī Ibn Mūsā Ibn Sa'īd al-Mağribī, *Kitāb al-muğrib fī ḥulā Al-Mağrib* ["The Book of the One who Admires the Fine Features of the Maghreb Residents"], Al-Qāhira 1953 (with Z.M. Ḥasan);

(57) Aḥmad Ibn Mūsā Ibn Muğāhid, *Kitāb as-sab'a fī qirā'at* ["The Book of Seven on the Recitations of Koran"], Al-Qāhira 1972;

(58) Ğurğī Zaydān, *Tārīḥ ādāb al-luġa al-'arabiyya* ["The History of the Literature in Arabic Language"], Al-Qāhira 1981.

In the end I shall repeat few statements, which were already, directly or indirectly mentioned. Šawqī Ḍayf's output in the field of Arabic philology is impressive – today it is hard to imagine an arabist – whether it be a literature specialist or a linguist, who could ignore the works of this Scholar. This irremovable footprint makes it a fact, that he will stay for many decades – again – *Al-Ġā'ib al-Ḥādīr* – "The Eternally Present Absent One", no matter if we agree with him, or decide to argue.

¹³ Tahānī Ṣāliḥ, op. cit.