ZAKI KONSOL (1916, Cordoba, Argentina - 1994, Buenos Aires)

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My interest in Zaki Konsol dates from the early eighties when I read my first books about the literature of the South American Mah¿ar. A more personal contact had to wait until 1987, when I met him at the guesthouse of my host, Dr. Horacio Munir Haddad, President of the Fundacion Los Cedros, in Buenos Aires. A second meeting took place in the consistory of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Buenos Aires, where an Arab literary circle met. This circle celebrated Zaki Konsol as their most outstanding poet writing in standard Arabic. During those meetings, Zaki Konsol gave me copies of his diwàns and a large quantity of his unpublished poetry.

The aim of this paper is to establish the identity of the poet, and what and where he published. The literary quality or the absence of it is not my first concern. To establish either of them goes beyond my capacities. I am more interested to know if his fellow emigrants, for whom he was writing his poetry, appreciated his work, why he chose traditional poetry, what subjects he chose, and if he did innovate.

The biographers of Zaki Konsol do not agree about the year and his place of birth. This may be partly due to the reluctance of the poet to inform his biographers correctly. His biographer, 'Abdallatíf Yûnus, writes in one of the opening phrases of his book, “I do not want to begin with mentioning his date of birth, because I do not want to expose myself to his enmity and anger” (Yûnus 1967:3).

Zaki Konsol’s volume of poetry, Nûr wa-nâr (Konsol 1972), mentions in the introduction that the poet was born abroad (fî diiyärî l-ğurba), in 1916 and that he went in 1922 to Yabrùd, the place of birth of his parents (Masqat ra’s wâlidayhi) (Konsol 1972:5). The first part of his Diwán (Konsol 1986), mentions that Zaki Konsol was born in 1916, fî diiyärî l-ğurba, or somewhere outside Syria. The poet also mentioned Yabrùd as “Masqat ra’si” (My place of birth) (Konsol 1974:41-44), expressing his emotional attachment to the place rather than presenting a fact. The line giving this information occurs on the left-hand side of the page in a small, bold type, just beneath the title of the poem. Many of the poems of Zaki Konsol have such a line, informing the reader of the occasion or the subject of the poem.

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The poet uses the spelling Konsol on the Castillano backside of his Arabic books published in Buenos Aires. In our transcription system of Arabic, his name would be spelled as Zaki Qunṣul. We shall use the spelling Konsol throughout our text.
"İsā an-Nāʻūrī (1977:579) mentions Yabrūd as the place of birth but does not mention the year of birth, and Ğurğ Šaydah (1964:633) mentions the year 1919. One might conclude that he considered Yabrūd as the place of birth of the poet on the basis of his line, "When Zaki Konσol, coming from Yabrūd, arrived in Argentine, in 1929, he followed the road his brother Ilías had taken five years before." The line, however, does not name Yabrūd as the place of birth.

The literary journal at-Taqāsīm devoted its issue of Tišrīn I (October) 1992 to Zaki Konσol. Among the contributors are Yūsuf Ābdalalād, who is a mine of information in the field of modern Arabic literature, and Zaki’s brother Karam. The latter contributed an article to this volume in which he stated that Zaki was born in 1916, in Cordoba, Argentina (at-Taqāsīm, October 1992:48-51).

In the same article, Karam Konσol writes that in 1922 the family went back to Yabrūd in Syria and Zaki went there to school until 1925. He adds that there was only one school in Yabrūd in those years and that the school closed its doors during the Syrian uprising against the French (1925-1926). However, the introductory essay in the first part of his Diwān (Konsol 1986) reports that Zaki had to leave school in order to help his father to earn his share in the family income.

In 1929, Zaki and his father emigrated again and settled finally in Buenos Aires. There Zaki had to do the work most Syrian immigrants did, travelling around with a huge box with merchandise. Zaki, more than once returned with a book or a journal instead of the money he had earned that day (at-Taqāsīm, October, 1992:49).

From 1935-1939 Zaki became an editor of the Syrian-Lebanese Journal (al-Ǧarīda as-Sūriyya al-Lubnāniyya), under the supervision of his brother Iyās, who was the editor-in-chief. They both left the journal in 1939 because of a political difference of opinion with the owner of the paper. They returned to trade, but Zaki’s interests were laying in literature rather than in trade (Konsol 1972:5-6, aš-Šā‘ir fi kalimāt).

Zaki’s literary career began in 1933 when Salma Salāma Aţlas published one of his poems in her journal al-Karma in São Paulo. al-Badawī al-Mu’attam2 gives the following summary of the published works of Zaki. He mentions a volume of poetry, Ašwāk, a volume of quatrains, Awtār al-qalb, a collection of patriotic and lyric poetry and aš-Šaţāyā. a volume of patriotic poetry that appeared in 1939. "İsā an-Nāʻūrī writes that Zaki never mentioned this diwān during the many years of correspondence between them from 1952 onward, and that he, therefore, doubts the existence of the volume. However, "Azīzā Marīdan quotes from aš-Šaţāyā3 and Karam Konσol mentions this diwān in his above-mentioned article. He, however, writes that Zaki published this diwān in the same year in which his brother and he published

3 Marīdan 1966:369f. She quotes five lines of poetry which can be found, according to her footnote on p.369, on page 37 of Zaki’s diwān.
the first issue of the journal *al-Manāhibil* (the sources), (1936:49). On the other hand, Karam does not mention the other volumes listed by al-Badawi al-Mulattam, and neither does Yusuf ʿAbdalaḥad in his bibliography (*at-Taqāfa*, October, 1992:8-14).

The next volume to appear was the volume *Suʿād*, in commemoration of his daughter Suʿād who died at the age of 8 months (San Martin, B.A., 1953). It was followed by *Nūr wa-nār* (Light and Fire) (Konsol 1972). The third page of this volume carried the title and the words: “First part of the diwān of the poet”. On the first page of the volume the following message occurs: “New, augmented, corrected edition which cancels what preceded it”. From this message and from the fact that this volume is indicated part one of the diwān of the poet, one is led to believe that the poet meant to include the volume as-šazāya in this annulment. A footnote on page 9 informs the reader that an earlier edition of *Nūr wa-nār* appeared at the end of 1970.

I have not been able to trace that earlier edition or to find other information about it than that recorded in the edition of *Nūr wa-nār*, published in 1972 in Buenos Aires.

The title page of the volume *‘Atṣ wa-ġūr* (Hunger and Thirst) (Konsol 1974), defines this volume as the second part of the diwān of the poet. The volume *Alwān wa-al-hān* (Tinctures and Tunes) was published in Buenos Aires, 1978, and the volume *Fi matāḥāt at-ṭāriq* (In the Mazes of the Road), was published in Damascus, 1984. In 1986, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in Damascus published the first part of the *Diwān* of Zaki Konsol, which consists of poems from all the collections so far mentioned and may be some unpublished poems, without any reference to the earlier diwāns. For the sake of completeness, we have to mention, that Zaki Konsol wrote some plays in prose. The first play appeared in 1939 with the title *at-Tawra as-suḥiya*. The second play *Taḥta samāʿ al-Andalus* was published in Damascus in 1965. Al-Badaawi al-Mulattam mentions, without further details, the play *Ṭariq ibn Ziyād*, not mentioned by anyone else (al-Badaawi al-Mulattam 1956:420).

The first observations about the literary value of the poetry of Zaki Konsol can be found in the earlier mentioned works by ʻIsa an-Nāʾūrī and by Ğurg Șayda. ʻIsa an-Nāʾūrī devoted ten pages (1977:570-579) to Zaki Konsol. He opens his description with the words: “I did not know the poetical significance of Zaki Konsol before the poet Ilyās Farḥāt made me aware of it ...” and “... I did not care to study him seriously until Ilyās Farḥāt had written me more than once praising his spirit and his art” (an-Nāʾūrī 1977:147). Șayda (1964:633-640) tells that he was very much impressed by the poem “the flower-girl” and that he then remembered what had

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4 an-Nāʾūrī 1977:574f. mentions the publication of a small *diwān* with the title *Nūr wa-nār* at the publishing house of the *Maqāllat at-Taqāfa* 1970, which, according to the poet was so riddled with mistakes that he ordered its reprint in Buenos Aires in 1972.
happened two years before. In 1948, on his way to Buenos Aires, he visited Ilyā Abū Mādī in New York and asked him if he knew any poets in Buenos Aires. Ilyā Abū Mādī mentioned four names and then added: “There is a young man (tārī al-‘ūd) named Zaki Konsol composing poetry, but he is not outstanding”. Saydah then relates that Ilyā Abū Mādī told that Zaki sent him his first diwān asking him to write a foreword, but that he was hesitant about it. Ilyā Abū Mādī told, Saydah writes, that the diwān still was in his possession, and finally, asked Saydah to take the diwān with him and give it back to Zaki. Saydah writes that the opinion of Abū Mādī influenced him until he read the above-mentioned poem.5

However, there is a notion that the poetry of the Mahgar and more specifically the poetry of the Southern Mahgar lack quality. This, at least is the opinion of Margot Scheffold (1993:30). She writes: “Moreover, it is precisely the striking quantity of Arabic poetical production, together with its obvious lack of quality, which made these works uninteresting for the theory of literature” (my translation). She refers in a footnote to Jayyusi (1977:67), but the only remark Jayyusi made was that: “The South remained more in the main stream of Arabic poetry and culture”. Jayyusi’s lack of appreciation for the Argentine Mahgar become evident when one realizes that she does not devote one single line to its poets.

The actual spread of this idea of lack of quality is difficult to establish. We know that the poet heard about it and that he reacted to it. The title page of Zaki’s diwān “Alwān wa-alhān” (Tinctures and Tunes) (Konsol 1978) carries next to the obligatory text the following sentence, šīr taqlidi rağī fihi kullu ṣuyūb aṣṣīr al-qādīm (traditional, backward poetry with all the defects of the old poetry). The opening poem of this volume has the title, Rağīyyun. The twenty-four strophes of this poem all begin with the words: Anā ya qaṣumu rağīyyun (Dear people, I am backward) (Konsol 1978:17-22). The first strophe runs as follows:

| I am backward, dear people  | let the world testify! |
| I have cleansed the heart from mud | and from its lower lusts |
| I love people. No hatred | overcomes me against anyone |
| All human beings are my brothers | every place is my country |

Strophe 13 is important because the poet speaks in it about his poetry. The strophe runs as follows:

| I am backward, dear people | I love art for the sake of art |
| I am a ġinn among humans | and human among the ġinn |
| I poetise to relieve | the soul from pains |
| My foot stumbles and I do not grieve | but I do when my pen stumbles |

5 We have to state here that Ilyā Abū Mādī is seen as the most important poet of the Northern Mahgar, enjoying a broad recognition in the Arab world and that Ilyās Farhāt is one of the best poets of the Southern Mahgar. Jayyusi (1977:72) writes that he and the poet al-Qarāwī “are noted for their strength of style and virile, precise and effective diction".
Strophe 15 also deals with his ideas about poetry:

I am backward, dear people
I reject indecency of thoughts
How much poetry is there without meaning,
and how much meaning is there outside poetry
They who propagated meanness were consumed by fire;
they died one after the other
Their bareness is visible to people
and they call their nakedness revolution.

The volume Alwān wa-ālān is unique in the sense that the poet himself wrote an opening essay entitled Fi šīr (On poetry). Not one of his other volumes of poetry has such an essay by the poet himself. The poet defines poetry as follows: “Poetry is what gives expression to the emotions of the soul and what lets the feelings of the heart speak. It dives into the depths of emotion in a true language free from stains, in a sound rendering with well-chosen words. It has a solid style without intricacies or obscurities, but for those required by the richness of the art and the dignity of the statement” (Konsol 1978:5). The poet then turns against the defenders of free poetry, saying that: “Poetry cannot do without metre and rhyme. It is a crime to set metre and rhyme afire, arguing that the internal music has taken their place and made them redundant. Internal music is a fable which does not hold out when examined ...”. He continues this argument saying: “abiding by the fundamentals of poetry does not preclude the variation of rhyme and the changing from one metre to another. The poets of the Mahār have made some exquisite inventions ...”. It should be noted that the volume Nūr wa-nār opens with a poem in which the poet is addressing the propagandists of the “new poetry”. The title of this poem is Ahfād Sayyāh, Sayyāh being the name of a woman who claimed to be a prophetess in the first period of Islam (Konsol 1972:13-15). The relevant lines of this poem run as follows:

Do not say freedom of poetry ...
the humbug of the inexperienced is nothing but calamity
All poetry without metre and without
meaning is idle talk, its root being foreign
The glory of speech lies in being plain
only the evil mind stammers

Another poem expresses the same idea:

Brother abroad, we are a group of people
who still are delighted in the metre of Halīl

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6 lā taqidū ḥurriyatā šīrī ... layst
kullu šīrīn lā waznā fihi wa-lā
lūfūl l-qewšī an yahūna faštān
turrūhātū l-āṣārī illā balīyya
mān ākhūn usūlūhā aḏnābīyya
lam yulaqīyī illā šābītū t-tawwyya
We are not riding the wave of poetry that spoils everything beautiful and glorious.

Continuing his argument, Zaki Konsol turns to the question for whom the poet writes his poetry: “Is it right that we exhaust the capacities of the reader with magic and riddles and then say that we are writing for the general public” (Konsol 1978:6). “Poetry does not live in dark caves, but it is in need of light and air. I do understand that it is veiled lightly (wa-anā ašfamu an yatabarqa’ā bi-niqābin šafāfin) because that has more impact on the soul and makes the brain more alert.” He ends this part of the essay saying: “Therefore, obscurity is ugly when it is synonymous to blindfolding and when its purpose lies in itself”.

Another subject of this essay is the function of poetry. The poet writes: “Poetry is not a mouthpiece for propaganda and jesting, or a vehicle drawn by the horses of custom and tradition, nor a means to solve political, social and economical problems. In the history of literature there are numberless proofs that freedom is the natural abode for poetry. It cannot breathe except in total freedom.” This view is not limited to political poetry but it applies to all sorts of poetry. The poet continues with saying that poetry does not need to have a link with virtue although he himself is a propagandist of such virtues. He loves nationalistic poetry, he says, but he believes that poetry is not required to side with nationalistic movements. “The quintessence is that poetry came into being as a basis for enjoyment – meaning that singing is a necessity since primordial times and that it will remain its companion to eternity – then political and social factors came upon it adding the element of utility. It can do without it whenever it wants to, but it can never do without its basic function. Who is able to combine the two and joins purpose and means, his merit is double and includes honour from both sides” (Ibid., 71).

Summarising we may say that Zaki Konsol wants poetry to be poetical before anything else and secondly that poetry may carry a message. To combine the two, the poem being poetical and carrying a message, is meritorious in his view and that means that we may expect him to bring a message in each of his poems.

Zaki’s poetry comprises the following categories: ġazal, love-poetry, the waṭanīyāt, or political poetry, the hanīn poems of longing for the homeland, the insāniyyāt, in which category come his poems about various trades and crafts, and the long poem Suṣād, which he composed after the death of his eight months old daughter. Within the category of the ġazal comes the series about Galwá’, a name the poet possibly

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7 Konsol 1984:30-38: Luğat al-ġanna, which poem has the following lines:
yā abū l-qurba innā maṭḥarun lam nazaλ natrubu li-l-wazni l-bahili
ma raqiμna mawqata šišri llati sawwabat kullu ġamīn waμalili
borrowed from Abū Šabaka. The latter’s collection of poems titled Galwā’, came out in Beirut in 1945.\(^8\)

Zaki Konsol wrote ten poems devoted to Galwā’ and in 27 other poems out of the 300 poems he published, he mentions the name of Galwā’. The inserts in these 27 poems vary in length between a few words to six lines, “what shall I say to Galwā’?\(^9\), or “Galwā’’s approval suffices for me” being the shortest inserts\(^10\). Most of these inserts occur in occasional poetry. Since such poems were meant to be recited before a life audience, one may assume that the poet used the inserts as a stratagem to hold or to recapture the attention of his audience, or to say indirectly what he could not or would not say directly.

The ten poems devoted to Galwā’ tell the story of a relationship developing from the first feelings of love for Galwā’ from afar to accusations of his infidelity and to the expression of anxiety for the wellbeing of Galwā’. The story ends in a poem in which the poet mentions Galwā’, his grandson and his son, in that order.

The first poem, Ablā darārīhi (His prettiest star), tells about an amorous young man who suffers from being in love (Konsol 1984:39-41). The poem opens with the line:

Wherever I go, her spectre follows me,
What can I do about her, and what about it?\(^11\)

The last sentence is:

If my wish does not come true, that is bad luck
Alas for my heart, how shall I console it?\(^12\)

There is no indication that Galwā’ knew about the feelings of the young man.

The poem, Žalāl al-hawwā’ (The error of love)\(^13\), follows the same line.

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8 Ilyās Abū Šabaka informs the reader in the introduction that he wrote the poems between 1926 and 1932 and that there is only a small part from the poet’s early youth in them. As a whole they are the product of fantasy not of reality. Galwā’ is a metathesis of Olga, the fiancée of the poet who finally married her after ten years (Meisami & Starkey 1998:446). The name of Zaki’s wife was Warda ‘Azzāz (at-Taqāfa, October 1992:49).

9 mādā aqūl li-Galwā’? (Konsol 1972:75).


11 yurāṣqumī annā dhahabtu hayāltubā
fa-mā hilati fihā wa-mā hilai fihī?

12 fa-in hába mā arūf fayān sī’a tālī ī
wa-yā wayha hādībi l-qalbi, kayfa uthāzīhi

13 Konsol 1978:159. This poem tells about an amorous man haunted by his love for Galwā’. How much I debate with him (my heart), how much I turn him away from her, he swears that he does not long for anything but her.
The third poem, *Yā hulwata ẓuğri* (You sweet mouth) shows a development in the relation. In good classical fashion, the poet exclaims:

Do you remember paradise, during our evening,  
while we were unaware of the evil of an informer and a slanderer?  
We flew to it and ecstasy was our third companion  
A guest tending the wounds of our bleeding heart  
The night wrapped us in the folds of its cloak  
A thirsty person withholding her drink from a thirsty person  

However, it is not Ġalwā' withholding her drink, but the poet withholding his. The devil, he says, was trying to persuade him to take the presents of beauty, but on the other hand a reproach, spelled out in detail, held him back from committing a crime.

The relation has undergone a change in the poem *Ba’da l-ʿāṣifa* (After the storm). The poet defends himself against the accusation of infidelity by Ġalwā'. An altercation between the poet and Ġalwā', be it an imaginative one, is the subject of the six-line insert in the poem commemorating the political leader, Fāris al-Ḥūrī (Konsol 1972:73-80):

"What shall I say to Ġalwā' when she shouts,  
Did you not turn your golden voice against us,  
poet of Syria? The heart of Syria is afire  
by emotion and your heart is playing with wine  

... Does her tear for the evil events not shake you?  
Are you made of stone, of wood?"  
"Stop your reproach, Ġalwā'..."  

The poet then continues saying that he is doing everything for Syria and that Ġalwā' does not need to reproach him for inactivity. In this case, the insert serves a rhetorical purpose to wrap his self-praise in an imaginative altercation between the poet and his beloved.

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15 Konsol 1974:63-67. This poem is with 40 lines the longest Ġalwā' poem by the poet.

16 Lines 14-15:

*mādā ʾagīlū li-Ġalwā'i ʾlidā hātāfāt  
yā shīrā ʾṣāmī qalābū ʾṣāmī muṭṣāsamun*

And lines 18-19:

*alā tahāzzukka fi ʾahdātī damʿatubā  
kuffī malāmāki yā Ġalwā'...*
A new element is the anxiety expressed by the poet about the health and safety of Ġalwā'. In the poem Salamat yadāka (Your hands healed), the poet thanked Dr. Haddād, director and owner of the clinic Los Cedros in Buenos Aires, for curing Ġalwā' (Konsol 1984:164-167).

In Qā'id ar-rakk (Leader of the caravan), the poet expresses his concern for the safety of Ġalwā’ imploring the captain of the ship (or plane) to bring Ġalwā’ safely to Syria (Konsol 1974:190-192).

The poem Durrat aš-ṣawqayn (Pearl of the two Easts = Damascus) (Konsol 1986: 81-88), is a poem composed in Damascus about the city ending with three lines in which he mentions Ġalwā’, his grandson and his son.

Ġalwā’, after tomorrow our ship will leave
Shall I turn my ear away from its hooters?
If my grandson and my son were not on my eyelashes
and in my heart and brain
I would never use a rhyme other than dād
and not spread a wing outside my country! (Konsol 1986:88)

There are two lines about the use of the name of Ġalwā’. The first one runs, bi-smihā a’ni waṭanī.17 The other line is, bi-smihā uġannī waṭani.18 They occur in two versions of the same poem, the first of which does not suit the metre but the second does. We may assume therefore that the first line is wrong. The second line gives a better meaning also: “In her name I sing the praise of my country”.

The waṭaniyyāt is another important group of poems in Zaki’s oeuvre. They deal with the important political events in the Arab countries and especially with Palestine. The treatment of the subject of Palestine comes close to the treatment of the Ġalwā’ motif. The poet composed a great number of poems on this subject and he inserted this motif into other poems on a variety of subjects.

The first volume of poetry, Nūr wa-nār (Konsol 1972), abounds with poems dealing with the fate of Palestine. The poet has dated most of his poems in this volume and so we know that he composed them between 1946 and 1971. He selected nine poems of the year 1967, which he dated by mentioning the month of composition next to the year. Six of the nine poems, composed in June, July and August, deal with the aftermath of the June war. The titles of these poems reflect the poet’s feelings about this war.

The first poem after the war is Kifāh wa-amal (Struggle and Hope) The opening line runs as follows:

“My people has not died and hope has not been lost

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17 Konsol 1984:30-38, especially p. 34 third line.
A false step of the rider does not mean failure”\(^\text{19}\)

The following poem, Laylu l’urūba (Night of Arabism), declares,

Patience is the best refuge when afflicted.

After increasing hardship relief will come\(^\text{20}\)

The other poems of this series are Ardu šuḥadā’i (Soil of martyrs), 15 July 1967 (Konsol 1972:152-156); Sa’ahnāqū ǧurā ṣ (I will suppress my injuries), which poem has the subtitle, “From a Palestinian refugee to the thieves of his country” (ibid., 157-160); aṣ-‘a’ru l-muqaddas (The sacred revenge), August 1967, (Ibid., 161-167).

Revenge is also the main theme of the Wasiyyatu ẓ-ṣa’r (The admonition to take revenge). Abdallahīf Yūnus considered this poem as the best poem ever written by Zaki Konsol, that is excepted until 1967, the year Yūnus published his book. He writes: “No Arab poet, myself not excepted, can describe the painful tragedy of Palestine as this masterpiece describes it” (Konsol 1972:29-31, Yūnus 1967:71-75). The poem dates from 1950. It consists of three strophes, the first of which deserves our attention. The poem opens with three adverbial clauses indicating the place, followed by six relative clauses describing the place before coming to two coordinate main phrases, the second of which is followed by two subordinate ones and a third coordinate phrase. This last phrase opens with an adverbial clause with a subordinate phrase and then comes to the main verb and its subject. The logical subject of these phrases is an old refugee, whose eyes, hand and sighs are the subjects of the three main phrases. The two last words of this strophe reveal this logical subject.

The adjectives of the form maf’ūlatin at the beginning of the lines three to eight emphasize, through meaning and sonority, the horror of the place. To give a taste of this sonority, the usual order of translation with a transcription of the Arabic text in the footnotes is abandoned. The Arabic transcription comes first followed by its translation:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{'abra l-tariqī l-‘abisi l-hālī} & \quad \text{'abra l-madā l-māwārī bi-l-ālī} \\
\text{fi haymatin saudā ka-l-qabri} & \quad \text{fi l-maḥbati l-māwārī bi-l-‘aṣī} \\
\text{mansūbatīn fi mahwabi l-qafri} & \quad \text{maḥbātinni mahwābirī bi-l-‘aṣī} \\
\text{manhūkatin maḥtākati s-satri} & \quad \text{maḥwābātini l-māwārī bi-l-‘aṣī} \\
\text{maṣūbatin lī-l-qafri wa-l-tayrī} & \quad \text{maḥwābātini l-māwārī bi-l-‘aṣī} \\
\text{maṣūfatin lī-l-bārri wa-l-qārī} & \quad \text{maḥwābātinni l-māwārī bi-l-‘aṣī} \\
\text{maḥfrū ṣatin bi-r-ramlī wa-l-qafrī} & \quad \text{maḥwābātinni l-māwārī bi-l-‘aṣī} \\
\end{align*}\]

\(^{19}\) Konsol 1972:143-146, dated 18 Ḥazīrīn (June), 1967: lam yamin qawmi la-l-dā ā a l-amāl kabwātu l-fārisī lā tārīn l-fāsal

mağmuratin bi-d-dulli wa-l-qahri
‘aynānī ta’tālīğānī bi-n-nāri
al-haqdū yuhibā
wa-calā l-hurūfī r-rā‘ifatī damā
tanzū hušāsatu

wa-yadun tabuttu wašiyyata t-ta‘rī
wa-l-qurūb yuño‘ibā
al-bādirātī tabālūhā humamā
lāги‘ī bāli

After a road, dreary and black
In a tent deathly black
Disposed of in an arid waste
Decomposed and worn the cloth
Exposed to birds and beasts
Open to cold and heat
Clothed with sand and need
Enclosed with humiliation and the rule of might

Two eyes tremble ablate
Feelings of hate instigate
And, on the bleeding, burning characters
Jumps the last sigh

A hand writes an order to retaliate
wounds dictate
which one might think lava to be
of the ageing refugee

‘Abdalla‘īf Yūnus is exultant about these lines. I translate: “They are above the level of the pen – any pen, and ability – any ability – it is on a level to which nothing rises except the innermost heart (damār)...”.

Other poems about Palestine give vent to feelings of frustration, anger, hate and aggression.

Hurāsatu s-salām (The legend of peace) (Konsol 1972:19-24), reads:
The abominable armistice, the source of our affliction
The neck of him who agreed to it, is sprinkled with blood
Without its strings, our sword would have smashed the den of vice
And Israel would have come to an end.

The poem Mulāku l-kalām (Kings of talk) (Konsol 1972:25-28) makes its title clear with the lines:
Your sons did not hesitate to fight
God is witness that they did not abandon you
The leaders alone were criminals
Ask them about their degraded honour.

The Palestine question plays a prominent role in the poem commemorating the battle of Maysalūn in 1920, when the French invaded Syria to establish the mandate government\(^{21}\). The same goes for the poem Abū l-fawāris (The headman of the caval-

\(^{21}\) Fi mašhībi š-[a]hid (In the procession of the martyr), Konsol 1972:198-200.
ry), which celebrates the Druze leader of the 1925-26 insurrection against the French rulers. The poem Kafartu bi-l-ʿīd (I did not celebrate) (Konsol 1972:67-70) tells why the poet did not take part in the fifth year celebration of the French withdrawal from Syria in 1946. This poem counts 24 lines and it is only in line 19 that the poet mentions Palestine as the cause for his abstention. The coming to power of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt in 1955 is another opportunity to mention the ongoing struggle.

Closely related to the wataniyyāt are the poems in which the poet describes his longing, ḥanīn, to the country where he feels his roots lie. Just like the other themes, Zaki Konsol composed complete poems devoted to it and he inserted short episodes into poems devoted to another subject. In the volume Atš wa-ḡū ṣ one finds the telling titles, Yā ġannata d-dunyā (Paradise of the world) (Konsol 1974:44) and Yabrūd, the city of his parents where the poet lived from 1922 to 1929, and where he went to school. Here follows a translation of the last of the eight strophes of the poem Yabrūd,

Girls of the quarter, do you remember a child,
Who stayed in the nest for a while and then went away
I was that child, but I am now a middle-aged man
My absence made me lose root and branch
I have not earned glory and I made no family happy
Be nice to my orphan tears
Greetings to you, paradise of the world, greetings

Nostalgia is a natural part of the Mabd ahlāmī (Cradle of my dreams), written shortly before the June war, in April 1967. Nostalgia also appears in poems which seem to give little reason for it. One of these poems is the elegy for Fāris al-Ḥūrī in 1962 (Konsol 1972:73-80).

After six lines praising Fāris al-Ḥūrī, the poet addresses his muse:

O muse of my poetry, in the middle of your confidential words you leave me
My self-esteem withholds me from running off
Do not dismiss the singing string when hoarseness

22 Yā šiblu Misr (Young man from Egypt), Konsol 1972:34-37.

23 Konsol 1974:44:
yā ṣāhiyā l-hayyī bal tadhkurna tiflā
lazama l-ʿišā zamānān tūmma ağlā
anā ḍāka t-tiflā lakīn šīrī tahbā
dayyāṭāni ġurbatī ašlīn wa-fašlā
lam ašīb maḏḏan wa-lā aṣṭaṭu aḥbā
fu-turaraffaṭa bi-damāttī l-yatāmā
wa-salāman ġannata d-dunyā salāmā
Falls upon the voice of one who in tiredness resigns
Nostalgia broke my wing and hope died out
like daybreak. I let it drink from my heart and eyes
Alas, for the stranger whose bed is made of thorns,
whose bread is baked from the dough of worry and hardship.
He lives physically in exile and his heart and longing are not exiled.24

After this nostalgia episode comes a Galwāʾ episode and after nineteen lines in total
the poet returns to the Šaybū lʿurūba.

ʿĪsā an-Nāʿūrī (1977:575) describes the so-called insāniyyāt as follows: “The reader
of Zaki Konsol’s poetry discovers that he has a great interest in social poetry and a
deep feeling for the toiling class of the nation. He wrote me in a letter dated
February 17th, 1953, that he had a volume of poetry titled ʿAlā qārīʿati t-ṭariq (Along
the streets), devoted to this forgotten group of people with their humble professions”.

an-Nāʿūrī tells that the volume counted twenty poems, some of which Zaki Konsol
had published and others not. Ten of the poems found their way to the volumes Nūr
wa-nār, Fi matāḥāt at-ṭariq and Dīwān. The jobs vary between the flower girl, the
composer, the builder’s labourer, the postal worker (Nūr wa-nār), the shepherd, the
teacher, the waiter and the seller of liquorice water (Fi matāḥāt at-ṭariq), the baker
(Dīwān).

ʿĪsā an-Nāʿūrī (1977:575) included one strophe of the poem “The maid” (al-ʿĀmi-
lā) and ten lines of the poem “The newspaper vendor” (Bāyyāʾu l-ğarāʾid) in the entry
about Zaki Konsol. Ġurğ Saydah (1964:634-636) admires the poem Bāʾrīʾatu t-zahr
(The flower-girl) and ʿAbdallaṭīf Yūnūs writes that this type of poetry describes the
toiling classes and their circumstances and awakens sympathy for them. It is, he says,
the type of poetry most deserving of immortality (Yūnūs 1967:130).

The Flower girl

In the hustle of dreams, I saw her confusion
As if she were reading the tales of illusion
She went like drunk in the march of the days
And made flowers dance with the following lays:

Flowers, o lovers – for flowers do come,

24 Konsol 1972:74, lines 1-5:
waʾizzatu n-naṣṣi taṭnini ʿani l-harabi
fi šuṭabi buḥḥatu l-mustalimī l-taṭabi
kaḥ-saṭri asqībi min qalbi wa-min huḍubi
wa-bukzābi min ʿaṣiqī l-hammi wa-n-naṣṣi
wa-qalbhu wa-hawāhu geyra muqṭaribā

waʾizzatu n-naṣṣi taṭnini ʿani l-harabi
fi šuṭabi buḥḥatu l-mustalimī l-taṭabi
kaḥ-saṭri asqībi min qalbi wa-min huḍubi
wa-bukzābi min ʿaṣiqī l-hammi wa-n-naṣṣi
wa-qalbhu wa-hawāhu geyra muqṭaribā
Proud among leaves in their sweet-smelling dress
A present of lovers for cheek and for neck
Richer than gold, an adornment for necks

Praise him who graced them
With a beautiful face
And modelled their paints
To God I say grace

The long poem Suʿād occupies a place of its own in the oeuvre of Zaki Konsol. It is his only long poem and its subject, the death of his eight months old daughter, sets it apart from his other poems. an-Nāʿūrī, in his entry about Zaki Konsol, quotes 19 lines from this poem and Ġurğ Ṣaydah quotes fifteen lines. Ābdallatif Yūnus devoted a special chapter to the poem quoting 44 lines (Yūnus 1967:144-151). He writes that Zaki Konsol had a name as a poet before he wrote this poem, but that his fame had not yet spread. After people had read this poem, they realised that they had a new poet. Yūnus quotes 11 strophes of the poem beginning with the second strophe. He dropped the first strophe, which, in his view, did not have the same quality as the others. In order to keep the quotation within manageable limits, we have translated the second, the fifth, the seventh and the eighth strophes, which give a fair impression of the poem.

Suʿād, is there a name sweeter than yours among human names?
It is like a song on the edge of a string
It is like the words of a breeze rocking the twigs of a tree
It is like kisses of moisture flowing between flowers

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raʿaytuhā ḥayrā
kaʿamnahā taqra
tasīru ka-s-sakrā
wa-turqū'u z-zaibrā
az-zabrū yā ʿušāq
yaḥṣub mina l-ʿawrāq
badīṣījatu l-mulqāq
wa-hilājatu l-anāq
subhāna man zānah
bi-waṣīḥī z-zāḥī
wa-sāga al-wānāb
āmantu bi-l-lābī
Did you not sing with the nightingales, morning and night?  
Did you not leave the songs of pessimism and distress to the crows?  
The hand of the merciful paved your path, my hope narcissus,  
And clad you every day in clothes made of happiness.

Sleep on my eyelashes when you cannot stay in bed  
I ransom you from the changes of times with everything a hand can hold  
Without you, my life was not pleasant and no resort was nice  
You made my hope bloom and the desert smiled on my path

I read on your brow the book of my distant past  
I see in your eyes two flashes of my roaming dream  
The world laughed to me. How happy I was with your coming!  
Today I rose from the grave. Today I am reborn!

As we have demonstrated above, Zaki Konsol's poetry covers a variety of fields. He showed his originality in incorporating the Ġalwā’ theme and other themes as well in his poetry and in describing the humbler professions. He chose for simple language to make his poetry accessible to a broad audience. Even if his fame would be limited to his closest audience, the Arabs in the Southern Mahgār, we must conclude that he is a poet well deserving our attention.
REFERENCES


