

THE MUAMMA GENRE AND THE SYSTEM OF METHODS IN AHMAD AL-MUAMMOIY'S RISĀLAT AL-MU'AMMĀ

Dilnoza Esanova

PhD Candidate in Uzbek Philology and Journalism

National University of Uzbekistan (NUUz)

Tashkent, Uzbekistan

ORCID: 0009-0002-7428-6657

The muamma genre represents one of the most intellectually demanding forms in classical Eastern literature. Unlike conventional poetic genres that primarily rely on aesthetic expression, muamma combines literary creativity with logical reasoning, linguistic analysis, and symbolic interpretation. Historically, muamma functioned not merely as a poetic pastime but as a refined intellectual exercise practiced in scholarly circles, literary gatherings, and courtly environments¹.

Despite its significance, the muamma genre has long been treated in scholarship as a marginal or auxiliary phenomenon within classical literature. Many studies have focused on individual poetic examples without addressing the internal mechanisms that govern the process of muamma construction and solution. This approach has obscured the genre's theoretical depth and its role in the development of intellectual literature in the Islamic East. Recent research, however, has demonstrated that muamma constitutes a structured genre governed by specific rules, methods, and analytical procedures². Within this context, theoretical treatises devoted to muamma play a crucial role, as they provide systematic explanations of the genre's principles. Among such works, Ahmad al-Muammoiy's *Risālat al-Mu'ammā* occupies a particularly important position. The origins of the muamma genre are closely connected with the Arabic tradition of *lughz* (riddle), which emphasized logical deduction and intellectual challenge. Over time, this tradition was enriched by Persian literary culture, where muamma acquired symbolic, philosophical, and mystical dimensions³. In Persian literature, especially within Sufi contexts, muamma often functioned as a vehicle for conveying hidden meanings and metaphysical concepts⁴.

In Turkic literature, the muamma genre underwent further transformation. Poets such as Alisher Navai employed muamma as a sophisticated linguistic exercise, exploiting the phonetic, morphological, and semantic properties of language. As a

¹ Safa, Z. *History of Persian Literature*, Vol. IV.

² Bertels, E. *History of Persian Literature*.

³ Shams Qays Razi. *al-Mu'jam*.

⁴ Jami, A. *Risāla-yi Mu'ammā*.

result, muamma became a genre situated at the intersection of literature, linguistics, and logic⁵.

Within this multilingual and multicultural environment, Ahmad al-Muammoiy composed *Risālat al-Mu‘ammā*. Unlike poetic collections that merely presented muamma examples, this treatise aimed to explain how and why muamma works. Al-Muammoiy systematized the genre by identifying its core components, defining key terms, and classifying the operations used in the process of solving muamma puzzles. The significance of *Risālat al-Mu‘ammā* lies in its methodological approach. The author does not treat muamma as an intuitive or spontaneous activity but conceptualizes it as an ordered intellectual discipline. By doing so, he elevates muamma from a playful literary form to a teachable and reproducible system of knowledge.

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology grounded in close textual analysis of Ahmad al-Muammoiy’s *Risālat al-Mu‘ammā*. The primary method involves examining the treatise as a theoretical text rather than as a mere compilation of poetic riddles. Special attention is given to the author’s use of terminology, structural organization, and explanatory strategies. By analyzing how key concepts such as method, operation, symbol, and linguistic manipulation are defined and applied, the study aims to uncover the internal logic of the muamma genre⁶. In addition, a comparative approach is employed to situate *Risālat al-Mu‘ammā* within the broader tradition of classical Eastern literature. Selected examples from the works of Jami and Alisher Navai are used to highlight similarities and differences in the application of muamma techniques. This comparison does not seek to evaluate poetic quality but to demonstrate how different intellectual orientations—symbolic, linguistic, and analytical—are reflected in the practice of muamma. A structural-analytical method is also applied to classify the operations involved in solving muamma. These operations are examined not as isolated tricks but as components of a coherent system. Through this methodological framework, the study reconstructs muamma as a genre governed by reproducible analytical procedures. The core contribution of *Risālat al-Mu‘ammā* lies in its systematic classification of the methods used in muamma construction and solution. Al-Muammoiy distinguishes between different types of operations based on their functional role in the analytical process. One major group consists of linguistic operations, which involve the manipulation of letters, sounds, and word structures. These include the rearrangement of letters, omission or addition of phonetic elements, and transformations based on homonymy and polysemy. Such operations reveal the

⁵ Navai, A. *Khazāyin al-Ma‘ānī*.

⁶ Köprülü, M.F. *Turkish Literature History*.

deep connection between muamma and linguistic analysis⁷. A second group of methods is based on symbolic and semantic interpretation. In this category, the solution of a muamma depends not on formal linguistic manipulation but on the interpretation of metaphors, symbols, and cultural references. These methods are particularly prominent in Persian literary contexts and reflect the influence of philosophical and mystical thought⁸. Al-Muammoiy acknowledges these symbolic strategies but integrates them into a broader analytical framework rather than treating them as purely intuitive insights. The treatise also identifies logical and numerical procedures as an important component of muamma analysis. In certain cases, the solution requires counting, ordering, or establishing proportional relationships between elements. This aspect demonstrates that muamma operates at the intersection of literary creativity and rational calculation, further supporting the argument that it constitutes an intellectual discipline rather than a simple poetic diversion⁹. What distinguishes Al-Muammoiy's approach from earlier practices is his insistence on methodological clarity. While Jami's muamma often emphasize symbolic depth and Navai's examples showcase linguistic virtuosity, *Risālat al-Mu'ammā* unifies these tendencies by presenting them as elements of a single system¹⁰. This synthesis transforms muamma into a genre that can be taught, learned, and systematically applied. His study has demonstrated that the muamma genre represents a complex and structured intellectual phenomenon within classical Eastern literature rather than a marginal poetic amusement. Through the analysis of Ahmad al-Muammoiy's *Risālat al-Mu'ammā*, the research has shown that muamma operates according to clearly defined analytical principles involving linguistic, symbolic, and logical procedures. The findings confirm that *Risālat al-Mu'ammā* occupies a pivotal position in the theoretical development of the muamma genre. Unlike earlier poetic practices that relied primarily on intuition or individual ingenuity, Ahmad al-Muammoiy conceptualizes muamma as a methodical and teachable discipline. His systematic classification of operations transforms muamma into an organized intellectual activity governed by reproducible rules. The comparative perspective further reveals that while Jami's muamma emphasize symbolic and philosophical interpretation, and Alisher Navai's practice highlights linguistic virtuosity, Ahmad al-Muammoiy integrates these approaches within a unified theoretical framework. This synthesis not only broadens the functional scope of the genre but also strengthens its epistemological foundations. In conclusion, *Risālat al-Mu'ammā* should be regarded as

⁷ Ahmad al-Muammoiy. *Risālat al-Mu'ammā*.

⁸ Safa, Z. *History of Persian Literature*.

⁹ Bertels, E. *History of Persian Literature*.

¹⁰ Jami, A. *Risāla-yi Mu'ammā*.

a foundational theoretical treatise that contributed significantly to the institutionalization of the muamma genre in classical Eastern literature¹¹. The study highlights the importance of reassessing muamma as a legitimate object of literary theory and intellectual history, opening new perspectives for future research on riddle-based genres and analytical poetics.

ACADEMIC BOOK

¹¹ Bertels, E. History of Persian Literature.