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## TRACING ORAL RESIDUE: INVESTIGATING TEXTUAL VARIATION IN THE LYRICS OF FUZULI OF BAGHDAD

### Abstract

The theory of orality has garnered significant attention in the fields of folklore and medieval studies, also within the context of the Middle East. While much scholarly interest has historically been directed toward epic poetry, lyric poetry has often been overlooked. Remarkably, the defining characteristics of orature, as elucidated by orality theorists, can be discerned within certain forms of classical Persian and Turkish lyrical poetry, such as the ghazal. This observation prompts us to consider the adoption of specific theoretical and practical assumptions that can broaden researchers' perspectives and enhance their textological tools.

Drawing upon my research into the textual variation present in early handwritten divans of the renowned poet Füzuli (d. 1556), this study demonstrates that multiple versions of a text can be effectively analyzed not solely as copies of a written text archetype distorted by scribes but sometimes also as instances of the recorded text representing several distinct verbal transmissions. It is worth noting that during the era of so-called divan poetry, evidence proves the coexistence of both oral and written text transmission, particularly in the case of the ghazal, a short poem intended for recitation or performance.

This presentation argues in favor of this perspective and explores the opportunities it affords for a deeper understanding of the material. Additionally, I provide compelling evidence, based on the oldest manuscripts of Füzuli's Turkish Divan, to support the existence of several key oral features: an additive structure, where verses can shift within as independent units of meaning; a formulaic style, characterized by the repetition of specific verbal expressions within defined metrical contexts; and mobility, featuring notable level of textual variation that adhere to both metric and semantic correctness.

**Key words:** Fuzûlî, Azerbaijani literature, Turkish classical poetry, orality, textual variation

Yatsik Yarמושko

## ŞİFAHİ ZEHNIYYƏTİN İZİNDƏ: FÜZULİ BAĞDADI ŞEİRLƏRİNDƏ MƏTN DƏYİŞKƏNLİYİ

### Xülasə

Hal-hazırda şifahi kompozisiya nəzəriyyəsi folklor və orta əsr elmlərində, o cümlədən Yaxın Şərqdə kifayət qədər geniş tətbiq olunur. Bu mövzuda tədqiqat aparən əksər alimlər şifahi mədəniyyətin epik məhsulları üzərində dayansalar da, lirik şeirlər o qədər də diqqəti cəlb etməmişdir. Halbuki klassik fars və türk şeirlərində, xüsusilə qəzəllərdə şifahi ədəbiyyatın bütün xüsusiyyətlərini asanlıqla müşahidə etmək olar.

Bu müşahidəyə əsaslanaraq, tədqiqat perspektivini genişləndirən və mətnoloji vasitələri inkişaf etdirən müəyyən nəzəri və praktiki fərziyyələri qəbul etməyi təklif edirəm. Görkəmli şair Füzulinin (vəfatı 1556) ilk əlyazmalarının mətn dəyişkənliyi ilə bağlı apardığım araşdırmaların nəticələri göstərir ki, əsərin müxtəlif əlyazma variantları tədqiq edilərkən onlar təkcə mətn arxetipi və katiblər tərəfindən pozulmuş nüsxələri anlayışı ilə qiymətləndirilmir, lakin bəzən də zehni məkandan qaynaqlanan kağıza köçürülən bir neçə şifahi nəqli kimi müvəffəqiyyətlə qeyd edə bilərik.

Bu tədqiqatda Füzulinin farsca və türkcə divanının ən qədim nüsxələrinə əsaslanaraq, şifahi ədəbiyyatın ən əsas xüsusiyyətlərinin onun şeirlərində olduğunu sübut edirəm.

Traditional studies of courtly Islamic literature, often influenced by hermeneutics and structuralism, have proven insufficient in addressing the questions raised by modern philology. It is evident that we should seek new approaches. I will demonstrate how the oral theory and its methodological tools can enhance our understanding of courtly Islamic literature and pave the way for future research in this field. For my study, I selected the poems of Füzuli of Baghdad (d. 1556), one of the most prominent Islamic court poets, known for his mastery of the *ğazal*, a short lyrical form. He compiled his lyrics in Persian and Eastern Turkish (Azerbaijani) in two extensive divans. I suggest that significantly varying versions of lyrical texts may represent different oral performances transcribed by scribes or carriers of oral tradition. This assumption allows us to apply methods of investigation developed by oral theory.

Some may question the relevance of using the theory of orality for written literature, but there are three reasons to support this approach: Firstly, oral theory originated from the study of ancient written texts, such as the works of Homer (Lord 1971: 141-197), Hesiod, Plato (Havelock 1963, 1986), and medieval epics like *Beowulf* (Lord 1971: 198-220) and *The Song of Roland* (Zumthor 1972). Studies examining the oral aspects of Islamic courtly epics like *Shahnama* (Davidson 1994, 1999) or *The Romance of Antar* (Madeyska 2001) have also been published. However, there is a significant gap in research on courtly lyric, which is the subject of my interest. Secondly, in the era of manuscripts, there was a strong tradition of verbal transmission alongside a newly introduced and strictly limited written transmission. The prosodic features of many poetic forms indicate they were intended for oral performance. Silent reading and writing with a quill in hand are only later developments (Berleant 2016: 149-158, Ong 2005: 93). Writing likely served as a mnemonic device *aides-mémoire*. Thirdly, Islamic courtly poetry exhibits structural features indicative of its oral nature, including an additive structure, formulaic style, and textual mobility. I will demonstrate not only the existence of these features, but also how investigating them can enhance our understanding of this poetry.

#### 1. ADDITIVE STRUCTURES

Most classical Islamic poetic forms consist of couplets referred to as *bayt* (meaning 'house' in Arabic) because each couplet "is like a house; if one wants to meet the man living inside and called by the name Meaning, he must enter through its door" (Pala 2008: 52). Like a living body, the meaning cannot be divided: it wholly belongs to a single couplet, it begins within it and ends within it. Therefore we can say that each couplet is an independent unit of meaning. This feature was commonly observed by researchers and described as a characteristic of a *bayt* (e.g. Akün 2013: 81-83, Pala 2012: 69). It is closely related to what has been called an adding style by Milman Parry (Lord 1971: 54) and is more widely known as an additive oral style (Ong 2005: 36).

The additive style is characterized by a lack of subordination between verses that follow one another. In Islamic courtly poetry, there is no enjambement, and a couplet can change its position within the same poem in different manuscripts without altering the poem's overall meaning. So it is sometimes hard to determine the proper or original sequence of the verses, if there were any. Only the opening couplet *matla'* (in which its both half-verses rhyme) and closing verse *maḥlaş* (in which the author places his signature) take fixed positions in most popular lyrical forms such as *qaşida* and *ğazal*. The rest of couplets bounded by the same metrical pattern, rhyme and loose associations, can theoretically occupy any position within the poem. Albert Lord in his chef-d'œuvre claims that the "absence of necessary enjambement is a characteristic of oral composition and is one of the easiest touchstones to apply in testing the orality of a poem" (Lord 1971: 54), and that the "test of enjambement analysis is, as a matter of fact, an easily applied rule of thumb that can be used on first approaching a new text to determine the possibility of oral composition" (Lord 1971: 145).

The level of additivity varies among different poetic forms. The *ğazal* has retained its oral nature both in structure and performance, showcasing a highly visible additive style. Also in different manuscripts the couplets often shift and change their position within the same *ğazal*. We can point the poetic form *qit'a* as its opposite. It is formally very similar to *ğazal*: it uses the same metres and rhymes, but usually there are no *matla'* and *maḥlaş* verses and the overall length is more labile. Moreover, the style of *qit'a* can be far less additive. At least three levels of decay of the additivity in this kind of poetry can be listed.

In the first level there are few couplets bound by unity of thema. Each of them comments and complements the other revealing partially their hidden senses, just like in the *ğazal*. In the *ğazal* however, the unity of thema occurs quite rarely and the couplets in their external semantic layer are placed far from each other. The second level applies to the *qit'a* that takes a structure of a narrative. It is in fact very similar to oral epic. Let us get acquainted with some lines of an exemplar of such *qit'a* originating from the Persian divan by Füzuli:

1. One night an argument broke out between a dog and a cat  
The dog said: you who lick glasses clean, whose eyes follow pieces of food
2. You are the one who strayed from the path of good manners  
You are whose only occupation is thievery
3. No one can bring a morsel to his own mouth  
Without you disturbing him by your whining and moaning out of greed [...]
11. Taking these smites upon himself, so far silent cat said:  
You who are a truculent and ruthless villain
12. All the time you attack both guests and beggars  
Every stranger suffers because of you
13. You wouldn't let prosperity [heralded by] Archangel Gabriel in  
You will not achieve your heart's desires with this attitude [...] (Füzuli, h. 988: 118b-119a)

The structure of this *qit'a* is very clear: there are two themas (the dog's argument in couplets 2-10 and the cat's argument in couplets 12-14), each one preceded by an opening line (couplet 1 for the dog, couplet 11 for the cat). The verses within the thema can be shifted without a change in meaning, but the sequence of themas remains unchanged (Lord 1971). The third level requires an external context. Without it, the *qit'as* seem incomplete; their meanings are weak, undeveloped, or sometimes the only sense left is a mere poetic description. The only function of this type of *qit'a* is to embellish prose.

## 2. FORMULAIC STYLE

One of the most investigated aspects of orality is the use of formulaic style of speaking. In the poetry by the term formula we usually mean "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (Lord 1971: 30, Ong 2005: 25). Some theorists of orality also claim that even a single word is enough to be considered a formula because it may serve to organize thinking (Ong 2005: 35-36).

To illustrate how metrical context determines word choice and placement in certain metrical patterns, we need a verbal expression that frequently appears in Füzuli's poems. One of such expressions is Füzuli's signature (pen name). I found it in 407 Persian *ğazals* and in 320 Turkish ones. The metrical pattern of the poet's name typically consists of three syllables: a short one at the beginning followed by two long ones (v--). If the declamatory scheme of a verse requires us to read it in this manner, we can refer to it as a strong position. The weak position on the other hand is when the last syllable of the word is shortened (in this case, it may or may not occur before an initial vowel of a word or suffix). Thus, we have a short syllable, a long syllable, and then another short syllable (v-v). In each metrical pattern, there are several places where this word can appear. Let's refer to these places as slots.

Table 1	<i>Ramal</i> (-v-- v-- v-- v-)							
	I.		II.		III.		In total	
Persian	10	9.8%	47	46.1%	45	44.1%	102	100%
Turkish	98	68.5%	23	16.1%	22	15.4%	143	100%
In total	108	44.1%	70	28.6%	67	27.3%	245	100%

Table 2	<i>Ramal</i> (vv-- vv-- vv-- vv-)			
	I.	II.	III.	In total

Persian	5	7.0%	32	45.1%	34	47.9%	71	100%
Turkish	30	54.5%	15	27.3%	10	18.2%	55	100%
In total	35	27.8%	47	37.3%	44	34.9%	126	100%

In the very popular and monotonic long metre *ramal* (-v--|v--|v--|v-) and its shortened form (vv--|vv--|vv--|vv-), we observe the same situation. In Persian poems, the signature of the author is often located in the second or third slot (there is a 45.7% chance for the signature to appear in each of them), while the first slot is usually omitted (only 8.7% of the signatures). We see that for the signature, there is no clear tendency in this case to take any certain position in a verse. However, as intriguing as it may seem the signature does show a tendency to omit one metrical context. Thus let us examine Füzuli's Turkish poems, where the situation differs. The first slot of the metre *ramal* is a favorable position, with a frequency of 64.6%, while the second and third slots are less frequently occupied, at approximately 19.2% and 16.2%, respectively.

Table 3	<i>Hazağ</i> (v--- v--- v--- v---)									
	I.		II.		III.		IV.		In total	
Persian	84	90.3%	5	5.4%	4	4.3%	0	0%	93	100%
Turkish	62	91.2%	4	5.9%	2	2.9%	0	0%	68	100%
In total	146	90.7%	9	5.6%	6	3.7%	0	0%	161	100%

In the full form of the metre *hazağ* (v---|v---|v---|v---), the situation is clear and firmly supports my previous claims: Füzuli's signature almost always appears in the same position, occupying the first slot of the verse (90.7%). There are few instances where it appears in the second and third slots (approximately 5.6% and 3.7%, respectively), but never in the fourth slot.

Table 4	<i>Muđāri'</i> (--v v-v v-v v-v)									
	I.		II.		III.		IV.		In total	
Persian	3	5.3%	3	5.3%	51	89.5%	0	0%	57	100%
Turkish	4	21.0%	4	21.0%	9	47.4%	2	10.5%	19	100%
In total	7	9.2%	7	9.2%	60	78.9%	2	2.6%	76	100%

Table 5	<i>Muğtatt</i> (v-v- vv-- v-v- vv-)											
	I.		II.		III.		IV.		V.		In total	
Persian	11	29.7%	2	5.4%	19	51.3%	4	10.8%	1	2.7%	37	100%
Turkish	6	54.5%	1	9.1%	3	27.3%	1	9.1%	0	0%	11	100%
In total	17	35.4%	3	6.2%	22	45.8%	5	10.4%	1	2.1%	48	100%

I presume that it is possible to account for the positions of an element within a verse based on the rules of the language, but only to a certain extent. It appears that a formulaic analysis may yield more efficient results. Let us examine two more dynamic metres: *muđāri'* (--v|v-v|v-v|v-v) and *muğtatt* (--v|v-v|v-v|v-v). In metre *muđāri'*, Füzuli's signature displays a pronounced tendency to occupy the third slot (78.9%). This tendency can be readily explicable from the perspective of phonotactics, as the third slot is

the one in a strong position within this metre. The signature can occupy another slot only if it precedes a word that begins with a vowel (which occurs only 21.1% of the time). However, let us now turn our attention to the similar metre *muğtatt*: once again, there is also only one strong position for the signature in the third slot (the same as before), but intriguingly, the signature more readily occupies weak positions (54.2% vs. 45.8%). In this instance, a linguistic explanation seems inadequate.

I have already established that in Persian and Turkish courtly lyrics, there are discernible tendencies regarding the use of certain words or phrases within specific metrical contexts while avoiding them in others. However, I have yet to demonstrate the existence of genuine formulas or formulaic expressions in this poetry. For instance, there exists a considerable number of highly specific and consistently reiterated expressions, such as *čāk-i girēbān* ‘collar torn with despair’, *šab-i hiğrān* ‘night of separation from the beloved’, *dūd-i āh* ‘smoke escaping from burning sighs’, *sang-i malāmat* ‘stone of reproach’, *šam’-i ruḥ* ‘face shining like a candle’, *sarw-i ḥirāmān* ‘silhouette resembling a swaying cypress’, *lab-i la’l* ‘lips resembling rubies’, etc., which can be regarded as simple formulas. Let us conduct a closer examination of at least one of such expressions. The phrase *zulf-i parēšān* ‘scattered curls’ presents sufficient complexity for our investigative purposes and appears in Füzuli’s *ğazals* on fifteen occasions, predominantly in his Turkish *divan*.

The metrical pattern of *zulf-i parēšān* contains an anceps in the second syllable, allowing for two possible interpretations: (-vv-) or (-v-). In theory, they could fit into many types of metres, such as *muğtatt*, *munsariḥ*, *mutaqārib*, *rağaz*, *sarī*, and some types of *muḍārī*. However, in practice, the phrase *zulf-i parēšān* appears only in varieties of metre *ramal* and *hazağ*.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that this formulaic expression always occurs with a suffix, with only one exception found in the entire dataset (even though the declamatory pattern compels us to read the following word as an enclitic). It is, therefore, more appropriate to treat *zulf-i parēšān* as a five-syllable formula extended by at least one additional syllable of any type. This approach excludes the case in which *zulf-i parēšān* takes the final position in a verse (which never occurs). It also reduces by one the number of available slots in one variety of the metre *hazağ* (--v|v--v|v--v|v--). We observe that the formula fills the last slot in 14 cases out of 15 possible instances (93.3%). It is evident that this frequently repeated expression is consistently located within a specific metrical context. Furthermore, it can be integrated into more complex formulaic patterns. It becomes clear that, even in the context of Persian and Turkish courtly lyrics, there exists a substantial amount of formulaic material to analyze.

### 3. TEXTUAL MOBILITY

When working with different manuscripts of the same literary work, we often encounter situations where a discrepancy in the text does not appear to be a simple mistake made by the scribe. Due to its metrical and semantic correctness, it can sometimes be challenging to determine its intended form accurately. In such cases, we are inclined to entertain the assumption that another poet may have undertaken a redaction of the work. While this is a plausible scenario in many circumstances, the theory of oral transmission provides an alternative explanation for this phenomenon. It suggests that the text may have originated as an orally transmitted composition, transcribed directly from the utterances of its original performer (Lord 1971: 63). In this context, we should consider the text’s origin more as an abstract concept residing in the mind of its owner, rather than as a fixed arrangement of words following a constant order and existing materially in the form of letters on paper. This oral dimension of textual being was conceptualized by Paul Zumthor and termed textual mobility (*mouvance*, Zumthor 1972: 507).

There are numerous intriguing divergences found in early manuscripts containing lyrical poems by Füzuli. To illustrate how textual mobility is manifested in practice, I will provide a striking example of a half-verse taken from two distinct versions of the poet’s Turkish *divan*. In each of these manuscripts, the words are positioned differently on the same metrical pattern or exhibit slight variations. The meaning also appears to differ somewhat, although this discrepancy is only apparent. Let us examine the verse in its original form and its Azerbaijani transcription:

a) (Füzuli, h. 980: 19) صالدى خطك نوقنى دل جانە قانلر يوتدروب

*saldı xəttin zövğini dil canə qanlar yuddurub*

b) Füzuli, h. 1053: 265a) كونكلوما سالمش خطينك نوقين فلك قان يوتوروب

The first excerpt can be translated as: “By making [me] swallow [my own] blood, the heart put the touch of [his] soft down into [my] soul”, while the second one reads: “By making [me] swallow [my own] blood, the Heavens put the touch of [his] soft down into my heart”.

The metre of this half-verse is *ramal* (-v--l-v--l-v--l-v-). The only word that lies exactly in the same place within the metrical pattern in both cases is *yuddurub* (-v-) ‘making swallow.’ There are semantically non-significant but metrically relevant differences in the inflectional forms of the other words. Thus, the expressions *saldı xəttin zövqini* (-v--l-v-) and *salmış xətin dövqin* (-l-v--l-) ‘put the touch of the soft’ have a different declamatory scheme due to their distinct positions in the metrical pattern. Despite this, both of them fit precisely within this pattern. The disruption of the word order in the manuscripts likely occurred because the poet consciously or unconsciously altered the flow of his thoughts while reciting or dictating the poem. Resolving the issue of which of these variants is closer to the author’s intention seems to be futile.

The rest of the words used in the half-verse have different forms and meanings. In the first case, the subject is *dil* (-) ‘the heart,’ and the indirect object is *canə* (-v) ‘into the soul.’ In the second case, the subject is *fələk* ‘the Heavens,’ and the indirect object is *könlümə* ‘into my heart.’ While the soul and the heart can easily be understood as synonyms in poetry and require no further explanation, the association between the heart and the Heavens is less obvious. To link these two objects, a good understanding of Islamic literary tradition is necessary (which the poem’s recipients likely possessed). Below, I quote a *qit‘a* from Füzuli’s work that sheds some light on this issue:

1. Day and night with the fumes of the burning heart  
I turn my breast into a kebab and set the wheel (of heaven/fortune) in motion
2. The tropics of Aries and Pisces and even the Heavens themselves  
Torment my burning heart and have [me] swallow [my own] blood
3. No hope in the world to be free [from suffering] because  
The kebab is spinning around and has the fire swallow the blood (Füzuli, h. 980: 127)

We can observe that the lyrical speaker is depicted as tearing open his chest and whirling in despair. Slices of meat from his chest are being roasted on the fire of his burning heart. Naturally, this image draws a comparison to a kebab, which is a typical figure in Middle Eastern poetry. For instance, the same Füzuli, in one of his Turkish *ğazals*, states: “Tears and blood are flowing down while the kebab is spinning around, the fire resembles the beloved, and the lover is similar to a kebab” (Füzuli, h. 980: 14). The blood flows from the heart and feeds the fire, so the fire cannot be extinguished as long as the lyrical speaker keeps bleeding.

However, we also notice another cause of the bleeding mentioned in the text—the impact of the dome of heaven and celestial bodies. Similar metaphors are prevalent in poetry. Let’s examine another verse from a Persian *ğazal* by the same poet: “The wheel (of heaven/fortune) burned down my sighs and has me swallow [my own] blood. There is no benefit in kebab for the fire but blood” (Füzuli, h. 988: 20a). The Heavens or the wheel of heaven symbolize the divine Beloved, which represents God in the mystical sense. God instills love in the hearts of His believers but remains beyond their reach. Longing for God constitutes the primary content of life and, simultaneously, the greatest suffering for a mystic. The heart and the blood symbolize attachment to worldly life, which the mystic must renounce to achieve union with the Beloved. In this context, the bleeding is, in fact, a positive phenomenon. It is triggered both by necessity, as the organs perform their function, and by Force Majeure, which entices the believer, urging them to unite with the Divine. Consequently, the connection between the Heaven and the heart is strictly metonymic (the Heavens make the heart make me swallow blood), allowing us to identify these two terms as synonyms.

The analysis presented above demonstrates that both of these half-verses express the same thought but in different words. Both effectively convey the author’s intention, and there’s no apparent reason, such as sound aesthetics, to assume that this piece of poetry needed redaction or improvement. Therefore, it is valuable to retain both lines for the researcher’s attention.

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