

The Centrality of the Self in the Poetry of the *Şu‘lūk* Poets: A Socio-Cultural Approach

Hadjer Taguia

Lecturer (Class B)

Brothers Mentouri University Constantine 1

Heritage Studies Laboratory

Received: 15-02-2026 , Accepted: 13-06-2026, Published: 15-06-2026

Abstract:

This study, in its entirety, seeks to move the poetry of the *Şu‘lūk* poets beyond the scope of traditional critical studies, which focus primarily on linguistic and rhetorical aspects, into the realm of cultural approaches that aim to uncover the implicit dimensions of their discourse through the binary opposition of center and margin (the dialectic of the self and the other). It also seeks to determine whether the *Şu‘lūk* poet succeeded in constructing an alternative poetic system that granted him superiority and enabled him to gain recognition.

Keywords: *Şu‘lūk* poetry; center and margin; self and other; socio-cultural approach.

Introduction:

Şu‘lūkism was a distinctive social and psychological phenomenon, as well as a human condition that warrants examination in order to uncover the context in which it emerged and the reasons behind its spread within pre-Islamic Arab society. It was also a unique literary and artistic phenomenon, for the *Şu‘lūk* poet pioneered poetic innovation and departed from the traditionally accepted poetic structure in form, content, and meaning after declaring his separation from his tribe.

This distinction, which generated a sense of self-awareness and a desire to overturn existing power relations and establish an alternative centrality capable of shifting the *Şu‘lūk* from the margin to the center, was among the reasons that led us to examine *Şu‘lūk* poetry through socio-cultural approaches. By moving it from a purely linguistic context to a social and cultural one, we seek to demonstrate that *Şu‘lūkism* was not merely a departure from tribal norms but rather a form of rebellion against the overall structure of pre-Islamic society, involving the rejection of the collective “we” (the group) and its replacement with a singular and distinctive “I”.

From this perspective, the following research problem is raised: To what extent was the *Şu‘lūk* able to construct an alternative poetic system that granted him superiority and secured recognition after severing ties with his society? How could a deviant criminal phenomenon give rise to a community possessing its own social, cultural, and psychological characteristics, as well as a distinctive artistic identity that attracted the attention of scholars and researchers across various fields? Moreover, how did the *Şu‘lūk* poet transform morally condemned traits, at least in their apparent form, into ethical values worthy of study, as exemplified by al-Shanfarā’s “*Lāmiyyat al-‘Arab*”?

I. Reading the Terms of the Title

1. *Ṣu'lūkism*: Concept and Essence

It is necessary to identify the trajectory through which the concept of “*Ṣu'lūkism*” evolved and the transformations that ultimately led it to signify a tendency toward rebellion, nonconformity, refusal to submit to prevailing conditions, and a desire to change the existing order. Accordingly:

A. *Ṣu'lūkism* in the Linguistic Sense

In the Arabic language, a “*ṣu'lūk*” is a poor person who possesses nothing sufficient to meet his needs or enable him to bear the burdens and demands of life. This is reflected in “*Lisān al-ʿArab*”, where *Ṣu'lūkism* is defined as follows: “A “*ṣu'lūk*” is a poor man who possesses no wealth; al-Azhari added: nor any means of support... It is said of camels that they became “*taṣaʿlakat*” when their hair fell out, they became bare, and shed it. A man is described as “*muṣaʿlak al-raʿs*” when his head is rounded... The “*ṣaʿālīk*” of the Arabs are their wolves... ‘Urwah ibn al-Ward was called ‘Urwah of the *Ṣaʿālīk*’ because he used to gather the poor into an enclosure and provide for them from what he acquired through raiding.”¹

Its direct meaning is that of dispossession or stripping away; that is, a man becoming deprived of his wealth and consequently weak and of little standing among those who are wealthier than him.

Among the terms closely related in meaning to “*Ṣu'lūkism*” is the term (“wolves”), which al-Jawharī used in “*al-Ṣiḥāḥ*” when he stated: “The “*ṣaʿālīk*” of the Arabs are their wolves,” meaning their thieves and rogues.

Another related term is (“the outcasts”). A “*khalīʿ*” is a person disowned by his family because of his frequent troubles and his rebellion against them and their customs.

B. *Ṣu'lūkism* in the Terminological Sense

The term “*Ṣu'lūkism*” departed from its purely linguistic meaning and acquired another dimension as a result of its use in various contexts, particularly the social context. In this sense, *Ṣu'lūkism* became a social phenomenon whose members were characterized by aggressive behavior that led them to engage in theft, plunder, raids on caravans and tribes, and even killing when necessary. It became widespread during the pre-Islamic period either as a result of the class divisions and racial discrimination that prevailed in society at that time, which gave rise to conflict and led a group of slaves to break away and call for rebellion against this social order, or as a consequence of an individual's expulsion from the tribe due to his rebellious conduct and practices that violated established customs.

From a psychological perspective, *Ṣu'lūkism* may be viewed as the product of a psychological complex affecting the individual as a result of the absence of social justice that would place him on an equal footing with all members of society. Consequently, the individual seeks compensation through it, either for the poverty in which he lives, the lack of recognition he receives within his community, and the feelings of humiliation and degradation he experiences, or for the inferiority complex resulting from being denied affiliation to his fathers’ merely because they were dark-skinned sons of Abyssinian slave women. Such circumstances reinforced their sense of inadequacy, as they were despised and regarded as

¹ Ibn Manẓūr. *Lisān al-ʿArab*. Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, Vol. 28, no edition, no date. Entry: “*Ṣaʿlak*”.

slaves despite deserving a dignified life. Thus, the *Ṣuʿlūk* was not born a *Ṣuʿlūk*; rather, it was his social and psychological condition that led him to adopt and persist in this way of life.

It is worth noting that there were two categories of *Ṣaʿālīk*. The first accepted their condition of poverty and humiliation and waited for the charity and benevolence of others.

The second sought to attain social standing and transform their condition from poverty to prosperity. This group was represented by strong, courageous, and dignified individuals. The poetry of *ʿUrwah ibn al-Ward* illustrates the distinction between these two groups. He says:

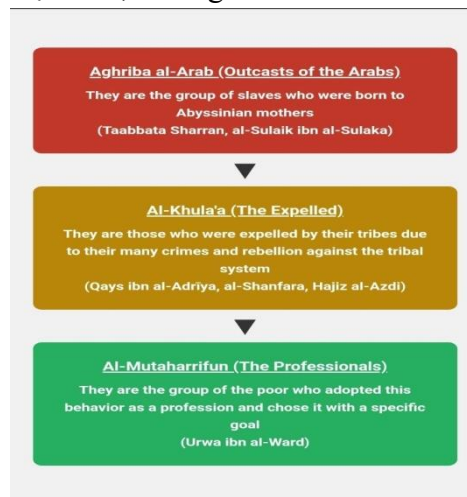
- > If a man neither sends forth his livestock nor returns
- > with gain, and his relatives do not show him kindness,
- > Then death is better for a youth than living
- > in poverty, while even his master's scorpions crawl upon him.
- > So I said to him: Why not live while you are free?
- > You will either satisfy your hunger in life or die.
- > Travel through God's lands and seek wealth;
- > You will live in prosperity, or die with an excuse.¹

ʿUrwah ibn al-Ward represents the model of the noble *Ṣuʿlūk* who transformed *Ṣuʿlūkism* from a negative phenomenon into a noble humanitarian tendency aimed at achieving social justice by taking from the rich and giving to the poor and needy. *ʿUrwah* embodied generosity in the pre-Islamic era, sharing all that he acquired with the poor and the sick.

In contrast, *Taʿabbata Sharran* stands as a genuine model of rebellion and plunder, acting without concern for anyone else.

C. Types of *Ṣaʿālīk*

The *Ṣaʿālīk* possessed both physical and moral characteristics that distinguished them from others. Among these qualities were courage, endurance, swiftness in running, horsemanship, skill in raiding, self-reliance, and boldness. In this context, it is necessary to distinguish between the different types of *Ṣaʿālīk*, among whom we find:



¹ "Suwāman lam yaruḥ": livestock (cattle); "aḥtahā" means to return them in the evening after grazing. The meaning is that if a man has no livestock to send out for grazing and no family who show him kindness and compassion, then death is better for him

."Tadubbu 'aḡāribuh": a metaphor for the harm caused by people's favours and condescension when giving him charity.

Factors contributing to the Emergence of Şu‘lūkism

When did al-Sa'laka appear? Is it linked to a specific era? And what are the reasons for its spread in pre-Islamic society?

It is not possible to determine the exact historical period or time in which the phenomenon of Şu‘lūkism first emerged, as it was closely linked to society itself, which was largely responsible for its spread. In the pre-Islamic era, Şu‘lūkism was associated with the prevailing tribal system and may be regarded as a phenomenon inherent to it.

The phenomenon of Şu‘lūkism did not arise in a vacuum; rather, a number of factors contributed to its emergence and proliferation. Among these factors are:



2.1. The Political Factor

This refers to the absence of a unifying state encompassing all Arab tribes. The absence of a state meant the absence of a strong legal authority capable of regulating individual behavior, compelling obedience, and deterring rebellion. The tribal system was structurally weak, being based primarily on customary norms. Consequently, it was relatively easy for the Şa‘ālīk to declare their liberation from the authority of these customs and rebel against them without fear of punishment.

2.2. The Geographical Factor

The Arabian Peninsula is predominantly a desert region characterized by a highly challenging geographical environment. Some areas receive little rainfall and experience extreme heat, while others are fertile and distinguished by the abundance of valleys and oases, such as Yathrib and Yemen. This environmental contrast prompted the Şa‘ālīk to raid fertile regions and seize their resources.

2.3. The Social Factor

The class-based system upon which pre-Islamic tribes were founded contributed significantly to the emergence of this group within society. It gave rise to a rebellious and revolutionary category that rejected discrimination among social classes. This deprived and impoverished group became preoccupied with raiding, theft, and plundering the wealthy. They attacked commercial caravans and pilgrims' caravans, in addition to raiding tribes and seizing the wealth of their affluent members.¹

¹ See: Ghazi Ṭalīmāt, 'Irfān al-Ashqar. Pre-Islamic Literature (Its Issues, Themes, Figures, and Genres). 1st ed. Dār al-Irshād, Syria, 1992, pp. 222–223.

3. *Şu‘lūk Poetry: Rebellion Against Pre-Islamic Poetry or a Tendency Toward Renewal?*

Şu‘lūk poetry cannot be regarded merely as a form of rebellion against pre-Islamic poetry, since both share many structural features, including the bipartite verse system, the use of the classical Khalilian metres, and the unity of rhyme and rhyme-letter. Rather, *Şu‘lūk* poetry represents a tendency toward renewal within classical Arabic poetry. This is attributable to the nature of the *Şu‘lūk*'s life, which required adaptation to changing circumstances and the creation of new themes capable of expressing contemporary realities, as well as the introduction of a new lexical repertoire.

Accordingly, this renewal manifested itself in short poetic pieces rather than lengthy odes a characteristic linked to the unstable and nomadic lifestyle of the *Şa‘ālīk*. These poems were generally organized around the unity of a single idea or theme and were distinguished by realism, emotional sincerity, and a narrative style. They also introduced new subjects, such as the description of weapons, adventure, escape, and similar experiences.

4. *The Self and the Other: The Problematic of Center and Margin*

One of the major issues raised by contemporary critical studies is the dialectical relationship between the self and the other. The “other” does not necessarily refer to someone who differs from the self in terms of race, religion, or civilization; rather, the other may constitute part of the self itself. However, social and cultural factors create and deepen differences between them. Such differences may generate psychological disturbances and complexes that accompany the self over long periods and may even be transmitted to subsequent generations not through heredity, but through what this self has preserved and transmitted across different historical periods. These experiences become recorded as forms of rebellion and resistance.

To understand this equation, it is first necessary to deconstruct its two components and define them. It is worth noting that the self and the other are inseparable; neither can be understood independently of the other.

A. *The Concept of the Self*

The self differs from and stands in contrast to the other, yet the two remain interconnected in one way or another. It is impossible to define one without reference to the other. This difficulty stems from the multiplicity of definitions proposed by scholars and theorists, as well as from the diversity of fields in which these concepts are employed, including philosophy, religion, politics, and psychology.

The self is defined as “the conscious mind, composed of conscious perceptions, memories, thoughts, and emotions. The self is responsible for an individual's sense of identity and continuity and, from the individual's own perspective, occupies the center of personality.”¹

Symonds likewise offers a conception of the self-consistent with psychoanalytic theory, defining it as “a set of processes—namely perception, thinking, and memory responsible for developing and implementing a plan of action aimed at satisfying responses to internal drives.”²

¹ Dawn Schattler. *Theories of Personality*. Translated by Hamid Ali al-Karbouli and Dr. Abd al-Rahman al-Qaysi. No edition. University of Baghdad Press, 1983. “The Ego,” p. 11.

² Dawn Schattler. *Theories of Personality*. Translated by Hamid Ali al-Karbouli and Dr. Abd al-Rahman al-Qaysi. p. 4.

The self always implies the presence of its opposite: “something different or someone confronting another person” (“self/non-self”, “self/other”, “self/you”, “self/we”, “self/mine”, “self/self”). Its meaning is determined by the context in which it is used; the more abstract its suggestive dimension becomes, the less clearly defined the self appears.¹

For Hegel, self-consciousness can only be constituted through interaction with the other.

The self becomes aware of itself only through recognition by another consciousness. Yet this self does not willingly acknowledge the other; rather, it seeks to exclude it in order to attain what it aspires to, namely genuine self-consciousness and certainty. Thus, “self-consciousness as a distinct identity can only be formed through a profound interaction with another. It knows itself only through recognition by another self-consciousness. However, in order to overcome this dependence, self-consciousness asserts itself as the one and excludes the other. Each seeks to negate the other in order to attain certainty of itself.”²

B. The Concept of the Other

The other is synonymous with “the different” and generally stands in opposition to the self. This distinction may be physical, racial, civilizational, social, class-based, intellectual, or otherwise. Consequently, the concept of the other often carries a negative connotation from the perspective of the self because it represents difference and distinction. This has led the self to adopt attitudes toward the other that are predominantly negative.

“The other maintains a constant presence within the self throughout all stages of life. As psychologists affirm, the presence of the other is not accidental. At the same time, however, the other is not a fixed and permanent entity; its characteristics change according to circumstances and positions.”³

For many thinkers, the concept of the other is also a modern one. “Despite the diversity of interpretations and positions associated with modernity, the other in modernity signifies the different that is open to discovery. The other (L’Autre) differs from the self (L’Émoi) in all its psychological orientations and frames of reference. The self is necessarily the negation of the other, and the existence of one presupposes the absence of the other from a psychological standpoint. Any encounter between them, for whatever reason, entails caution, apprehension, reflection, and scrutiny.”⁴

It is the self that “has drawn the boundaries of the other and defined its characteristics. Just as the other may be an individual, it may at times be a group. Just as the other may be known to the self and close to it, it may at other times exist in distant places or even in different historical periods.”⁵

¹ Igor Kohn. *The Search for the Self: A Study in Personality and Self-Awareness*. Translated by Ghassan Nasr. Ma’d Publishing and Distribution House, Damascus, Syria, 1992, pp. 10–11.

² al-Ṭāhir Labīb et al. *The Image of the Arab Other: Observer and Observed*. 2nd ed. Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, Lebanon, 2008, p. 593.

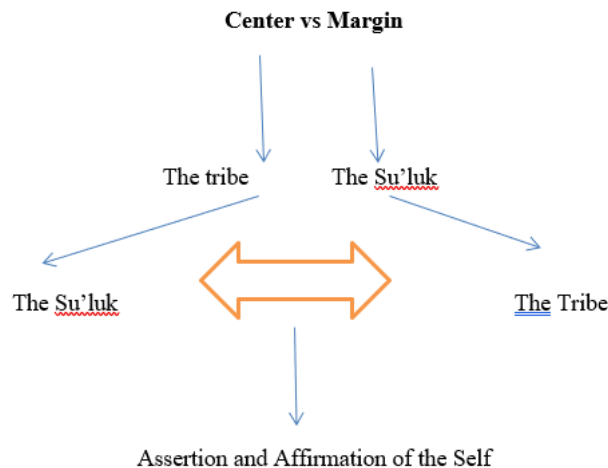
³ Muṣṭafā ‘Umar al-Ṭir. “The Geographical Dimension and the Image of the Other: An Empirical Approach.” In al-Ṭāhir Labīb et al., *The Image of the Arab Other: Observer and Observed*, p. 419.

⁴ Muntaṣir ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ghaḍanfārī. *Multiplicity of Perspectives: Reflections on the Ancient Arabic Text*. 1st ed. Dār Majdalāwī, Amman, Jordan, 2010/2011, p. 39.

⁵ al-Ṭāhir Labīb et al. *The Arab as Observer and Observed*. Jean Varou. “The Other as a Historical Construction,” p. 51.

This other does not differ from the self historically, racially, or religiously, nor is it geographically distant from it. Rather, it differs from the self in terms of concepts, perspectives, and intellectual backgrounds.

If Şu'lūk poetry is approached through a socio-cultural perspective, it is transformed into a set of cultural systems within which forces contend between center and margin, power relations are reconfigured, and established hierarchies are reversed, allowing the margin to become the center.



A. The Tribe as the Center of Authority and Decision-Making

The life of Arab tribes in the pre-Islamic era was based on two fixed social norms that did not change except with the advent of Islam. These were tribal and class-based (group solidarity), whose foundation was lineage. This class system divided individuals into masters and slaves, and leadership granted certain individuals the freedom to live according to a specific order, particularly when lineage was involved, as it was the most important source of pride for the Arab.

As stated: “The values in which the Arab takes pride are embodied purely in the authentic Arab lineage, free from any blemish in both paternal and maternal ancestry.”¹

Thus, the nobleman preserved his lineage from mixture and refused to attribute a child born from an Abyssinian slave woman to himself, unless compelled to do so, as in the case of ‘Antarah and his father Shaddād, since such attribution was considered a major disgrace. This situation generated in the slave-born individual a tendency toward rejection and rebellion, resulting in a group known as the “Aghribah of the Arabs” (the black Arabs). This inclination often produced a sense of inferiority that the “outsider” sought to compensate for.

It is worth noting that this group was subjected to severe rejection and widespread mockery by the class of pure Arabs, extending even to their children and grandchildren, as if it were a curse affecting all generations resulting from such mixture and tribal prejudice. As stated: “The descendants of mixed ancestry suffered from the fanaticism of the pure Arabs, who excluded them from the category of free men and placed them within the sphere of enslavement and servitude. Even if their own relatives did not enslave them, tribal fanaticism

¹ Khadija Mawāsa. “Tribal Belonging and Tribal Consciousness among Şu'lūk Poets in the Pre-Islamic Era.” Professor Forum Journal, Vol. 19, No. 1, December 2023, p. 150.

made the pure Arab see in the mixed-race individual nothing but a slave, even if he were free.”¹

Among the inferiority complexes that affected the *Ṣu‘lūk* and caused psychological trauma (trauma) was, in addition to lineage, dark skin color. Arabs used to mock them harshly for their black complexion. Among these figures were al-Shanfarā, al-Sulīk ibn al-Sulakah, and Ḥaffāf ibn Nudbah.

Al-Sulīk says, after his wife mocked him for his extreme thinness and dark skin:

Umāmāh ridiculed me when she saw my frailty,
a mouth with a defect and black skin.²

The question that arises here is: how does the *Ṣu‘lūk* compensate for this deficiency, and through which mechanism?

B. The *Ṣu‘lūk* and the Construction of Individual Heroism

The mechanism adopted by the *Ṣu‘lūk* to assert himself and alter power relations was rebellion and departure from the tribe, which granted him a form of authority through the adoption of deviant and aggressive behavior, namely raiding and plundering. This behavior is interpreted differently depending on perspective:

Raiding from the *Ṣu‘lūk*’s perspective:

- ✚ **Redistribution of wealth:** as practiced by ‘Urwah ibn al-Ward, who used to raid caravans and distribute the spoils among the poor.
- ✚ **Revenge and justice:** as seen in al-Shanfarā’s threat to kill one hundred men from his tribe in retaliation for the harm inflicted upon him.
- ✚ **Self-assertion and affirmation:** through physical abilities acquired in the desert (speed, endurance, escape), whereby the *Ṣu‘lūk* did not perceive his mixed lineage as shameful as long as he possessed noble character, self-respect, and bravery.

As ‘Urwah ibn al-Ward says:

They reproached me for my mother being a stranger
but is there any blame upon a noble and generous man?³

✚ **Plunder and raiding from the tribe’s perspective:**

- A deviant and aggressive act that violates custom.
- An affirmation of tribal authority and exclusion of those outside it, through the practice of (expulsion).
- A form of revenge and retaliation.

This behavior reinforced the dialectic of the self and the other, shifting the self from the collective “we” into an individual-centered “I.”

This individual self-constructed its own social, psychological, and literary uniqueness (individual heroism). Consequently, *Ṣu‘lūk* poetry becomes a form of resistance aimed at rebalancing power relations and moving from margin to center.

¹ Farouk Ahmed Salim. *Belonging in Pre-Islamic Poetry*. Arab Writers Union Publications, 1998, pp. 165–166.

Psychological trauma: a type of psychological shock referring to a painful experience that affects the individual and leaves long-term emotional effects that are difficult to overcome.

² Al-Sulīk ibn al-Sulakah. *His Dīwān*. Edited by Ḥamīd Ādam Thuwainī. 1st ed. Al-Ma‘ānī Press, Iraq, 1984, p. 11.

³ ‘Urwah ibn al-Ward. *His Dīwān*. Edited by Asmā’ Abū Bakr Muḥammad. Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1998, p. 56.

The *Ṣuʿlūk* poet thus constructs a distinct poetic structure, breaking the traditional form of the pre-Islamic ode as if declaring war through artistic means. This appears in:

1. Elevation of the self and rejection of the collective “we” (tribe):

The poet breaks away from tribal norms by abandoning the conventional prelude of ruins and replacing it with themes of adventure or love. Al-Shanfarā explicitly declares his departure in his “*Lāmiyyah*”:

Leave, O sons of my mother, set your mounts’ chests forward,
for I incline toward a people other than you.
My needs have become urgent, and the night is clear,
mounts are prepared and journeys are set.
On earth there is space for the noble to avoid harm,
and refuge for whoever fears rejection.
By your life, the earth is not narrow for one
who travels willingly or in fear while conscious.¹

Here, al-Shanfarā expresses his intention to leave his people, referring to them as “sons of my mother,” encompassing both full and half-siblings. His departure was initially not his choice but the result of a forced exchange. He lived among Banū Salāmān, who mistreated him and insulted his mother, claiming he was the son of a slave woman. This led him to leave and rebel against them.

Thus, his statement “Leave, O sons of my mother” refers to his own departure, not theirs. His repetition of expressions emphasizes certainty of departure. The verses highlight his perception that dignity requires leaving a place where one is humiliated or harmed.

Al-Shanfarā’s poetry marks a shift from tribal affiliation to individual existence. As noted: “It is natural that the tribal dimension does not appear in the poetry of a poet who has lost his sense of tribal solidarity; once the social bond between the *Ṣuʿlūk* poets and their tribes is severed, it is naturally also severed artistically.”²

The Arab poet traditionally represented his tribe, defending and glorifying it. This is absent in *Ṣuʿlūk* poetry, where the poet focuses on his own experience, using the first-person singular instead of the collective “we.” As stated: “The individual pronoun (I) becomes the primary means of expression instead of the collective pronoun (we).”³

Al-Shanfarā says:

I have, instead of you, companions
a fierce lion, a leopard, and a wild beast.
They are my companions; secrets are not betrayed among them,
nor is the wrongdoer abandoned for his wrongdoing.
Each is noble and courageous, but I am more so
when the prey appears.
I am not the fastest among them when food is scarce,

¹ Al-Shanfarā. *Lāmiyyat al-ʿArab*. Commentary and study by ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Ḥanafī. Maktabat al-Ādāb, Cairo, 1999, p. 7.

² Yūsuf Khalīf. *The Ṣuʿlūk Poets in the Pre-Islamic Era*, p. 276.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

yet I act with generosity beyond them all.¹

The poet contrasts his new “tribe” of wild animals with his former human tribe, presenting a paradox in which the wilderness becomes superior in moral values such as loyalty and honesty.

The desert becomes the new home of the *Ṣaʿālīk*, governed only by the law of strength, equality of opportunity, and absence of tribal discrimination. The *Ṣuʿlūk* develops a close relationship with desert animals and describes them extensively, while also asserting his superiority over them in speed and bravery.

Thus, the *Ṣuʿlūk* constructs his own world governed by his own rules, rejecting all external authority. The harsh desert environment marked by drought, scarcity of resources, and rough terrain contributes to shaping this new identity.

2. Affirmation of Superiority

The *Ṣuʿlūk* seeks to affirm superiority not through lineage but through physical abilities that become a source of pride. These include:

- **Running speed:**

A key feature celebrated in *Ṣuʿlūk* poetry, associated with survival and adventure.

As Yūsuf Khalīf notes, it is both a distinctive trait and a means of survival in dangerous situations.² Taʿabbāṭa Sharran describes a companion:

He outpaces the wind wherever it turns,
breaking through its force with unmatched speed.³

- **Escape:**

Ṣuʿlūk life is based on mobility and instability, which becomes a source of pride. Taʿabbāṭa Sharran says:

Nothing is faster than me
no excuse can match me,
even one with wings beside the swift gazelle.⁴

- **Endurance of hunger:**

One of the aspects on which the *Ṣaʿālīk* focused in their poetry is their endurance of hunger and the lack of available means of livelihood. This is particularly significant given the geographical nature of the Arab environment, which is arid and barren in some regions, while fertile and rich in others. As a result, it was often difficult for the *Ṣaʿālīk* to secure their basic subsistence. They refused, however, to humble themselves before others in order to obtain food, preferring death over such submission. In this regard, al-Sulīk says:

I did not attain it until I lived as a *Ṣaʿlūk* for a long time,
and I was almost known for the causes of death.

¹ Al-Shanfarā. *Lāmiyyat al-ʿArab*, pp. 9–10.

² Yusuf Khalīf. p. 215

³ Abu Tammam. *Sharh al-Hamasa*. Vol. 1. p. 48 / wafd al-riḥ: the first part of the wind. yantahi: he heads towards. munakhraq: the wide desert.

⁴ al-ʿudhr: the horse / dhā janāḥ: the falcon / al-rīd: the top of the mountain / wālih: insane / qabīd: fast / ghaydāq: abundant, wide. He likened himself to the falcon because it is fast in striking its prey and escaping with it.

Until I saw hunger in summer afflicting me,
when I stood up, shadows enveloped me and darkness spread.¹

When these two verses are examined and their implicit meanings uncovered, it becomes clear that the poet states explicitly that he did not attain the status he deserved except by leaving the tribe, which recognizes only lineage. His entry into the world of *Ṣu'lūkism* required personal effort and great hardship. The life of the *Ṣu'lūk* made his existence constantly threatened, yet it was a suffering wrapped in dignity.

In the second verse, the poet illustrates the nature of the suffering he experiences in this chosen life: he is either destined to be killed or to die of hunger after his body becomes weak and exhausted. It is commonly observed that when hunger reaches an extreme level, the superego (ego) loses its function, leading the individual to beg others for sustenance. As stated: "When a dignified person experiences extreme hunger, he abandons all ideals that constitute moral and social values in order to preserve his life and survive."² However, this is not the case with the *Ṣa'ālīk* poets, for self-respect is their most valuable possession.

Similarly, al-Shanfarā describes moments of fatal hunger and the suffering of his body:

I fold my intestines over extreme hunger as
threads of silk are twisted by Māriya as they are spun and wound.

I go out for meager sustenance like a weakened gazelle,
carried through vast deserts, pale and exhausted.

He rises, hollow, confronting the wind, emaciated,
moving along the ends of valleys, drifting and struggling.³

One of the remarkable aspects of al-Shanfarā's description is his comparison of his starving intestines to silk threads spun by Māriya. Yet this hunger does not prevent him from seeking sustenance; rather, it becomes a source of strength through which he competes with the fastest and fiercest animals.

It is worth noting that the *Ṣa'ālīk* poets overturned traditional power relations. Although they represent the margin in contrast to the tribal center, their moral values surpassed those of the tribe, which had nothing to boast of except lineage. What overturned the balance of power was the transformation of physical abilities into ethical values (such as running speed and endurance of hunger).

3. From Long Odes to Short Poetic Fragments

Pre-Islamic poetry is generally characterized by its long odes, which poets favored because they served their intended purpose and expressed tribal affiliation through lamentation over ruins, description of dwellings, and depiction of journeys. The most famous of these long poems are the *Mu'allaqāt*. However, when the *Ṣu'lūk* poet declared his separation from the

¹ Yusuf Khalif. p. 30

² Muawiya Mahmoud Abu Ghazala. General Psychology. p. 242. cited in: Muhammad Mahmoud Al-Amr, Ahmad Ali Jawda. "Homelessness and Loss among the *Ṣu'lūk* Poets: A Study of Their Semantic Dimensions." Readings Journal for Critical Studies and Research. International Islamic Sciences University, Jordan. Issue 1, June 2023. pp. 126–127

³ al-khams: hunger / al-hawaya: intestines / Māriyy: a man known for making and twisting ropes / azall: a lean wolf / tahadāhā al-tanā'if: deserts with no water or human presence / aṭḥal: a color like ash / ṭāwiyan: emaciated from hunger (he folded his stomach) / hāfiyā: one who moves left and right due to extreme hunger / yakhūtu: he crosses valleys / adhānāb: the tail of an animal / yu'silu: he sleeps lightly.

tribe and his rebellion against its norms, he sought to break all its constraints, including the structure of the poem itself.

This shift is due to several factors, the most important of which are:

- His unstable life and constant escape from one place to another, which required him to compose short poetic fragments compatible with the speed of his existence.
- His avoidance of mentioning ruins or weeping over them, as this requires lengthy compositions, strict linguistic structures, and metrical and musical systems that contradict his lived reality. His life itself became the subject of his poetry (adventures, descriptions of weapons, accounts of exploits). Thus, poetry among the *Ṣaʿālīk* transformed from a historical record into a personal biography.

4. Unusual and Difficult Vocabulary

One of the first features encountered by the reader of *Ṣaʿālīk* poetry is its strange and harsh lexical repertoire, which requires first a lexical interpretation and then a cultural one, as it is closely tied to their new lifestyle and environment. It appears almost like a form of coded language. The poet invokes the desert with all its components and charges it with rich semantic energy that reflects his separation from his former society and the formation of new relationships.

This does not mean that the *Ṣaʿlūk* deviated from standard Arabic linguistic usage; rather, his vocabulary remains close to correct Arabic, which is why it has been accepted as authoritative evidence in linguistic studies.

It is evident that the *Ṣaʿlūk* sought distinction in all aspects of his life in order to assert his existence and centrality. He therefore established new poetic standards that diverged from conventional norms.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that cultural approaches have revealed the implicit dimensions of *Ṣuʿlūk* poetic discourse. They have shifted it from a closed linguistic system of meaning to new interpretive frameworks that uncover the *Ṣuʿlūk*'s cultural, social, and psychological identity, and that interpret the state of separation he experienced away from the tribe. This separation expresses his explicit and implicit rejection of exclusion imposed by the tribe, as well as his ability to construct his own identity according to his own terms, independently of lineage.

Accordingly, we observe that:

- ✓ The condition of loss and wandering experienced by the *Ṣuʿlūk* reveals an underlying state that leads to an explicit and implicit declaration of psychological, social, and artistic rupture with the tribe in which he was raised, and to the construction of a new identity.
- ✓ The inferiority complex formed among the *Ṣuʿlūk*, particularly among the “Aghribah” (mixed-origin Arabs), led them to compensate through revenge against their tribes and through raiding them whenever possible.
- ✓ The dismantling of the tribal hierarchy based on class divisions which imposed the existence of masters and slaves resulted in its rejection and in the declaration of belonging to the desert and its inhabitants, whether human beings or animals.

- ✓ The construction of a new poetic structure as a form of innovation and self-construction, through the abandonment of the traditional prelude of ruins and its replacement with more heroic or martial openings. This also included the shift from long odes to short poetic fragments, which better suited their lifestyle, and consequently the abandonment of conventional poetic meters.
- ✓ The transformation of poetry from a historical record documenting Arab tribal days, genealogies, and achievements into a biographical and realistic record. The Ṣa'īk poet describes his lived reality with precision within a dramatic framework that portrays him as a heroic figure seeking to assert his authority and presence. His physical abilities are thus transformed into ethical values worthy of admiration and pride, rather than shame or rejection.

References

First: Poetry Collections

1. Al-Sulīk ibn al-Sulakah. His Dīwān. Edited by Ḥamīd Ādam Thuwainī. 1st ed. Al-Ma'ānī Press, Iraq, 1984.
2. Al-Shanfarā. Lāmiyyat al-'Arab. Commentary and study by 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ḥanafī. Maktabat al-Ādāb, Cairo, 1999.
3. 'Urwah ibn al-Ward. His Dīwān. Edited by Asmā' Abū Bakr Muḥammad. Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1998.

Second: Dictionaries

1. Ibn Manẓūr. Lisān al-'Arab. Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, Vol. 28, n.d., entry: "Ṣa'īk".

Third: Books and Studies

2. Igor Kohn. The Search for the Self: A Study in Personality and Self-Awareness. Translated by Ghassān Naṣr. Ma'd Publishing and Distribution House, Damascus, 1992.
3. Khadija Mawāsa. "Tribal Belonging and Tribal Consciousness among Ṣu'īk Poets in the Pre-Islamic Era." Professor Forum Journal, Vol. 19, No. 1, December 2023.
4. Dawn Schattler. Personality Theories. Translated by Ḥamd 'Alī al-Karbūlī and 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qaysī. Baghdad University Press, 1983. ("The Ego").
5. . al-Ṭāhir Labīb et al. The Image of the Arab Other: Observer and Observed. 2nd ed. Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 2008.
6. . Ghāzī Ṭalīmāt & 'Irfān al-Ashqar. Pre-Islamic Literature: Issues, Themes, Figures, and Genres. 1st ed. Dār al-Irshād, Syria, 1992.
7. Fārūq Aḥmad Salīm. Belonging in Pre-Islamic Poetry. Arab Writers Union Publications, 1998.
8. Muḥammad Maḥmūd al-'Amrū & Aḥmad 'Alī Jawda. "Displacement and Loss among Ṣu'īk Poets: A Study of Their Semantic Dimensions." Readings Journal for Critical Studies and Research, International Islamic Sciences University, Jordan, No. 1, June 2023.
9. Muntaṣir 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ghaḍanfarī. Multiplicity of Perspectives: Reflections on the Ancient Arabic Text. 1st ed. Dār Majdalāwī, Amman, 2010/2011.