'ILM AL-WAD':
AN INTRODUCTORY ACCOUNT OF A LATER MUSLIM
PHILOLOGICAL SCIENCE[1]

BY

BERNARD G. WEISS

Of the traditional Muslim philological sciences (al-'ulūm al-lughawīya), one which has received virtually no attention in the West is 'ilm al-waḍ'. This neglect may perhaps be due to the relatively late emergence of this science, as compared to the other Muslim philological sciences, which gives it the appearance of being an appendage to the Muslim scholarly tradition, an afterthought, as it were, of the medieval Muslim intellect. Another possible reason for this neglect may be that from the point of view of Western philology 'ilm al-waḍ' is something of a curiosity; it is not so easily categorized as the other philological sciences and does not seem to reflect any of the traditional interests of Western philological scholarship. 'Ilm al-ṣarf, for example, is quite readily categorized as morphology, 'ilm al-naḥw as syntax, 'ilm al-ishtiqāq as etymology, 'ilm al-lugha as lexicography, and so on. 'Ilm al-waḍ', on the other hand, has no apparent counterpart among the branches of Western philology or linguistics; as a matter of fact, its subject matter, which will be unfolded in the course of the present study, does not seem to fall within the domain of the Western philologist's, or linguist's, interests. If there is any category of inquiry at all, known to the West, that suits 'ilm al-waḍ', it is probably that part of philosophy which is called «philosophy of language». Gardet and Anawati have referred to 'ilm al-waḍ' as «sémantique»[2].

---

[1] My initial study of the subject matter of this article may be found in the third main section of my doctoral dissertation («Language in Orthodox Muslim Thought: A Study of Waḍ' al-Lugha and Its Development», Princeton University, 1966). The present study incorporates a number of key terminological changes and includes observations that were not contained in the earlier study, although it does not go into as much detail on certain points.

[2] L. Gardet and M.-M. Anawati, Introduction à la théologie musulmane (Paris, 1948), p. 135.

The beginnings of *'ilm al-waḍ'* may be traced back to a short treatise on the subject of *waḍ'* written in the fourteenth century by the great theologian 'Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 757/1355) and entitled *al-Risāla al-waḍ'īya*. Upon this treatise a number of commentaries and glosses were written in subsequent centuries, the most renowned of these being the commentaries of 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Qushjī (d. 879/1474), Abu'l-Qāsim al-Samarqandī (fl. 888/1483) and 'Iṣām al-Dīn al-Isfarā'īnī (d. 944/1537)[3]. However, despite the abundance of this literature of commentary, Tashköprüzade as late as the mid-sixteenth century stated that *'ilm al-waḍ'* had not yet become a «codified» (*mudawwan*) science and that the treatise of al-Ījī was but a drop in the ocean of its subject matter[4].

If we take the existence of manuals (*khulāṣāt* or their equivalent) to be the ear-mark of a fully fledged codified science in Islam, then we should perhaps assign the coming-of-age of *'ilm al-waḍ'* to the period after Tashköprüzade, when the first manuals on *waḍ'* began to appear. A number of such manuals were written and published within the last hundred years. The following, for example, may be found in the Azhar mosque library: Muḥammad Ḥajarzāde, *Risāla fi'l-waḍ'* (Istanbul, 1890); 'Abd al-Malik al-Patnī, *'Aqd al-La'ālī* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Sharafīya, 1887); Yūsuf ibn Aḥmad al-Dijwī, *Khulāṣat al-waḍ'* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Nahḍa, 1915); 'abd al-Raḥmān Khalaf, *Khulāṣat 'ilm al-waḍ'* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Sa'āda, 1916); 'Abd al-Khāliq al-Shubrāwī, *al-Minḥa al-ilāhīya fi'l-qawā'id al-waḍ'īya* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Sa'āda, 19—); and Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Zawāhirī, *al-Mulakhkhas fī 'ilm al-waḍ'* (Cairo, 19—)[5]. Until the early part of this century, *'ilm al-waḍ'* has occupied a rather high place in the curriculum of religious studies in the Azhar[6].

The term *waḍ'*, which indicates the subject matter of the science under consideration, is a verbal noun or infinitive, the ordinary meaning of which is «to put down», «to place», «to posit», etc. In the technical

---

[3] In my own study of these works I have made use of manuscripts found at Princeton. See R. Mach, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts (Yahuda Section) in the Garrette Collection, Princeton University Library* (Princeton, 1977), pp. 293-7. As this catalogue indicates, al-Qushjī has sometimes been confused with al-Samarqandī. Cf. C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur* (Leiden, 1949), vol. II, pp. 268-9; vol. SII, pp. 288-9.

[4] Aḥmad Tashköprüzade, *Miftāḥ al-sa'āda wa-miṣbāḥ al-siyāda* (Haydarabad, 1910), vol. I, p. 110.

[5] These works are listed in *Fihris al-kutub al-mawjūda bi'l-maktaba al-azharīya* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Azhar, 1946-52), vol. IV, as follows: Ḥajarzāde, pp. 53-4; al-Patnī, p. 58; al-Dijwī, p. 51; Khalaf, p. 50; al-Shubrāwī, p. 59; al-Zawāhirī, p. 58.

[6] Gardet and Anawati, loc. cit.