CHAPTER 3

Muǧannas (Semasiological) Lexica

1 Introduction

The muǧannas type of lexica (i.e. general, unspecialized works in which sign leads to meaning) appeared only shortly after the first mubawwab lexica, and it has already been argued that the two types practically belong to the same stage of philological activity and in no way represent two consecutive stages of lexicography as some have claimed.¹ In their earliest stages, both types were closely linked to interest in the philological study of the Qurʾān and the desire to preserve correct usage and systematize the available data, particularly due to the linguistic shifts that took place with the expansion of Arabic following the conquests and the Arabization of the official registers, or dawāwīn, in the second half of the first/seventh century. But in spite of their common background, there was an early awareness that each of the two types served a purpose which the other could not achieve, for whereas the muǧannas type proceeded from sign to meaning, the mubawwab proceeded from meaning to sign. As previously mentioned, Ibn Sīda’s (d. 458/1066) succinct definition of the purpose of each type, as represented in his al-Muḥkam and al-Muḥaṣṣaṣ, clearly justifies the coexistence of the two types for several centuries.²

Unlike mubawwab lexica, most muǧannas ones aim at exhausting the linguistic corpus of Arabic, i.e. the inclusion of all the roots of the language, and, in some of the more comprehensive works, the greatest part of the derivatives of these roots. This naturally made the authoring of a muǧannas lexicon a much more arduous task than writing a mubawwab one, perhaps with the exception of the few voluminous and comprehensive multithematic works which are best exemplified by Ibn Sīda’s al-Muḥaṣṣaṣ. It is therefore not surprising that the number of lexica to be discussed in this chapter is much less than the number of those encountered in the previous one. But in spite of the relative scarcity of muǧannas lexica, they exhibit a noticeable variety not only in their arrangement but also in content. The criterion of the arrangement of material has traditionally been adopted in classifying these lexica, and we shall make no exception to this practice. Accordingly, our classification includes three major types: the phonetic-permutative, the alphabetical, and

¹ Cf. above, 46–47.
² Cf. above, 47–48, 276.
the rhyme systems. Yet, one should be aware of the fact that this classification is not without some overlaps. Ibn Durayd’s (d. 321/933) Ǧamharat al-luġa, for example, is alphabetically arranged but lists together the various permutations of the radicals. Moreover, the rhyme system adopts an alphabetical arrangement, except that roots are arranged according to their last letter, and not their first. Above all, the classification of muġannas lexica based on the type of arrangement should not divert one from the fact that the three types mentioned above are not separate stages in the development of the lexicographical tradition. Although the rhyme system, which was fully developed by Ġawhari (d. c. 400/1010) in al-Šaḥāḥ, eventually became dominant, there were major muġannas lexica which continued to adopt the phonetic-permutative and the alphabetical systems well into the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries respectively. Following our discussion of the lexica of all three types, the epilogue shall examine, among other subjects, some of the issues which pertain to all of them regardless of their type of arrangement.

2 The Phonetic-Permutative System

This system of arranging Arabic roots is most probably the oldest and goes back to the first muġannas lexicon in the tradition, al-Ḫalîl b. Aḥmad’s (d. 175/791) K. al-ʿAyn. What is exclusive to the lexica which adopt this system is the phonetic aspect, that is, the arrangement of letters based on their place of articulation. The method of including in each lemma all the permutations (taqālīb) of the radicals is however not exclusive to this group of lexica since Ibn Durayd (d. 321/933) adopts this method but still arranges the roots alphabetically in his Ǧamharat al-luġa. The originator of the phonetic alphabet (i.e. ʿ, ḥ, ḥ, ḫ, ġ, etc. with minor modifications at times) is almost certainly Ḫalîl, and the reasons for originating this system will be discussed as part of our discussion of K. al-ʿAyn.

From a wider perspective, phonetic arrangement is not restricted to muġannas lexica but also features in some mubawwab ones. Among the examples encountered in the previous chapter are Qālī’s (d. 356/967) al-Maqṣūr wa-l-mamdiʿd, Ibn al-Qūṭiyya’s (d. 367/977) al-Afʿāl and Saraqusṭī’s (d. after 400/1010) al-Afʿāl. Permutations were also adopted by a number of authors of mubawwab lexica, the earliest of whom is most probably Ḥarbî (d. 285/898)

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3 For chronological comparison with K. al-Ǧīm, cf. below, 332–333.
4 Cf. above, 245, 258–260.