

THE PORTRAIT OF AHMED SHAWQI

(A Modern Egyptian Muslim Arabic Poet 1868-1932)

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The clash between the technologically advanced West and the culturally decadent Arab lands at the close of the 13th century C.E. brought in its wake radical changes in Egypt and other Arab countries. This clash was, at the outset, military. In his bid to fight the British in all fronts Napoleon Bonaparte of France invaded Egypt in 1798. Though his stay in Egypt was short-lived, it served as a fillip to cultural renaissance in Arab Lands. It dawned on the Arabs that for centuries they had been in a state of torpidity, and that the flag of learning and enlightenment had been snatched away from them by the West.

As a reaction to this reawakening there were internal changes in the area as well as attempts to imitate the West. The Muslim majority looked inwards and concluded that they were backward because they were not practicing Islam the way it ought to be practiced. The new environment produced pan-Islamic scholars like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, to name only two, whose revolutionary impact on Modern Muslims and their attitude to modernization is great²⁷⁵.

The changes also produced literary scholars and poets who were bent on ridding Arabic literature of the rigidity and decadence with which it had been afflicted for centuries since the fall of the Abbāsid Empire in 1258. Such scholars include Nāsif al-Yāziǧī (1800-1871),

Ahmad Faris al-Shidyāq (1804-1887), Butrus al-Bustani (1819-83) Abdullāhī al Nadim (1844-1896), Ibrahim al-Muwaylihī (1845-1904) and his son Muhammad al-Muwaylihī (1868-1930), Marun al-Naqqash (1817-1855), Mahmud Sami al-Barudi (1839-1904), Hafiz Ibrahim (1871-1932) and Ahmad Shawqi.

This paper is essentially a study of the last mentioned personality, namely, Ahmad Shawqi. It is divided into four sections. The first one dwells

²⁷⁵ For a detailed account of the results of the clash between the West and the Arab world, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798 - 1939*. (London, Oxford University Press, 1970).

on the life of the poet while the second section covers his literary works. These include his diwan (anthology) called al-Shawqiyyat, his poetic plays and his prose works. The third section treats the poet's attitude to religion, particularly Islam. The last section is the conclusion. Notes and references as well as an appendix containing the Arabic original of quoted extracts are given after the conclusion.

It is hoped that the article will throw some light on Ahmad Shawqi the African Arab Poet, his literary activities and his miheu. It is also hoped that it will help students of Arabic literature, literary historians and critics to understand more about the personage called Shawqi and his place in modern Arabic literature.

Ahmad Shawqi's Life

Ahmad Shawqi is a well known modern Arabic poet among the neo-classicists who were bent on reviving the cherished traits of classical poetry after half a millennium of decadence (inhibit) and rigidity (Jumud) in Arabic poetry.²⁷⁶ Born in 1868 of fairly wealthy parents of mixed Arab, Turkish, Circassian and Greek origins, he was brought up in the modern secular schools of Egypt in addition to his Qur'anic training. After his secondary education in Egypt, he was sent to Europe by the Khedive 'Tawfiq,' ruler of Egypt (1879-92) to study law and literature. The poet was to spend two years in Montpellier and two years in Paris. On the day of his departure from Cairo, the Khedive gave him one hundred pounds and promised to pay him a sum of sixteen pounds monthly. He warned the Paris bound budding poet not to worry his parents whenever he needed money and that he was ready to take full responsibility of all his financial needs.²⁷⁷ This undoubtedly had a great impact on the mind of Shawqi. Little wonder then that he showered his encomiums upon the Khedive and his successor, Abbās Hilmi (reigned 1892-1914) whose attitude towards the poet was not less favourable.

²⁷⁶ M. M. Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (London, Cambridge University Press 1975), p. 29.

²⁷⁷ Fu'ad Ifram al-Bustani, *Ahmad Shawqi, Al-Rawa'i XLVIII*, (Beirut, Catholic Press, 1959), p. iii.

When the poet returned to Egypt in 1891, he was appointed to a high office in the court and soon became the favorite bard of the Khedive Abbas Hilmi. As M.M. Badawi puts it:²⁷⁸

“He composed panegyric poems on official occasions such as the anniversary of Abbas’s accession to the throne and expressed the Khedive’s official poetry in his poems praising the Ottoman Caliph or criticizing British policy in Egypt.”

In September 1894, Ahmad Shawqi was delegated to represent Egypt in the conference of Orientalists held in Geneva²⁷⁹. During the conference, the poet recited an elegant poem captioned “Kibar al-hawadith fi wadi al-Nil” (Great Events in the Nile valley), in such a brilliant manner that won him the hearts of his audience²⁸⁰. Thus much of the poet’s time “was consumed by his office at the court which he occupied for over twenty years, and which, although conferred prestige and power”²⁸¹ upon him as ‘shair al-Umara’ (poet of the princes) in Egypt, also cost him some of his freedom. Nevertheless, Shawqi tried at the same time to compose a multiplicity of poems which were outside the scope of his official functions.

When the first World War broke out in 1914, the British government prevented the Khedive, Abbas from entering Egypt. He was deposed in his absence while on a visit to the Ottoman Caliph in Istanbul. The action was due to the Khedive’s known solidarity with the Ottoman government which was in alliance with Germany, Britain’s deadly foe²⁸². Sultan Hasayn Kamil (1914-17) was appointed in his place. The British promptly annexed Egypt and declared it a protectorate.

Ahmad Shawqi’s attachment to the Khedival court and his sympathy for the Ottoman Caliphate were no secret. He could not pretend to be neutral, for his vituperative attacks on the British in his much publicized poetry were clear evidence of his stand. As a security measure, the British wanted to exile him to Malta in 1915, but some state dignitaries interceded for him; he was

²⁷⁸ Badawi, op.cit., p.29 Hanna al-Fakhuri, *Tarikh al-Adab al-Arabi* 2nd Edition Beirut, Matbaat al-Bulisiyyah, 1953), p. 984.

²⁷⁹ Al-Bustani, op.cit., p.v.

²⁸⁰ Badawi, op.cit., p.29.

²⁸¹ Al-Bustani, op. cit., p. ix

²⁸² Al-Fakhuri, op.cit., p.984.

then given the option to choose where he would like to be exiled to.²⁸³ He chose Barcelona in Spain, and was promptly sent there in the company of his family. He was allowed to return to his home country towards the end of 1919.²⁸⁴

In Spain the poet's virtuosity was enhanced. He developed great interest in Spanish Arabic poetry, particularly that of Ibn Zaydun. He composed many poems on the past glory of the Arabs in the Iberian Peninsula and gave vent to his deep nostalgia for Egypt in meditative and highly emotional poetry.²⁸⁵

At the end of the war, the poet returned to Egypt. At this time he was no longer the partly restricted poet of the court. He became more and more attracted by the nationalist aspirations of his people. He, like Hafiz Ibrahim, became one of the mouth-pieces of Egyptian nationalists more especially in the 1919 insurrection by the youths against British imperialism.²⁸⁶ Thus it was evident that Shawqi's exile to Spain was a blessing in disguise. He learnt much and perhaps, discovered his natural talents more than ever before, and strove vigorously to attain the title of Amir al-Shu'ara (the prince of poets). "Why should he not strive to attain such a coveted title?" one may ask. Was he not known as Shair al-Umara (the poet of princes) right from his youthful days as a poet laureate at the Khedival court? Have the Arabs not been saying that Kalam al-muluk muluk al-Kalam (the words of kings are the kings of words), and that adat al-sadat Sadat al-adat (the habits of masters are the masters of habits)?²⁸⁷ This second phase of the poet's life was also noted for the writing of his poetic plays, the only exception being Ali Bayk al-Kabir (1893).²⁸⁸

The poet was married to a young lady from a well-to-do family. She brought a lot of wealth to the matrimonial home from her father. This further augmented his comfort and stability. He had three children by her; a girl,

²⁸³ Al-Bustani, op.cit., p.x.

²⁸⁴ Badawi op.cit., p;29.

²⁸⁵ See A. Hourani, op.cit., pp.193-244. A talented Egyptian novelist Najib Mahfuz (Naguib Mahfuz) has aptly fictionalized this period in his Bayn al-Qasrayn, the first of his Trilogy.

²⁸⁶ Al-Bustani, op.cit., XLIX, p. xii.

²⁸⁷ Badawi, op.cit., p.30

²⁸⁸ Al-Fakhuri, op.cit., p.973.

Aminah, and two boys whom he named Ali and Husayn respectively.²⁸⁹

The poetic life of Shawqi's rose to its apogee in 1927 when a conference was held in Egypt by literary scholars from all over the Arab world, and the title of Amir al-Shuara' was conferred upon him. Long and impressive speeches were made to show how unparalleled the poet's position was in the art of Arabic poetry.²⁹⁰ It was on that occasion that Hafiz Ibrahim, another talented Egyptian poet (1871-1932) described Shawqi thus:

“O Prince of rhymes, I've come to pay (you) homage and these are

The groups from the East who joined me in paying (you) homage”.²⁹¹

Shawqi continued to enjoy an unmitigated flow of poetic inspiration and the adoration of Egyptians and other Arabs until his death in October 14th, 1932. Funeral citations were made in the Royal Opera House under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and a group of literary dignitaries. Many scholars from all over the Arab world were invited to the ceremony and the Egyptian monarch, King Fu'ad, was represented at the ceremony.²⁹²

SHAWQI'S LITERARY WORKS

The poet's literary productions are many and varied. They include his al-Shawqiyyat (an anthology in four volumes), a number of poetic works on drama, an historical piece in verse and many prose works. Below is a brief introduction:

1. The Shawqiyyat:

The poet published the first volume of his poetry captioned al-Shawqiyyat in 1898.²⁹³ His poems, like his contemporaries', generally

²⁸⁹ Abbas Hasan, *Al-Mutanabbi wa Shawqi wa Imarat al-Shier*. (Cairo, Dar al-Ma-arif, 1073), pp. 7-8, and 387 - 9.

²⁹⁰ Al-Bustani, *op.cit.*, XLIX, p. xii. One may question the sincerity of this declaration on the part of Hafiz Ibrahim in view of the reference to his disguised criticism of Shawqi's poetry in R.C. Ostle (ed.) *Studies in Modern Arabic Literature*. (London, S.O.A.S., University of London 1975) pp. 1-13. For the Arabic original of the verse, see the Appendix, Number 1.

²⁹¹ Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat, *Tarikh al-Adab al-Arabi*. 21st Edition. (Cairo, Maktabah Nahdah Misr, n.d.) P. 501.

²⁹² I have not been able to obtain a copy of this edition. Shakib Arslan, a close friend of Ahmad Shawqi, suggested the title al-Shawqiyyat to the author.

²⁹³ See Ostle *op.cit.*, p. 3.

appeared first in the newspapers, magazines and journals of the time such as al-Ahram, al-Mu 'ayyad, al-Liwa, al-Majallat al-Misriyyah, Ukaz, and al-Zuhur.²⁹⁴ It was much later that his selected works were published in four volumes called al-Shawqiyyat.

In the new edition of volume I of al-Shawqiyyat (1925) which was introduced by Dr. Muhammad Husayn Haykal, the most spectacular poems in this collection of sixty-one poems are Kibar al-hawadith fi wadi al-Nil (Important Events in the Nile Valley), Sada al-harb (the Echo of War), and Nahj al-Burdah (in the manner of the Mantle) which is a eulogy of the Prophet Muhammad meant to be read during the Mawlid al-Nabi celebrations.²⁹⁵

Treated in this part also are socio-political and historical themes such as poems on Mustafa Kamil's victory over the Greek, a lamentation of the abolition of the Caliphate by Mustafa Kamal of Turkey, a halt at the graveside of Napoleon Bonaparte, and a poem entitled al-Andalus al-Jadidah (The New Spain).

The second volume of the Diwan (1930) contains one hundred and seven poems arranged under three headings: (a) al-Wasf (descriptive poems), (b) al-Nasib (elegiac reminiscence at the beloved one's deserted encampments), and (c) Mutafarriqat (miscellaneous odes).²⁹⁶ Poems in each section are arranged alphabetically. Conspicuous among the poems in this part are

²⁹⁴ Badawi, op. cit., p. 30

²⁹⁵ Mawlid al-Nabi is the celebration of the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) which is observed every year all over the Muslim world. In composing his Nahj al-Burdah, Shawqi imitated the celebrated panegyric composed by Muhammad al-Busiri for the Prophet Muhammad which is called al-Burdah (the Mantle). The title is said to have been taken from the mantle which was given to al-Busiri in a dream by the Prophet when he was afflicted with paralysis. After the receipt of the mantle, he was miraculously healed. This is how his eulogy for the Prophet which he captioned "al-Kawakib al-Durriyyah fi Madh Khayr al-Barriyyah" came to be known as al-Burdah. It should be recalled that originally the Prophet gave a mantle of his to Kab b. Zuhayr b. Abi Sulina, a young poet of his time who first satirized him and later composed the famous Banat Su'ad to praise the Prophet. See art. "Burdah" in The Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition. Vol. I (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1960) p. 1314. Ahmad Shawqi dedicated his own poem to "our master, al-Hajj Abbas Hilmi II" to commemorate the Khedive's holy pilgrimage to Mecca in 1909. Al-Bustani, op.cit., XLIX, p. v.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. p. vi.

“Ayat al-asr fi sama’ Misr” (the sign of the Time in the sky of Egypt), “al-Busfur Ka-annaka tara-hu” (The Bosphorus as if you are seeing it), “al-Siniyyat al-Andalusiyyah” (The Andalusian Ode in S-Rhyme), and “Khada’ uha” (They Deceived Her). Paregyrical poems have been omitted from this part, but the *nasib*, as has been mentioned, remains. It is here that one finds Shawqi’s famous elegant verse which summarizes a typical love story:

“A look, then a smile and greeting Followed by talking, dating, and then meeting”.²⁹⁷

This volume of the *Shawqiyyat* also contains “Marra’ al-Lurd Kitshinar” (The Fall of Lord Kitchener), “al-Nasr al-Misri” (The Egyptian Eagle), and Saqr Quraysh (the Hawk of Quraysh) which is a story about Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil in strophic Andalusian verse.²⁹⁸

In 1936, the third volume of the poet’s anthology was published; this contains fifty-nine elegiac poems. It was befitting tribute to Ahmad Shawqi that his elegies on notable personalities both in the Arab and Western worlds were published in one volume four years after his demise. These elegies follow the traditional pattern, and the bard’s neo-classicist proclivities are glaringly noticeable here as in many other genres of Arabic poetry he treated. Some of the elegies are on people like Hafiz Ibrahim, Said Zaghlul, Mustafa Kamil, Muhammad Abduh, Qasim Amin, Jurji Zaydan, Victor Hugo, Tolstoy, Verdi, Tharwat Pasha, Yaqub Sarruf, Sultan Husayn Kamil, al-Manfaluti, Butrus Ghali, and the poet’s own mother who died when he was away in Spain.²⁹⁹

The fourth volume appeared in 1943. The 129 poems in this volume are classified under the following headings:

- (a) Mutafarriqat fi al-siyasah wa al-tarikh wa al-ijtima (Miscellaneous poems on political, historical and social issues);
- (b) Al-Khususiyyat (personal notes);
- (c) Al-Hakayah (Fables);³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ The Arabic original of this verse is in the Appendix, Number 2.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. vi - vii.

²⁹⁹ Badawi, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

³⁰⁰ The fables are fifty-four in number, and contain 709 verses covering sixty-five pages of the fourth volume of *al-Shawqiyyat* pp. 94-158. See Z.I. Oseni, “Sources of Ahmad Shawqi’s Fables in verse,” *NATAIS: Journal of the Nigerian Association of Teacher of Arabic & Islamic Studies*, Vol. II no. 2 Dec., 1981, p. 54.

- (d) Diwan al-Atfal (Children’s Anthology);
- (e) Min Shir al-siba (Of childhood verses), and
- (f) Mahjubiyat (Light-hearted poems on his good friend, Dr. Mahjub Thabit)³⁰¹

In 1961, a scholar named Muhammad Sabri published two further volumes entitled “Al-Shawqiyat al-Majhulah” (the Unknown Shawqiyat), but the authorship of some of the poems in the book, according to Dr. M.M. Badawi, has not yet been established beyond all doubt.³⁰² Until the authenticity of the volume’s content is proved, by further research, let us be contented for now with the known shawqiyat.

2. Shawqi’s Other Poetical Works

Besides the Shawqiyat, the poet published the following plays in verse:

- (a) Ali Baykaw ma hiya Dawlat al-Mamalik (1893), the revised version of which was published as 'Ali Bayk al-Kabir (“Ali Bey the Great) in 1932)
- (b) Masra Kilyubatrah (The Fall of Cleopatra), 1929³⁰³
- (c) Qambiz (Cambyses), 1931.
- (d) Majnun Layla (1931) which is a dramatisation of the well-known desert romance of Qays narrated in al-Isbaharu’s Kitab al-Aghani.³⁰⁴
- (e) Antar (1932). This deals with the ancient Arabic romance of love and chivalry.
- (f) Al-Sittah Huda (a one-verse comedy about a contemporary Egyptian lady). This was published long after the poet’s death.

³⁰¹ It should be noted that in this study, the editions of al- Shawqiyat used are later ones volumes I & II are bound together in one book (Cairo, Matba’t al-Istiqamah, 1958) while volumes III & IV are also bound together in another volume (Cairo, Matbaat al- Istiqamah, 1956)

³⁰² Badawi, op. cit., p. 30. See also Ahmad al-Hufi, Al-Islam f i Shir Shawqi. (Cairo, The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs of Egypt, 1972) pp. 8-9 where some poems which are not in al-Shawqiyat are quoted. The poems were earlier published in Egyptian magazines. All these findings further attest the greatness of this poet.

³⁰³ A study of this play had been undertaken in M.A. Bidmus, “Masra’ Kilyubatrah of Ahmad Shawqi - A literary study and an English Translation”, an unpublished M.A. Degree Project (Ibadan, Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan, September, 1980).

³⁰⁴ This work has been studied and evaluated in B.A. Omotoso, “Majnun Layla of Ahmad Shawqi: Its place in modern Arabic Literature,” an unpublished B.A. Hons. Degree long essay. (Ibadan, Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan, June 1968).

In addition to the above plays in poetic form, the poet wrote and published a historical work in verse. The book is captioned *Duwal al-Arab Wa Uzama' al-Islam* (The Arab States and the Notable of Islam). This work saw the light of the day after the poet's death.

3. Shawqi's Prose Works

Ahmad Shawqi is known all over the Arab world as a poet who tried his hand at every imaginable poetic theme known in Arabic literature. In addition to his undying fame as a poet, he wrote the following five prose romances:

(a) *Adhra al-Hind* (1897). This work introduces the reader to the ancient history of Egypt.

(b) *Ladiyas* (1899). This romance is about the last of the Pharaohs of Egypt.

(c) *Shaytan Binta'ur* (1899); this was published in *al-Majallat al-Misriyyah*.

(d) *Waraqat al-As* (1904). This work has less rhyming prose than others. It treats ancient history as far back as the time of Sabur, the King of Persia.³⁰⁵

(e) The poet also wrote an ornate work of rhyming prose entitled *Aswaq al-Dhahab* (the Markets of Gold). The book appeared in 1932. It contains articles in which the writer³⁰⁶ expressed his views on topics like freedom, the nation, Suez Canal, the pyramids, death, the unknown soldier, etc. It also contains proverbs and aphorisms some of which are drawn from Shawqi's personal experience.³⁰⁷ The title of the book reminds one of al-Zamakhshari's work *Atwaq al-Dhahab* (The Collars of Gold) which is a classical collection of proverbs written in the early part of twelfth century C.E.

(f) He also wrote a play in prose captioned *Amirat al-Andalus* (The Princes of Andalusia), 1932. The events in the play are said to have happened in Spain & Morocco in the eleventh century C.E.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ Al-Fakhuri, op. cit., p. 987.

³⁰⁶ Badawi, op. cit., p. 30

³⁰⁷ Al-Fakhuri, op. cit., p. 988.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 1021.

III Islam in Shawqi's Works.

Islam as a religion and way of life influenced the poet greatly in his literary works. He was learned in Islamic Studies such as the Qur'an, Sirah (the biography of the Prophet Muhammad) and the Hadith (the Traditions of the Prophet P.B.U.H.). Shawqi's knowledge of these branches of Islamic Studies was not just a superficial one'. Rather his Shawqiyyat are replete with Islamic elements which portray his Islamic background. In the poems which are specifically devoted to the Prophet Muhammad, e.g. Nahj al-Burdah - a poem of 190 verses composed in 1910; Dhikr al-Mawlid (1911) which contains 99 verses; and al-Hamziyyat al-Nabawiyyah (1912) which contains 131 verses, the poet's deep knowledge of the Sirah of the Prophet is indubitably established. In these works, Shawqi showered all imaginable praises upon the Prophet in a manner that equaled the renowned al-Busiri's. Take for instance the following verses from Nahj al-Burdah:

The full moon is beneath you in beauty and honour

And the sea is below you in goodness and generosity;

The mountain's heights become low when you measure yourself against it;

And whenever you compete with the bright stars you win.

The lion in its daring enterprise is below you in courage,

When you walk up to a man armed to the teeth.

The hearts of heroes and stalwarts yearn to you

Even when you cause them to bleed during the war.

5. God has indeed put His love and honour on the son of Aminah in all encounters.

Your face amidst dust is like the full moon of the night, shining whether covered or not;

A full moon rising at Badr: its light is comparable to the light of victory which illuminates the darkest of nights.

You're mentioned in the Qur'an as a (lonely) orphan as a mark of respect

For the value of a hidden pearl is in its (lonely) uniqueness.

While God shared people's sustenance amongst them

God you were given the choice of sustenance and shares.

10 If you say 'No' or 'Yes' about any matter,

God's choice will be the 'No' or 'Yes' emanating from you.

Your brother, Jesus, raised a dead man to life

While you gave life to generations from decay.

Ignorance is death; if you're given a miracle

Raise (people) from ignorance or from the tomb.³⁰⁹

In his humble conclusion of Nahj al-Burdah, Shawqi says:

If my sins are too enormous to forgive, I have hope

In God which put me under the best protector;

And I meet my request as the protector is dear to Him,

Who removes all anxieties and grief's in the two worlds.³¹⁰

The poet believed very strongly in God and did not fail to express this unshakable belief in his poems³¹¹ He also loved Islam very much and tried not to compromise his faith whatever be the situation. Hence he regarded Islam as the seal of religion thus:

“Those are the signs of the Criterion which God sent as light and by it guides whomsoever He wills.

The signs abrogated the way of the Prophets

And Apostles as light overshadows lesser lights.”³¹²

The poet was not, however, an Islamic fanatic; he composed poems to eulogize Jesus as a prophet of God. An example is:

“Jesus, your way is mercy and love,

³⁰⁹ Ahmad Shawqi, al-Shawqiyyat, I, p. 241. For the Arabic original see the Appendix, Number 3.

³¹⁰ Ibid., I, p. 244. For the Arabic original see the Appendix, Number 4.

³¹¹ Ibid, I, pp. 10 and 30 and II, pp. 36 and 120.

³¹² Ibid, I, pp. 15 and 24. See the Arabic original in the Appendix, Number 5.

Purity and peace in the universe.

You were neither a shedder of blood

Nor a man who looked down on the weak and orphans. ³¹³

He attacked the followers of Jesus who were belligerent and oppressive, and reminded them that their ways were different from Jesus' own. He says:

“Jesus and his disciples wash their hands of them;

Could the followers of the compassionate Jesus be harsh? They're hostile to a religion, not to an empire;

Their pretension and complaint are false.”³¹⁴

Thus Shawqi made sure that he did not overstep the bounds of Islam in his eulogy of Jesus. He pleased the Copts and the Christian Arabs as well as his Muslim brothers. Perhaps, his education in Europe and his contacts with many people from different climes and faiths contributed to this much liberal attitude in his consideration of Christianity.³¹⁵

³¹³ Ibid, I, p. 287 - See the Arabic original in the Appendix, Number 6.

³¹⁴ Ibid, I, p. 188. See the Arabic original in the Appendix, Number 7.

³¹⁵ See al-Fakhuri, op. cit., p. 1001 and Badawi, op. cit., p. 40

Nevertheless, the poet saw the Sultan of Turkey as the symbol of Islam and consequently eulogized the Ottoman Caliphs in Istanbul in a number of poems. Addressing a Caliph he says:

“You’re always the Refuge of Religion and the Guide

By whom we intimately move near to God”³¹⁶

This explains why he was shocked to the marrow when Mustafa Kamal (Attaturk) abolished the Caliphate in 1924 in an attempt to modernize Turkey along European lines. Shawqi lamented the abolition passionately in a poem entitled *Khilafat al-Islam*.³¹⁷

He composed beautiful lines on Salah (formal prayer), Zakah (poor-rate), and Siyam (fasting), and practised them with zeal in his life-time. In his *Aswaq al-Dhahab* he describes Salah as follows:

If it were not the head of acts of worship, it would have been regarded as a righteous religious act, an exercise of the body, purification of clothes, a means of baring the emotion, and (a pointer to) various good qualities on which young girls and boys should grow.³¹⁸

The poet was generous and paid his Zakah and even exceeded the normal

³¹⁶ See *al-Shawqiyat* I, pp. 92, 108 and 198 and II, p. 39. See also a poem entitled “Dajj al-Hajj” with which he appealed to the Caliph Abd al-Hamid to deal with the Sharif (ruler) of Mecca, Awn al-Rafiq’ who terrorized innocent pilgrims in 1904. *Ibid*, I, p. 254. See also *al-Hufi*, op. cit., pp. 172-3. For the Arabic original of the above line, see the Appendix, Number 8.

³¹⁷ *Al-Shawqiyat*, I, p. 106.

³¹⁸ *Al-Hufi*, op. it., pp. 40-41. For the Arabic original of this passage see the Appendix, Number 9.

rate to express his gratitude to God for His grace and mercy.³¹⁹

In spite of his religious disposition, one is not suggesting that Shawqi was a perfect Muslim. The poet used to drink wine and has a number of Bacchanalian verses in his Diwan.³²⁰

One finds it difficult to defend the poet on this issue, especially if one recognises the fact that he advised workers not to take alcohol.³²¹ This is the same poet who, despite his picturesque poem on pilgrimage to Mecca captioned *Ila Arafat Allah* (to God's Arafat) in which he piously discussed the pilgrimage, and petitions God to have mercy on His servants, refused to perform the holy pilgrimage in 1911 when the Khedive asked him to accompany him in the holy journey. He never performed this obligatory duty in his life.³²² It is said that he dreaded riding on a camel and that this is why he did not follow the Khedive to Mecca.³²³ One must emphasize the indefensibility of Shawqi's act here. In view of the Khedive's exalted position, no Hajj could be more comfortable to the poet than accompanying him to Mecca. He looked for excuses and failed to perform the Hajj but went to spend his summer holiday in Europe and Lebanon almost every year until his death in 1932.³²⁴

As a versatile artist, he frequented social gatherings, cinema and dance houses. But as he advanced in age, his appetite for these fleeting things decreased.³²⁵ In his last days, he had dramatically cut down his hedonistic engagements. He contented himself with the study of Islamic religious books such as al- Ghazali's and repented fervently for his past indulgences.³²⁶

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Ahmad Shawqi has proved through his poetic experimentation

³¹⁹ This was confirmed by his close friend, Shakib Arslan. Ibid pp. 41 and 44. In the *Shawqiyat I*, p. 26, the poet refers to Zakah as a socialistic element which God introduced through Islam.

³²⁰ *Al-Shawqiyat*, I, p. III and II, p. 8, 92 and 145.

³²¹ Ibid. I, p. 95

³²² *Al-Hufi*, op. cit., pp. 48-50.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ *Al-Fakhuri*, op. cit., p. 984.

³²⁵ Ahmad al-Iskandari et al, *Al-Mufassal fi tarikh al-Adab al-Arabi*, Book II. (Cairo, Ministry of Education, n.d. P. 284.

³²⁶ *Al-Hufi*, op. cit., p. 11.

in Arabic that the language is capable of expressing almost everything under the sun appropriately. He used the classical language to express modern terms and this he did admirably.

He is known in modern Arabic literature as Amir al-Shuara, (the prince of poets) whose poetry is more comprehensive than any other poet's - both past and present-as far as the Arabic language is concerned.³²⁷ There is no doubt that in addition to his poetic virtuosity, his contact with some other cultures, particularly French and English, helped him in no small measure to widen his horizon and fertilise his ideas. A close look at the second section of this paper reveals his versatility in the poetic art though owing to space economy, it has not been possible to give elaborate illustrations of the various themes on which he composed. The ease with which he described modern inventions like the aeroplane in his poetry while using old Arabic idioms, for example, is fascinating.

Shawqi proved in his works that he was a threnodist, eulogist, didactic poet, social critic, outspoken politician, bucolic singer, bacchanalian bard, fabulist, writer of juvenile stories, play-wright, historian, and Islamic Scholar with a bias to the field of Sirah (biography of the Prophet Muhammad P.B.U.H.). Indeed his emergence as a poet marked the maturation of modern Arabic poetry, a phenomenon whose foundation was laid by literary figures like Nāsif al-Yazīji, Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq and al-Barudi in the early years of the renaissance of Arabic literature.

³²⁷ Abbas, Hasan, op. cit., pp. 7-8 and 387-9.

(١) أمير القوافي قد أتيته مبايعاً وهذا جموع الشرق قد بايعت معي

(٢) نظرة فابتنامة فسلام فكلام فموعد فللقاء

(٣) البدر دونك في حسن وفي شرف والبدر دونك في خير وفي كرم

شم الجبال إذا طاولتها انخفضت والأخيم الزهرما واستمرتا تسم

والبيت دونك بأسا عند وثبته إذا مشيت إلى شاكي السلاح كمى

تهفو إليك - وإن أدميت حبثها في الحرب - أفئدة الأبطال والبهم

حبة الله ألقاها وهيبته على ابن آمنة في كل مصطدم

كأن وجهك تحت النقع بدر دجى يضى ملتثماً أو عبر ملتثم

بدر تطلع في بدر فغرتة كغرة النصر تجلو داجي الظلم

ذكرت باليتم في القرآن مكرمة وقيمة الدولو المكنون في اليتيم

الله قسم بين الناس رزقهم وأنت خيرت في الأرزاق والقسم

إن قلت في الأمر لا أو قلت فيه نعم فخيرة الله في لامنك أو نعم

أخوك عيسى دما ميتاً فقام له وأنت أحييت أجيالا من الرمم

والبهم موت فلن أوتية معبرة فابعث من الجهل أو فابعث من الرمم

(٤) لأن جل ذبني عن الغفران لي أمل في الله يجعلني في خير معتصم

ألقى رجائي لذا عز الجير على مفرج الكرب في الدارين والغم

(٥) تلك أي الفرقان أرسلها الله ضياء يهدى به من يبتئ

نسفت سنة النبیین والرسول كما ينسخ الضياء الضياء

(٦) عيسى سبيلك رحمة ومحبة في العالمين وعصمة وسلام

ما كنت سفاك الدماء ولا امرأة هان الضعاف عليه والأيتام

(٧) تبرأ عيسى منهم وصحابه أتباع عيسى ذي الحنان جفاة؟

يعادون ديناً لا يعادون دولة لقد كذبت دعوى لهم وشكاة

(٨) فلا زلت كحف الدين والهادي الذي إلى الله بالزلف له نتقرب

(٩) لولم تكن رأس العبادات لعدت من صالحة العبادات رياضة

الأبدان طهارة الأبدان وتهذب وجدان وشهواتها