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The Role of ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā’ī in the Development of Modern Literature and Culture in Oman and the Gulf

Abstract

The article examines the role of ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā’ī in the development of modern literature and culture in Oman and Gulf Countries. His life was devoted to build bridges of understanding between people. He was not only poet and writer but also Author of critical studies on literary life in the Gulf Countries. ‘Abd Allāh aṭ-Ṭā’ī paved the way for the next generation of men of letters and became a symbol of the revival of the Gulf Literature. All works by ‘Abd Allāh aṭ-Ṭā’ī were collected and published in 2016 in *Dār Faḍā’āt* in Amman.

Keywords: ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā’ī, poetry, prose, Oman, Gulf literature

Introduction

Nahḍa in modern Omani literature is a period when pioneers (sing. *rā’id*, pl. *ruwwād*) returned and played an active role in the cultural development of Oman. They proved to be innovators in introducing new literary genres such as novel and short stories, forms of modern poetry.



When Sultan Qaboos¹ took power in Oman in 1970 there were no modern cultural and educational institutions. The young and educated ruler set the development of education as his main priority and that all efforts should be directed to the spread of schooling. Previously, teaching took place mainly in mosques and private homes, where boys were taught religion, Arabic and the basics of arithmetic. One of the first schools in Oman was Az-Zawāwī School in Al-Khor mosque next to Al-Ġalālī Fort in Muscat, established in 1871. Other well-known Qur'anic schools which opened their doors to Omani students were in Sohar, in Bahla and in Nizwa. The semi-formal schooling started in 1930s, and the first one was the Sulṭāniyya school, established in 1930 under the supervision of government, next one opened its doors in 1932. Sheikh Aḥmad Ibn Sulaymān Ibn Zahrān ar-Riyāmī is known as the father of education in Oman. At the same time, many nonformal schools were opened which taught also the Holy Qur'an, Arabic, and arithmetic. The As-Sayyidiyya School in Muscat opened in 1940 as a semi-public school. The second and third As-Sayyidiyya schools were in the Matrah and Salalah, respectively.² In 1970, there were a meek number of three formal schools and roughly 900 students in the entire country. The educational program of Oman expanded in the national level quite abruptly during the 1970s up to the early 1980s.

The University of Sultan Qaboos in Muscat, which was established in 1986 began to play a significant role in the Omani national revival. It opened the door for many outstanding Arab and foreign scholars to come to Oman.

The inauguration of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage in 1975 was aimed at preserving the rich Omani national heritage and supporting publications, e.g. *Journal of Oman Studies*. Cultural and literary clubs soon began to proliferate and flourish, such as: Al-Muntadā al-Adabī (1985), An-Nādī at-Ṭaqāfī (1986), An-Nādī al-'Ilmī (1989), and in 2006 Al-Ġam'iyya al-'Umāniyya li-al-Kuttāb – Omani Society of Writers and Literati led by the outstanding Omani poet Sa'īd aṣ-Ṣaqlāwī. The first evidences of club activities were published in *Al-Muntadā al-Adabī. Fi 'āliyyāt wa-Manāšif*.

In the 70's and 80's a dynamic development of the press occurred. The following dailies were founded: *Al-Waṭan* (1971), *'Umān* (1972), *Aṣ-Ṣabība* (1983) and cultural magazines: *As-Sirāġ* (1975–76; 1992–96), *Al-Ġadīr* (1977–84), *Nizwa* (since 1994). Beginner journalists accelerated the information process by writing about domestic and foreign matters, and at the same time they promoted literature and the first Omani authors.

¹ Qābūs Ibn Sa'īd (b. 18.11.1940 – d. 10.01.2020) an only son of Sultan Sa'īd Ibn Taymūr and Sultana Mazūn Bint Aḥmad al-Ma'shanī.

² Ramzi Naser, 'Educational Reform in Oman: System and Structural Changes', in: *Education Systems Around the World*, ed. Gilson Porto, Jr., 2019, Viewed 9 February 2022, <<https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/65989>>.

‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā’ī and his great impact on promoting the literature and culture of the Gulf

Unquestionably ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā’ī (1924–1973) was a pioneer of Omani *Nahḍa* in the field of literature, culture and political thought. He had a great influence on Omani writers and reformers who, like him, actively worked for education and culture in Oman and the Gulf. He was a man of exceptional ability who devoted his entire life to building bridges between people, different cultures and literatures to enjoy a shared humanity with others. He was also involved in politics and diplomacy. His books, which were the first critical and literary studies on cultural and literary life in the Gulf countries, significantly influenced the development of modern Omani literature, placing him at the forefront of the first researchers in this region.

‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā’ī’s life was associated with travel, to Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Emirates, and Pakistan. As soon as Sultan Qaboos took power, he returned to Oman and assumed the positions of Minister of Information and Minister of Social Affairs. He was a versatile man: writer, poet, literary critic, organizer of cultural and literary activities in many countries, from the Gulf to Pakistan. He was the author of books and publications presenting the history as well as cultural and literary life of Oman and of the Gulf countries. A series of lectures entitled *Al-Adab al-mu’āṣir fī Al-Ḥalīġ al-‘Arabī* (The Contemporary Literature of the Gulf) discussing literary work in Kuwait, Qatar, Emirates, Bahrain and of course in Oman resulted in the publication of a book of the same title. Starting from the first pages of this book ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā’ī describes the importance of the Gulf region in Arabic culture and literature. In a word from Author – *Kalima li-al-mu’allif*, Aṭ-Ṭā’ī wrote:

From the pearl oyster habitat on the seabed...
 From the tall date palms growing in oases...
 From falcon spaces on the coastal horizons...
 I present to the Arab reader the fruits of the thoughts of the Arabian
 Gulf region
 and the aspirations of the souls of the Arabian Peninsula, which now
 includes five countries.³

The author emphasizes the enormous role of the sea, which until the time of the oil boom was of great importance for the countries and inhabitants of the Arabian Gulf, providing jobs in fishing and pearling, and thus daily bread for many families. He also refers to date palms and falconry and their cultural significance in order to emphasize the substantial role of poets in the history of Arabic literature, naming: Ṭarafa Ibn al-‘Abd, ‘Antara Ibn Šaddād, Imru’ al-Qays, or Al-Ḥalīl Ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī – the creator

³ ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā’ī, ‘Kalima li-al-mu’allif’, in: *Al-Adab al-mu’āṣir fī Al-Ḥalīġ al-‘Arabī*, ‘Ammān 2016, p. 21.

of Arabic prosody. Aṭ-Ṭā'ī clearly pointed out that in his study he would take into consideration five countries: Kuwait, Bahrain, Arab Emirates, Qatar and his home country Oman.

'Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā'ī emphasizes the role played by the founding of the first semi-formal schools in the region, such as: Al-Mubārakiyya in Kuwait (in 1912), Al-Hidāya al-Ḥalīfiyya Boys School in Bahrain (in 1919) and Sulṭāniyya in Oman (in 1930). In the latter country the return of the first Omani scholarship holders from Baghdad was celebrated in 1941.⁴

Another element of the Omani nahḍa was the emergence and development of the press. Aṭ-Ṭā'ī describes the role in promoting revival slogans by Egyptian newspapers: *Al-Anṣār*, *Al-Ahrām* or *Al-Manār*. He attaches great importance to visits of Ğamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī⁵, Amīn ar-Rīḥānī⁶ or Sulaymān al-Bārūnī⁷ to the Middle East. Under the influence of activity from abroad, the first magazine in the Gulf region entitled *Al-Kuwayt*⁸ was founded in Kuwait in 1928 by 'Abd al-'Azīz ar-Ruṣayyid and Aṭ-Ṭā'ī draws attention to the importance of newspapers and magazines for the development of culture and national awareness of the Gulf countries⁹. Naṣir Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā'ī, who founded the newspaper *Al-Waṭan* in 1971, returned to Oman shortly after Sultan Qaboos came to power.

'Abd Allāh aṭ-Ṭā'ī describes the creators – innovators in the literature of the Gulf. He systematizes and characterizes the poetry of the Gulf from the 1950s to the 1970s. And so, for example, poets: Aḥmad al-'Adāwanī from Kuwait or Ibn Ṣayḥān from Oman write epic poems (*malḥama*), in which one can see historical and philosophical accents, Ḥalīd al-Faraġ and Muḥammad Fāyiz from Kuwait, Ibrāhīm al-'Urayyīd from Bahrain create

⁴ 'Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā'ī, *Al-Adab al-mu'āṣir*, pp. 26–27.

⁵ Ğamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī (Afghanistan/Egypt), a political and Islamic activist considered to be the founder of pan-Islamism (proclaiming the need to unite all followers of Islam and to free themselves from European influence) and the modernist trend in Islam. He worked at the end of the 19th century also in the Middle East Region. He published the magazine *Al-'Urwa al-Wuġqā*, jointly with Muḥammad 'Abduh, in which he included his views of freeing Muslim nations from foreign domination.

⁶ Amīn ar-Rīḥānī (Lebanon), played a leading role in the Arab revival (*Nahḍa*) and modern Arabic thought. One of the founders of émigré literature (*adab al-maḥġar*). He published the collection *Ar-Rīḥānīyyāt*. His books, based on his stay in Arabia in 1922, originally written in Arabic and English, provide an objective and analytical description of Arabia from an Arabic point of view. These are: *Maker of Modern Arabia* (1928), *Around the Coasts of Arabia* (1930) and *Arabian Peak and Desert* (1931). The author wrote accounts of his travels to Arabia, first in Arabic, and were published under the titles: *Mulūk al-'Arab* (Kings of the Arabs), *Tārīkh Naġd al-ḥadīṭ* (History of Modern Najd), *Qalb Al-'Irāq* (The Heart of Iraq).

⁷ Sulaymān al-Bārūnī (Libya), his family belonged to Ibadi Islam. He studied at the universities of Al-Azhar in Egypt and Az-Zaytūna in Tunisia. He played a huge role in the history of Libya. He was a Berber leader and writer from the Ġabal Nafūsa mountains (now Al-Ġabal al-Ġarbī), a symbol of Libyan resistance to Italian colonialism. He was also the governor of Tripolitania. He eventually left for Oman, where he became Minister of Finance.

⁸ 'Abd al-'Azīz ar-Ruṣayyid founded jointly with Yūnis al-Ġabbūrī in 1932 another magazine called *Al-Kuwayt wa-al-'Irāq*, which addressed cultural and literary topics of the entire Gulf. Other titles include: *Al-Bu'ā* (1946), *Kāzima* (1948), *Ar-Rā'id* (1952), *Aṣ-Ṣā'b* (1957), and *Al-'Arabī* (1958).

⁹ The following titles were founded in Bahrain: *Al-Baḥrayn* (1939), *Ṣawt al-Baḥrayn* (1949), *Al-Qāfila* (1954); in Qatar were founded: *Al-'Urūba* (1969), *Ad-Dawḥa* (1969); and in the Arab Emirates: *Al-Ḥalīġ* (Aṣ-Ṣāriqa, 1969), *Al-Ittiḥād* (Abū Zābi, 1969).

narrative poetry (*šī'r qaṣaṣī*), and 'Abd Allāh Sinān is the author of poetry describing urban revival (*an-nahḍa al-'umrāniyya*). The work of the latter is associated with the economic and civilization changes that led to urban revival. There are also national poems (*waṭaniyyāt*) e.g. in the works of Omani poet Sulaymān as-Sālīmī. In Bahrain Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Ḥalīfa worked for the modern literary renaissance for half a century. His subsequent volumes of poems deal with the history of Bahrain and the Gulf.

Poets of the Gulf countries praised traditional forms of work in their poems, encouraging awakening and work to build a new reality, e.g. Nāṣir Ibn Salīm ar-Rawāḥī wrote about pearl divers or farmers who should prepare their children for civilization changes. 'Abd Allāh aṬ-ṬĀ'Ī mentions also the role played by the first women, who wrote poetry and prose in the Gulf. He portrays Maryam Ḥalīd al-'Udsānī, Kawṭar 'Abd Allāh al-Ġaw'ān, Ḍiyā' Hāšim al-Badr or Fāṭima Yūsuf al-Ġānim from Kuwait, who deserve attention, while from Bahrain he characterises Ḥamda Ḥamīs and Munīra Fāris¹⁰.

It should be emphasized that the poets of the Gulf often refer to the romantic trend, strive to express their own feelings, believing that poetry should discover the secrets of the human soul. They refer to the world of nature, which is a stage for love. Their works frequently contain philosophical thoughts. For them poems are their manifesto of identity, their origin, culture, tradition and language.

In the book: *Dirāsāt 'an Al-Ḥalīḡ al-'Arabī*¹¹ (Studies on the Gulf), 'Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṬ-ṬĀ'Ī became a keen observer of life and was a sharp critic of it, taking up issues related to the history, political issues and culture of the Gulf and other countries. In this volume he concluded his lectures written in 1960–1972 for the Kuwait radio station. From the first sentences, he underlines the geographical and commercial, civilizational¹², economic (shipbuilding, pearl fishing, palm trade), cultural (poets: Ṭarafa Ibn al-'Abd, Al-Farazdaq or philologists and lexicographers Ibn Durayd and Al-Ḥalīl Ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī) as well as religious ('Amrū Ibn al-'Āṣ) importance of Oman and the Arabian Peninsula. AṬ-ṬĀ'Ī devotes several chapters to religious significance, pointing out to eminent poets who wrote their poems on topics related to Ḥiġra, the holy month of Ramaḍān and holidays after the end of the month of fasting. Among many, readers' attention deserve: Ḥalīd al-Faraġ from Kuwait, Saqr Ibn Sulṭān Āl Qāsimī from Emirates or 'Abd ar-Raḥman al-Mu'āwida from Bahrain.¹³

'Abd Allāh aṬ-ṬĀ'Ī introduces the history of Oman in concise way (e.g. imamate, Portuguese occupation, rule in Zanzibar)¹⁴. On two hundred pages AṬ-ṬĀ'Ī describes the literary history of the Arab Gulf countries. Many names and subjects are extended in

¹⁰ Comp. 'Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṬ-ṬĀ'Ī, *Al-Adab al-mu'āṣir*, pp. 52–85.

¹¹ 'Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṬ-ṬĀ'Ī, *Dirāsāt 'an Al-Ḥalīḡ al-'Arabī*, 'Ammān 2016.

¹² E.g. Dilmūn – an important trading center. At the height of its power, it controlled the Persian Gulf trading routes, the Phoenicians – who prospered from trade and manufacturing until the capital, Tyre, was sacked by Alexander the Great in 332 BC., or Nabataeans – people who inhabited northern Arabia and the Southern Levant in antiquity.

¹³ Comp. 'Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṬ-ṬĀ'Ī, *Dirāsāt 'an Al-Ḥalīḡ al-'Arabī*, pp. 34–52.

¹⁴ Comp. *Ibidem*, pp. 70–90.

relation to the information contained in the previous book *Al-Adab al-mu'āṣir fī Al-Ḥalīġ al-'Arabī*. This applies, for example, to a detailed description of the development of newspapers and the role of magazines, which had a great and lasting impact on promoting the literature and culture of the Gulf. In Kuwait, next to the first title *Al-Kuwayt*, which emerged in 1928, then the magazine *Al-Bu'ā* (1946) and *Al-Kāzima* (1948) appeared, which followed the trends in the literary activity of Kuwaiti men of letters or the world-known socio-cultural magazine *Al-'Arabī* (1958), existing until today.

In following chapters, Aṭ-Ṭā'ī discusses outstanding figures from cultural and literary life and their work, whom he considers to be the promoters of innovative style and topics undertaken. He brought closer their biographies, social environment and merits in the field of literature and culture. He pointed out the names that led the revival in the Gulf, such as 'Abd Allāh Sinān who in the poetry volume *Nafahāt al-Ḥalīġ* (Whiffs of the Gulf) describes various aspects of life in Kuwaiti society, the Emirati poet Saqr Ibn Sulṭān Āl Qāsimī who represents the romantic trend in the volume *Fī ġannat al-ḥubb* (In the Garden of Love), Bahraini poets: Ibrāhīm al-'Urayyīd and Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Ḥalīfa who in their volumes of poetry: *Arḍ aš-šuhadā'* (Land of Martyrs), *Min aġānī Al-Baḥrayn* (Bahraini songs) or in *Haġīr wa-sarāb* (Hajir and Mirage) respectively reflect current problems of the Arab world, e.g. Palestinian affairs or political issues in the Middle East in general. Aṭ-Ṭā'ī devoted two subsections in his book to the young Saudi poet Ġāzī al-Quṣaybī, believing that he occupied a leading place on the map of the cultural revival of the Gulf States, and his poetry volume *Ġazā'ir al-lu'lu'* (Pearl Islands) is the praise of Bahrain, which he loved and chose to live.

Aṭ-Ṭā'ī also mentions Šayḥ 'Abd Allāh Ibn Ḥamīd as-Sālīmi recognizing him as one of the greatest Omani theologians and historians. Šayḥ as-Sālīmi, who lived in the years 1867–1914, played an important role in the imamate. His most famous works include *Bahġat al-anwār* (Joy of Lights). He gathered his views in a work of 16 thousand verses entitled *Wa-Ṭala'at aš-šams wa-ġawhar an-nizām* (Sunrise and the Essence of the System), which deals with religious principles and Muslim law. Šayḥ As-Sālīmi is also the author of the historical work *Tuḥfat al-a'yān fī sīrat ahl 'Umān* (A Masterpiece about Dignitaries among the Inhabitants of Oman) and many volumes of poetry.

'Abd Allāh aṭ-Ṭā'ī in next five chapters¹⁵ draws readers' attention to poets who began to write poetry, in an innovative way, addressing the current problems of the Arab world, especially the Palestinian issue, which in 1947–48 was widely heard. He discusses problems in a broad cultural and historical context. Poets began to write engaged poetry (*ši'r multazim*). The first was Ibrāhīm al-'Urayyīd from Bahrain with an epic (*malḥama*) entitled *Arḍ aš-šuhadā'* (Land of Martyrs), followed by the Kuwaiti poet Ḥalīd al-Faraġ with the poem *Wa'īd Balfūr* (Promise of Balfour), then Omani Hilāl Ibn Badr, Bahraini Aḥmad Āl Ḥalīfa or the ruler of the emirate Aš-Šāriqa – Saqr Ibn Sulṭān Āl Qāsimī. Such engaged poetry, initiated in the 1950s, by the poets from the Arabian Gulf, showing heroes who decided to defend their land and dignity, continues to this day.

¹⁵ Comp. 'Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā'ī, *Dirāsāt 'an Al-Ḥalīġ al-'Arabī*, pp. 199–219.

Aṭ-Ṭā'ī in his critical studies *Aṣ-Ṣu'arā' al-mu'āṣirūn* (Modern Poets) described the most important personalities in the world of the literature. He knew all of his contemporary men of letters who contributed to the revival of literature in the Arab and Gulf countries, for example Ibrāhīm al-'Urayyīd, Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Āl Ḥalīfa and 'Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu'āwida from Bahrain, Ṣaqr Sālīm aṣ-Ṣabīb, Fahd al-'Askar and Ḥalīd al-Farağ from Kuwait, Saqr Ibn Sulṭān Āl Qāsimī from Emirates, Ṭāhir Zamaḥsharī, Šālīḥ al-'Uthaymayn, 'Abd as-Salām Hāšim Ḥāfīz, 'Abd al-Azīz Ibn 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Mubārak, Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Uthaymayn and Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Awwād from Saudi Arabia and indicated the multicultural sources of their work. He draws reader's attention to the special role of Omani poets, such as: 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Alī al-Ḥalīlī, Sulaymān Ibn Sa'īd al-Kindī, Abū Muslim, and Muḥammad Ibn Šayḥān. There are also other names such as Ibrāhīm al-Ḥaḍrānī from Yemen, then Muḥammad Riḍā aṣ-Ṣabībī and Hilāl Nāğī from Iraq, Hārūn Hāšim Rašīd from Palestine, Ḥalīl Mardam Bak and 'Abd Allāh Ḥallāq from Syria, Ibrāhīm Nāğī from Egypt, Ibrāhīm Ibn Muṣṭafā Bākīr from Libya, and Muṣṭafā Ḥurayyif from Tunis.¹⁶

The works of these poets are varied, endowed with current content and based on observation of the surrounding reality. They show freedom of lyrical expression. Poets care for the harmony of form and content. They break with traditional rhetoric and style of expression in favor of monothematic poems. Among them are patriotic subjects related to the emergence of independence of Arab countries, and at the same time a sense of defeat related to the Palestinian tragedy. So-called involved poetry (*šī'r multazim*) arises. Poets refer to tradition and history, and at the same time describe universal, existential, philosophical and civilization changes. Their love of their homeland trumps in poems describing the beauty of nature. There are love poems where depth of feelings and personal lyrics dominate.

Poems become a harmonious description of thoughts and feelings. Poets are in favor of the renewal of Arabic poetry trying to develop a language understandable for each member of the Arab community, his preferences and interests.

'Abd Allāh aṭ-Ṭā'ī as a Man of Letters

'Abd Allāh aṭ-Ṭā'ī wrote poems himself thus he personally participated in the poetry revival movement (*Nahḍa*). His poems were collected in three volumes: *Al-Fağr az-zāḥif* (Creeping Dawn), *Widā'an ayyuhā al-layl aṭ-ṭawīl* (Goodbye long night), *Ḥādī al-qāfila* (The Caravan Guide).¹⁷ The poems reflect his longing for his homeland while traveling around the Gulf countries and his involvement in the socio-political issues of the Arab world, e.g. in Palestine or Iraq. In his poetic work, there are features of the renewal of

¹⁶ 'Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā'ī, *Aṣ-Ṣu'arā' al-mu'āṣirūn*, 'Ammān 2016.

¹⁷ 'Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā'ī, *Al-A'māl aṣ-ši'riyya*, 'Ammān 2016.

a poem in relation to content and form. The poems are distinguished by thematic diversity, especially those regarding Oman and Sultan Qaboos.¹⁸

In the poem, entitled *‘Umān biladī* (Oh Oman, my Country) – which expresses the love of ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad at-Ṭā’ī to Oman and Sultan Qaboos – was written in *fushḥā* and the Omani dialect. It is formed of the words belonging to the classical language but the way of pronunciation is different, resembling a dialect.

There is a ruler in Oman who does not tolerate humiliating his people
(...)

Qaboos, O leader, you are a pillar of heroes
You are our pride and people talk about you as a statesman¹⁹

On the occasion of the second National Day of Oman, established by Sultan Qaboos on November 18, 1971, ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad at-Ṭā’ī wrote a poem that we can count as a paean (*naṣīd*) dedicated to Qaboos, untitled *Ṣawt an-nahḍa* (Voice of Rebirth):

A voice calling for rebirth is heard
Come in groups and singly
Qaboos called out to glory
So start praising with him
You, the noble sons of Oman²⁰

Each fragment of the poem written in the form of *taf’īla* has its own voice character, the first: a choir (*al-maḡmū’a*), praising Qaboos and good changes leading to a revival in Oman. In the second fragment the farmer (*al-fallāḥ*) speaks, in the next one an employee (*al-‘āmil*), followed by a woman (*al-mar’a*), a student (*at-tilmīd*), finally a nation (*aš-ša‘b*) and history (*at-tārīḥ*), which will bear witness to the times of the sultan’s reign. Everyone and each one separately in their own way praises the new era of flourishing and revival, which was initiated by Sultan Qaboos.

‘Abd Allāh at-Ṭā’ī died on July 18, 1973 in Abū Zabī. Before his death on July 10, 1973, he wrote the last poem *An-Nafaq* (The Tunnel). It clearly shows that poetry was the most important companion of his life:

Oh poetry! Oh, passion, Oh, rhythms of my art!, Oh horizon!²¹

¹⁸ Barbara Michalak-Pikulska, ‘Literature in Oman during the reign of Sultan Qaboos’, in: *Sultan Qaboos and Modern Oman 1970–2020*, ed. Allen James Fromherz, Abdulrahman Al-Salimi, Edinburgh 2022, p. 286.

¹⁹ ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad at-Ṭā’ī, *‘Umān baladī*, in: *Al-A‘māl aš-ši‘riyya*, ‘Ammān 2016, p. 233.

²⁰ ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad at-Ṭā’ī, *Ṣawt an-nahḍa*, in: *Al-A‘māl aš-ši‘riyya*, p. 239.

²¹ ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad at-Ṭā’ī, *An-Nafaq*, in: *ibidem*, p. 159.

‘Abd Allāh aṭ-Ṭā’ī was also a pioneer of the novel²² in the Gulf area, and his work had a significant impact on future generations in Oman, especially his novel *Aṣ-Ṣīrā’ al-kabīr* (The Great Sail).²³ The title of the novel refers to the slogan “the great sail”, which means hope in getting safely to the destination.²⁴

The protagonists – passengers of the ship try to warn Omani ports against the enemy. Despite the victory of the Portuguese, the sacrifice of the heroes is not in vain and eventually liberation from foreign occupation takes place. The writer, showing the generation fighting for freedom, wants to recall moments of glory and indicate that the unity of people is the most important. The novel reflects life, especially of the sea-men: the captain (*an-nawḥīda*), the helmsman (*as-sūkūnī*) and of the coastal towns of Musqaṭ, Quriyyāt and Ṣūr.

‘Abd Allāh aṭ-Ṭā’ī had chosen a significant period in the history of Oman, he was proud of – the period of the Portuguese occupation, which lasted from the beginning of the 16th century to the mid-17th century. Remembering the moments of glory, he wanted to resurrect the spirit of the heroic past and therefore that period became the background for the story of *Aṣ-Ṣīrā’ al-kabīr* (The Great Sail). Among many historical events and facts, the author included certain clues for the reader, aimed at arousing patriotic emotions. The story is written to lift hearts, but at the same time it is a warning against internal social disintegration that results from the weakness of the state. It exudes faith in the strength of unity, both at the level of Oman and of the entire Arab world. The novel is composed of intertwining plots reflecting the fate of the generation that experienced the occupation and the generation that fought for freedom, paying dearly for it.²⁵

The action of the second novel, entitled, *Malā’ikat al-ġabal al-aḥḍar* (Angels of the Green Mountains) takes place during the reign of Sultan Sa’īd Ibn Taymūr and refers to the succession movement led by Imam Ġālib Ibn ‘Alī and his brother in 1954–1959, which ended with the sultan’s success in unifying the country and extending his authority over it.²⁶

Conclusion

Most space in his works ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā’ī devoted to poetry. He repeated names of certain poets many times, who, in his opinion, contributed to the revival (*Nahḍa*) in the literature of the Gulf. He authenticated all his assessments about presented poets with quotes from their poetry. Furthermore, he pointed to the individual creative features of individual poets. He was able to appreciate the value of new poetry, its novelty and means of expression. At the same time, he referred to classical literature

²² Muḥsin al-Kindī, *‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā’ī (1924–1973) wa-riyādat al-kitāba al-adabiyya al-ḥadīṭa fī ‘Umān*, ‘Ammān 2009.

²³ ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭā’ī, *Aṣ-Ṣīrā’ al-kabīr*, Ruwī 1981.

²⁴ Barbara Michalak-Pikulska, Wail S. Hassan, ‘Oman’, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Arab Novelistic Traditions*, New York 2017, p. 360.

²⁵ Comp.: Barbara Michalak-Pikulska, *Modern Poetry and Prose of Oman 1970–2000*, Kraków 2002, pp. 160–163.

²⁶ Barbara Michalak-Pikulska, Wail S. Hassan, ‘Oman’, pp. 359–360.

and eminent representatives to emphasize the importance of this region in the development of Arabic literature. He believed that changes were inevitable and necessary for the development of poetry.

There were also texts related to cultural, philosophical or historical themes. This was the fruit of his broad knowledge and awareness of other cultures. ‘Abd Allāh aṭ-Ṭā’ī became a symbol of the revival of the Gulf literature. As a man curious about the world, foreign cultures and literatures, he took the leading place on the literary scene of the Arabian Gulf.

‘Abd Allāh aṭ-Ṭā’ī died in 1973. All his works were collected and published in 2016 by Dār Faḍā’āt in Amman. The work of ‘Abd Allāh aṭ-Ṭā’ī paved the way for the next generations who grew up in Oman during the reign of Sultan Qaboos since 1970, because he created the conditions for the development of not only the economic but also the cultural flourishing of the country.

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