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Poetry on the Walls: A Cultural and Literary Reading of the "Ithra" Library Inscriptions

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Abstract: This study presents a contemporary model of artistic graffiti, centering on the composition of Arabic poetry. Adopting a descriptive and analytical approach, it investigates the poetic inscriptions adorning the column walls of the "Ithra" Library in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. The research aims to interpret these inscriptions, classify them, analyze their poetic structure, and explore their aesthetic and thematic dimensions. The study focuses on selected verses, delving into the unique characteristics of the poetry and the familiar discourses it communicates to Arab audiences. It also considers the literary stature of the poets behind these works. Rather than encompassing all the poetic texts inscribed throughout the library, the research highlights representative examples drawn from various literary periods accompanied by critical commentary.

The study is structured into an introduction and three main sections. The introduction outlines the historical context of the murals and emphasizes the significance and scope of the research. Each section corresponds to a different library floor, with each axis showcasing multiple inscription models relevant to the respective floor. A conclusion summarizes the key insights and findings. This research underscores the role of aesthetic awareness in shaping cultural institutions–particularly public libraries–and highlights the importance of integrating literary discourse into visual media designed for the broader public. Ultimately, the "Ithra" Library is proposed as a model for other libraries to emulate, demonstrating the enriching potential of poetic expression in public cultural spaces.

Keywords: graffiti in Arab culture, Arabic literary tradition, poetic inscriptions, "Ithra" Library, Arabic calligraphy

Introduction

Writing poetry on walls serves multiple purposes—cognitive, historical, linguistic, aesthetic, psychological, and moral. It can also offer therapeutic benefits, both

psychological and physical, particularly for individuals seeking meaningful and conscious engagement with literary material. The walls of the "Ithra" Library embody this concept, adorned with verses from some of the most celebrated figures in Arabic poetry. The library honors 65 poets whose works span the rich timeline of Arabic literary history. These include the legendary poets of the Mu'allaqat from the pre-Islamic era, followed by key voices from the Islamic and Abbasid periods, the eloquent poets of Al-Andalus, and prominent modern poets. Together, they represent the diverse cultural and geographic tapestry of Arab society, their verses etched into the very architecture of the library's columns.

Graffiti is a historical-artistic phenomenon. It refers to "words or drawings, especially humorous, rude, or political, on walls, doors, etc. in public places" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d). It has been utilized as a method for historical documentation (Al-Khawatra, 2022). Ancient Egyptians inscribed on the walls of temples, tombs, and pyramids and documented facts, events, customs, wars, and beliefs. In addition, the ancient Arabs composed the *Mu'allaqat*, referred to as "*Mathhabat*", due to reports of their inscription in gold water and exhibition on the curtains of the Ka'ba. Graffiti represents a tradition within ancient Arab culture, particularly during its period of literary prominence (Rosser-Owen, 2022).

Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, in his *History of the Caliphs*, recounts an episode involving the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil (al-Suyuti, 2013). In the year 236 AH, al-Mutawakkil ordered the demolition of the tomb of Imam Hussein and the surrounding houses, replacing them with farmland. He prohibited visits to the site, had it plowed over, and turned it into a desolate area. His actions, which were characterized by extreme fanaticism, caused great distress among Muslims. In response, Baghdad residents expressed their outrage by writing curses and protest messages on mosque walls and public spaces (including walls of prisons) (Borling, 2013). Poets also satirized him, using literary expression as a form of resistance.

This episode illustrates how public walls have long served as canvases for social, political, and emotional expression—often through eloquent poetry or prose. Throughout Islamic history, such literary inscriptions were not

limited to paper. Instead, many of the most profound and artistic expressions were deliberately engraved on architectural surfaces such as palace walls, mosques, schools, and factories. Additionally, inscriptions were found on utensils, pens, garments, and tools—embedding literature into daily life and public memory. Ibrahim al-Bayhaqi (d. 320 AH), as cited by al-Muhasin and al-Musawi, described how texts were etched into rock and stone, becoming integral to the physical structure of buildings and monuments (Al-Bayhaqi, 1961). These inscriptions were often historical records, sacred covenants, moral exhortations, or commemorations of honor and legacy. Examples include the inscriptions on the Dome of Ghamdan, the Gate of Kairouan, the Gate of Samarkand, the Column of Ma'rib, the Corner of al-Mashqar, al-Ablaq al-Fard in Taima, and the Gate of Edessa. These sites were chosen for their prominence and cleanliness, ensuring the inscriptions remained preserved, legible, and visible to future generations.

In Andalusia, this tradition reached a peak of artistic refinement in the Alhambra Palace of Granada. Its walls are adorned with exquisite poetic inscriptions that celebrate the king, praise his virtues, and marvel at the beauty of the palace itself. Notably, three poets—who also served as the king's chamberlains and prime ministers—authored many of these verses: Ibn al-Jayyab (673–749 AH), Ibn al-Khatib (713–776 AH), and Ibn Zamrak (733–793 AH). The enduring impact of these poetic engravings is vividly captured in Nizar Qabbani's poem *Granada*, where he writes (Qabbani, n.d.):

الزَّخْرَفَاتُ أَكَادُ أَسْمَعُ نَبْضَهَا وَالزَّرْكَشَاتُ عَلَى السُّقُوفِ تُنَادِي

قَالَتْ: هُنَا "الْحَمْرَاءُ، زَهْوُ جُدُودِنَا فَاقْرَأْ عَلَى جُدْرَانِهَا أَمْجَادِي

The Arabesques—I swear I hear their pulse,
and gilded filigree on ceilings call to me.
She declared: "Here stands Al-Hamra, our ancestors' pride—
now inscribe upon its walls my glories' creed".

The "Al-Hamra" Palace, a representation of our pride and glory, is here, the girl said, and its walls testify to the Arabs' history, triumphs, and glory.

The poet conceptualizes the elaborate decorations as a living entity, ascribing to them an almost animate quality. The ceiling adornments are envisioned as whispering and beckoning to the departed, serving as a metaphor that effectively conveys a profound feeling of mourning for lost splendor. These include verses of love, moral wisdom, Quranic ayat, and poetic narratives, often found on gravestones and memorials. Noteworthy references include Abu al--Abbas Shams al-Din Ahmad ibn Khalil, known as Ibn al-Labboudi al-Shafi'i (d. 896 AH) (Ibn al-Labboudi, 2017), who wrote about the poetry found on graves, and the work Mutheir al-Azm al-Sakin Ila Ashraf al-Amakin by Abu al-Faraj Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597 AH), which contains a chapter titled "On the Merits of What Was Written on Graves" (Ibn al-Jawzi, 1995).

Research Context and Rationale

Arabic scholarship has, for the most part, paid limited attention to the study of mural and artistic inscriptions. As Nora Amer (2006) aptly observes, "The subject of graffiti has not received even a little attention in all Arabic studies, while foreign studies are very rich in this subject, as rich as that phenomenon there is, and according to its development". This observation remains largely accurate today, highlighting a significant and ongoing gap in the field. In response, this research focuses exclusively on select Arabic-language studies, deliberately setting aside Western scholarship in order to emphasize the need for localized, culturally grounded approaches to the analysis of mural writings. This focus is particularly relevant given the growing prevalence of such inscriptions throughout the Arab world. As Abd Elhaseeb (2015) notes, there is a notable absence of research on literary texts that have transitioned from traditional formats—such as books and manuscripts—to public walls, including poetic odes, aphorisms, and proverbs. The inscriptions adorning the columns of the "Ithra" Library exemplify this emerging literary phenomenon and offer a compelling case study for further exploration. Whereas previous studies tend to examine graffiti through social, psychological, or political frameworks, the present study adopts a distinctly literary perspective. It prioritizes cultural discourse,

examines the criteria for textual selection, and explores the aesthetic functions of mural inscriptions. Unlike research that focuses primarily on the motivations behind graffiti production, this study investigates the intentional design and artistic planning involved in the placement and presentation of poetic verses within the "Ithra" Library. Additionally, this research conducts a critical evaluation of the poetic content itself—analyzing the structure, meaning, and stylistic elements of selected verses. It also identifies and addresses linguistic or stylistic inconsistencies, which are discussed in the conclusion. Finally, in contrast to earlier scholarship that often relies on Western theoretical models, this study employs close reading as its principal method of analysis. This approach enables a more nuanced and contextually sensitive interpretation of mural texts, aligning more closely with the cultural and literary traditions from which these inscriptions emerge.

Graffiti and Mural Inscriptions: Between Aesthetic Form and Cultural Transgression

Poetic inscriptions on walls represent a prevalent phenomenon across various societal sectors, encompassing both spontaneous and organized acts of drawing or writing. Motivations are diverse, encompassing psychological, social, and involuntary factors, with manifestations that include personal, emotional, social, economic, political, sports-related, religious, and educational dimensions. The methods vary significantly: some illustrate the writer's suffering, nostalgia, or aspiration for fame; others reveal repression, promote products, employ satire, undermine, communicate ideas or information, provide advice or guidance, display calligraphic skill, or represent random, unintended marks. Graffiti utilizes various techniques, including professional calligraphy, machine printing, and amateur methods, such as colored spray, engraving tools, paint, and digital printing.

Murals encompass a wide spectrum of styles, ranging from aesthetically refined and purposeful inscriptions to crude and offensive markings. Present in both Arab and Western cultures, these wall writings convey a variety of

messages—literary, political, economic, social, and emotional. They appear in numerous forms, including handwriting, spray paint, engraving, and other artistic techniques.

However, not all mural expressions contribute positively to the visual landscape. Some feature vulgar, incoherent, or aesthetically displeasing content that offends public taste and undermines cultural values. Such writings may diverge from religious teachings, societal norms, and traditional etiquette. They can serve as outlets for psychological expression, including anger, hatred, or frustration, or may be driven by entertainment motives or illicit purposes, including sexual innuendos or provocations.

These inscriptions appear in a wide array of public and private spaces—on school walls, residential buildings, factories, universities, streets, vehicles, stations, bridges, fences, trees, trains, public restrooms, and abandoned structures. Some are written in colloquial dialects, others in flawed Modern Standard Arabic, and many contain profane or inappropriate language:

- "The school is for sale, and the principal is free".
- "Oh, how beautiful he is—he doesn't have forty!"
- A humorous exchange:
  "Please don't write on the walls".
  Response: "Good news, may you live long!"
- Playful distortions: "Scribble, scribble. To mess up the threads. Drawing on the wall".

Such writings mar public spaces with visual and linguistic degradation, embodying the proverb: "The walls are the planks of the insane".

Figure 1. A photograph of the interior of the "Ithra" Library showing columns with poetic inscriptions

Source: Taken by the Author.

The poetry at the walls of "Ithra": The Content and Values

Since its establishment, the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture ("Ithra") has recognized the profound cultural and historical significance of poetry. The library's architectural design embodies this vision by incorporating poetic verses by some of the most distinguished poets in Arabic literary history. These inscriptions, elegantly etched onto the columns, represent a carefully curated selection of works by poets celebrated for their lasting contributions to Arabic literature.

The columns within the "Ithra" Library are not only structurally prominent but artistically expressive. Each floor features uniquely crafted columns, set

amid collections that span thousands of books across diverse fields, as well as audiovisual materials and dedicated exhibition spaces. Over time, these columns have become more than architectural elements—they serve as vessels for the voices of Arabic poetic heritage, enriching the intellectual and aesthetic journey of visitors, scholars, and literary enthusiasts alike.

The concept of inscribing poetry onto columns is deeply rooted in Arab literary tradition. Ibn Qutaybah recounts that the pre-Islamic poet Al-Nabigha Al-Dhubyani was honored with a red leather dome at the renowned Ukaz market, where poets such as Al-A'sha, Hassan ibn Thabit, and Al-Khansaa al-Salamiyya would gather to present their verses for public judgment and acclaim (Qutaybah, 1958). It was in this rich cultural context that Al-Khansaa famously recited (Tammas, 2004):

قَذًى بِعَيْنِيْك أَمْ بِالْعَيْنِ عُوَّارُ أَمْ ذرفَتْ إِذْ خَلَتْ مِنْ أَهْلِهَا الدَّارُ؟

Is it grit in your eye or the rot of sight?
Did grief pour forth when halls turned ash and their dwellers fled?

The poetess mourns her brother, Sakhr, using visceral imagery of vision and decay to interrogate the nature of her sorrow:

وَإِنَّ صَخْرًا لَتَأْتَمُّ الْهُدَاةُ بِهِ كَأَنَّهُ عَلَمٌ فِي رَأْسِهِ نَارُ

Indeed, Sakhr is that rock to which seekers of guidance are drawn,
as if he were a mountain crowned with a blazing light at its summit.

The poetess praises her brother, Sakhr, depicting him as a mountain crowned with a light to guide wayfarers.

Poetry verses on the columns of "Ithra" Library

The "Ithra" Library features over 300,000 printed books in Arabic and English, distributed across four thematic floors: the ground floor is allocated for multimedia resources and the children's library, the second floor features

display screens and a café, while the third floor comprises books on an array of topics, in religious philosophy, ethics, technology, and the arts. The fourth floor encompassed subjects pertaining to history, geography, and encyclopedias.

Figure 2. A photograph from inside the first floor of the "Ithra" Library, with excerpts from modern Arabic poetry

Source: Taken by the Author.

Column poets on the first floor

The first round featured poetic selections from twenty-two prominent contemporary poets. Among them were Elia Abu Madi, Ahmed Shawqi, Hafez Ibrahim, Omar Abu Risha, Ghazi Al-Gosaibi, Muhammad Al-Faytouri, Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab, Salah Abdel-Sabour, Mahmoud Darwish, Nizar Qabbani, Ali Mahmoud Taha, Mahmoud Ghoneim, Muhammad Al-Thubaiti, Nazik Al-Malaika, Jassim Al-Sahih, Khalil Mutran, Al-Akhtal Al-Saghir, Abdullah Al-Faisal, Gibran Khalil Gibran, Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabi, Muhammad Mahdi Al-Jawahiri, and Ibrahim Naji.

A single poetic line by the poet of love and beauty, Elia Abu Madi (1889–1957 AD), was inscribed on one of the columns on the first floor's wall.

وَالَّذِي نَفْسُهُ بِغَيْرِ جَمَالٍ لَا يَرَى فِي الْوُجُودِ شَيْئًا جَمِيلَا

By the One whose soul is without beauty, nothing in existence appears beautiful.

The poet mentions that only those with a beautiful soul can recognize and feel beauty.

In addition, there is a single verse by the Prince of Poets, Ahmed Shawqi, which has an ethical message:

وَإِنَّمَا الْأُمَمُ الْأَخْلَاقُ مَا بَقِيَتْ فَإِنْ هُمُو ذَهَبَتْ أَخْلَاقُهُمْ ذَهَبُوا

Indeed, nations are nothing but the morals that endure;
For if their morals are lost, then they are lost too.

The poet mentions that morality is the wealth of nations and the address of civilizations, and without morality, nations and civilizations do not exist.

Among the verses is a renowned line by Hafez Ibrahim, conveying an ethical message:

الْأُمُّ مَدْرَسَةٌ إِذَا أَعْدَدْتَها أَعْدَدْتَ شَعْبًا طَيِّبَ الْأَعْرَاقِ

The mother is a school; if you prepare her well,
you prepare a nation of good lineage.

The poet compares the mother to a school that, when adequately prepared, will cultivate a society with high morals.

Column poets on the second floor

The second floor shows the poetic works of thirty poets from both the pre--Islamic and Islamic periods, featuring notable authors such as Ka'b ibn Zuhayr, Al-Khansaa, Al-Nabigha Al-Dhubyani, Al-Harith ibn Hilliza Al--Yashkuri, Ubaid bin Al-Abras, Duraid bin Al-Sammah, Urwa bin Al-Ward, Maan bin Aws, Amr bin Maad Yakrib, and Umayyah bin Abi Al-Salt, among others.

This floor features four columns, each showcasing poetic selections that serve multiple purposes, ranging from praise of the Prophet to elegy and love poetry. On one of the column walls on the second floor—dedicated to poets from the Islamic, Umayyad, and Abbasid periods—a verse by Ka'b ibn Zuhayr, the renowned author of *Al-Burdah*, has been inscribed (Faour, 1997). This particular verse dates back to 26 AH (26 AH = 646 AD).

بَانَتْ سُعَادُ فَقَلْبِي الْيَوْمَ مَتْبُولُ مُتَيَّمٌ إِثْرَهَا لَمْ يُفْدَ مَكْبُولُ

Su'ad has gone—my heart, a withered bloom,
Love-chained, pursuit unyielding—still in chains.

The poet describes his state of mind following the separation from his beloved Su'ad, that left him in a state of awe. He was akin to a prisoner who was unable to redeem himself.

The second column features Al-Khansaa's renowned verse, in which she laments her brother Sakhr:

وَإِنَّ صَخْرًا لَتَأْتَمُّ الْهُدَاةُ بِهِ كَأَنَّهُ عَلَمٌ فِي رَأْسِهِ نَارُ

Indeed, Sakhr is that rock to which seekers of guidance are drawn,
as if he were a mountain crowned with a blazing light at its summit.

The poetess praises her brother Sakhr and describes him as a mountain with a light at its summit to guide travelers.

On the third column of the same floor, the famous opening of the poem by Al-Nabigha Al-Dhubyani:

يَا دَارَ مَيَّةَ بِالْعَلْيَاءِ فَالسَّنَدِ أَقْوَتْ وَطَالَ عَلَيْهَا سَالِفُ الْأَمَدِ

O dwelling of Mayya in the "Al-Aliya" and "Al-Sanad",
It lies empty and the days have lengthened upon it.

The poet calls the homes of his beloved Maya; she used to live in these two places "Al-Aliya" and "Al-Sanad", which have been emptied of their inhabitants by their departure from her and their long separation from her.

On the fourth column of the same floor, the famous opening of the poem of Al-Harith ibn Hilliza Al-Yashkuri:

آذَنَتْنَا بِبَيْنِهَا أَسْمَاءُ رُبَّ ثَاوٍ يُمَلُّ مِنْهُ الثَّوَاءُ

Asmaa has appraised me of her intention of departing our camp;
A place may grow weary of its dwellers,
But I always appreciated Asmaa's presence and never wanted her to go.

He tells the poet that Asma has left them, and expresses his sadness for her departure, as he does not get bored of her stay even if it is long (Masoud, 2025).

This verse may be critiqued for its linguistic complexity; however, its historical and cultural significance cannot be dismissed. It represents a foundational element of Arab literary heritage and serves as the opening line of a renowned poem widely acknowledged by scholars of classical Arabic literature. While it may not be familiar to the general public, its inclusion underscores the depth and richness of the tradition it represents.

Column poets on the third floor

The third floor featured poetic verses from thirteen distinguished poets of the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Andalusian periods. Among them were Al--Mutanabbi, Abu Tammam, Al-Buhturi, Jarir, Bashar Ibn Burd, Abu Al-Atahiya, Al-Farazdaq, Abu Nuwas, Ibn Zaydun, Abu Al-Alaa Al-Ma'arri, Lisan al-Din Ibn al-Khatib, Imam Al-Shafi'i, and Ibn al-Rumi. With the inclusion of these poets, the total number represented in the library rose to 65—corresponding to the number of columns dedicated to poetic inscriptions across the first three floors. The fourth floor, however, contains no inscriptions, as it was deemed unsuitable for writing.

A verse by the esteemed Arab poet Al-Mutanabbi (303–354 AH) was inscribed on the first wall of the columns on the third floor (Al-Barqouki, 1986).

أَعَزُّ مَكَانٍ فِي الدُّنَا سَرْجُ سَابِحٍ وَخَيْرُ جَلِيسٍ فِي الزَّمَانِ كِتَابُ

The most exalted place in the lifetime is the saddle of a swift horse,
And the finest companion in all times is a book.

Al-Mutanabbi says that a horse's saddle is the highest and most honorable place, because when a person rides a horse, he fights and defeats his enemies. Al-Mutanabbi describes a book as the best and most valuable friend a person can have, as it offers many benefits and never harms its owner.

This particular verse of poetry holds notable significance within the library, as it is often referenced in literary discourse and serves to promote the value of reading and the pursuit of knowledge. Its message aligns closely with the library's mission, making it a fitting choice for placement on the first wall. The second column features a verse by Abu Tammam, taken from the opening lines of a poem that commemorates the Battle of Amorium—a pivotal event in Islamic history:

السَّيْفُ أَصْدَقُ أَنْبَاءً مِنَ الْكُتُبِ فِي حَدِّهِ الْحَدُّ بَيْنَ الْجِدِّ وَاللَّعِبِ

The sword's tells truer tales than books do,
Its cutting edge draws the line between earnestness and jest.

The poet extols the virtues of fortitude and demonstrates that the sword is more accurate than the predictions of astrologers and their books; its razor--sharp edge distinguishes truth from superstition.

A renowned verse by Al-Buhturi, frequently recited during spring's arrival, is featured in the third column. This verse encourages reflection and optimism regarding nature and existence:

أَتَاكَ الرَّبِيعُ الطَّلْقُ يَخْتَالُ ضَاحِكًا مِنَ الْحُسْنِ حَتَّى كَادَ أَنْ يَتَكَلَّمَا

Spring has come to you, free and radiant,
Its loveliness so vivid, it almost seems to speak.

Al-Buhturi observes that the delightful spring season has arrived, bringing with it the splendor of nature, which he likens to a man striding confidently, filled with laughter.

The fourth column features a verse of poetry regarding love, referenced in romantic relationships, albeit extracted from a satirical poem by Jarir:

إِنَّ الْعُيُونَ الَّتِي فِي طَرْفِهَا حَوَرٌ قَتَلْنَنَا ثُمَّ لَمْ يُحْيِينَ قَتْلَانا

Eyes with brightness in their glance have slain us,
Yet they didn't revive our killed ones.

The poet describes eyes that possess an alluring beauty, often interpreted as having a striking contrast between the whiteness and the deep blackness of the iris. He laments the fact that these captivating eyes have figuratively "killed" him with their beauty, but they do not "revive" those they have killed, highlighting the enduring impact of their allure.

Additionally, several pillars on the second floor are dedicated to poets from the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods. One prominent pillar in the library features a Qur'anic verse, an exalted pronouncement from God Almighty (The Clear Quran, 2016):

Say, O Prophet, "If the ocean were ink for writing the Words of my Lord, it would certainly run out before the Words of my Lord were finished, even if We refilled it with its equal".

No matter how many poets compose verses or how eloquent their discourse, their expressions can never replicate the structure, style, or language of the Holy Qur'an. The Divine Book stands alone in its sublimity, perfection, coherence, eloquence, and miraculous nature—qualities that continue to inspire awe and unify hearts across generations.

Conclusion

While the "Ithra" Library's poetic inscriptions are impressive in scope, notable gaps remain. Several prominent poets who made significant contributions to Arabic literature are absent from the columns, including Antarah Ibn Shaddad, Abu Firas Al-Hamdani, and Abdullah Al-Bardouni, among others. Despite their literary excellence and enduring popularity, these figures are not represented.

Furthermore, the selection does not fully reflect the range of metrical patterns and tonal variation found in Arabic poetry, revealing a lack of stylistic diversity across the inscriptions.

The library comprises a total of 66 columns. One is dedicated to a Qur'anic verse highlighting the infinite nature of God's words. The remaining 65 feature poetic verses drawn from across the Arabic poetic tradition. Of these, 30 are from pre-Islamic, early Islamic, and classical poets; 13 from the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Andalusian periods; and 22 from the modern era. This distribution positions the library as a near-comprehensive poetic archive—what could be considered a "library of poetry".

Some inscriptions, however, contain minor linguistic and grammatical errors. For example, in a verse by Bashar, the presence of nunation in the word "sometimes" is incorrect; the proper form should retain the alif without nunation. Similarly, in a verse attributed to Abu Al-Alaa Al-Ma'arri, the word "laughing" is inaccurately vocalized with a fatha on the letter *kaf*, when it should be read with a kasra. Another instance involves Ibn al-Rumi's use of *Malik* with nunation, whereas it should appear without it. Notably, many columns display verses on opposite sides by different poets—for instance, Ahmed Shawqi on one side and Hafez Ibrahim on the other.

The modern-era poets featured in the collection represent various Arab nations. From Lebanon, Elia Abu Madi and Gibran Khalil Gibran; from Palestine, Mahmoud Darwish; and from Syria, Nizar Qabbani and Omar Abu Risha. Tunisia is represented by Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabi, while Sudanese poet Muhammad Al-Faytouri is also included. Saudi Arabia is represented by poets such as Jassim Al-Sahih and Ghazi Al-Gosaibi. Iraq contributes notable figures like Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab, Nazik Al-Malaika, and Muhammad Mahdi Al-Jawahiri. Egypt's representation includes Ahmed Shawqi, Salah Abdel-Sabour, Mahmoud Ghoneim, Hafez Ibrahim, and Ali Mahmoud Taha.

Despite this regional variety, poets from numerous Arab countries—such as Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Somalia, the Comoros, Jordan, Yemen, and Djibouti—are notably absent. Furthermore, while the eras covered span the pre-Islamic, early Islamic, Umayyad, Abbasid, Andalusian, and modern periods, other significant historical stages remain unrepresented. There are no

inscriptions from the Ayyubid period, which featured poets like Ibn Al-Farid, nor from the Fatimid period, which produced poets such as Sharif Al-Murtada and Amara Al-Yemeni. The Kharijite tradition, with figures like Qatari Ibn Al-Fuja'ah, and the Mamluk period, represented by Al-Busiri and Safi Al-Din Al-Hilli, are also missing. Likewise, the Ottoman-era poets, including Ibn Maatouq Al-Musawi and Abdul-Ghani Al-Nabulsi, as well as Sufi poets like Al-Hallaj and Ibn Arabi, are excluded.

Moreover, many renowned poets whose reputations are equal to—or exceed—those who were included are notably absent. These include Omar Ibn Abi Rabi'ah, Al-Sharif Al-Radi, Abu Al-Baqa' Al-Rundi, Ibn Hamdis, Ibn Khafaja, Al-Mu'tamid Ibn Abbad, Mahmoud Sami Al-Baroudi, and others. The selection lacks balance in terms of poetic schools, voices, and aesthetic approaches, leading to a relative uniformity in tone and form.

Despite these shortcomings, the "Ithra" Library stands as a model cultural institution, not only within Saudi Arabia but across the Arab world. Its curatorial vision avoids a centralized or bureaucratic approach, embracing a broader Arab identity by including poets from Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria, among others, rather than limiting its scope to local or Gulf writers.

Unlike random graffiti that appears on public walls without intent or purpose, the inscriptions at "Ithra" were carefully curated. Each verse was deliberately chosen and artistically presented to foster both visual engagement and intellectual reflection. The result is a thoughtful and purposeful integration of poetic heritage into architectural space.

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