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If we move from the 'amor de lonh', we have to contend with Briffault's claim: 'Or, de cette "nouvelle conception de l'amour" attribuée aux troubadours il n'existe au cours de toute la période de leur floraison aucune trace dans leurs œuvres' (Les Troubadours et le Sentiment Romancé, Paris 1945, p. 88). This may be an exaggeration, but the evidence that Briffault provides cannot be traced to any form of refined or sentimentalised Platonism, and this can only underline again the dangers of the generalised approach.

Von Grunebaum writes of Provencal poetry in general: 'All (its) lyrcal types breathe this intoxication with youth and strength and hope' (V.147). Perhaps 'lyrical' is intended to exclude Bertram de Born's 'tuit li dol e.11h plor e.11h marrimen' and Marcabrun's 'Mort son li bon arbre primier', but this would seem as eccentric as to ignore the fact that 'lo gens tems de puscor' is matched by the season of 'neus, gels e conglaips'. Von Grunebaum goes on to say: 'the élite in Aquitania and Provence ... were swept by sentitgements of a refinerwent unprecedented, at least in their cultural area' (V.148). If 'élite' refers to social class, it might cover Rudel, but Guillaume de Poitou — 'Ges non sai ab quai mi tenguia de N'Agnes o de N'Arse' — fits badly, while if it refers to the poets in general, then either it must explain away Briffault's analités lascives or be convicted of inadequacy.

It is here, in fact, that the kernel of the difficulty lies. At first sight it is the unfamiliarity of a new literature that is most obvious. It is impossible to confuse Shona praise poetry with the epinikian odes of Pindar, the Polynesian drama of Ngaru with European mystery plays or Vedic hymns with the psalms of David. This is because first impressions are based largely on language and techniques of expression. When allowances are made for this, similarities begin to appear, and the more striking they are, the greater the temptation must be to force them into a pattern. In matters of technique, the point is clear. Virgil borrowes from Homer and Cézanne from Monet, but the question whether Cézanne actually saw things differently because of Impressionism, or whether Virgil's own emotional response to his theme was coloured by Homer, is far more complex. The sedulous aperes of literature may merely recast what has gone before, but the pattern suggested by von Grunebaum indicates that in something as universal as the expression of love real creativity can be bound by convention. This is an intricate field and whatever theories are advanced cannot depend on generalisation, elliptical argument and insufficient evidence. The chief defect of these essays by von Grunebaum is the way in which points of this kind have been raised; the chief merit is that they have been raised at all.

Cambridge, March 1982

M. C. Lyons


The author of the present book has drawn her material from earlier Antar translations, such as Terrick Hamilton's,

Antar a Bedouin Romance, London, 1819-20, L. Marcel Devic's, Les aventures d'Antar, fils de Cheddad. Roman arabe des temps ante-islamiques. Paris, 1878, and Gustave Rouger, Le roman d'Antar, Paris, 1923, which is a selection from Devic's book rewritten by Rouger. A long familiarity with the Arab environment enabled the author to trace deviations from the Arabic original in that sense that the above mentioned translation, according to Diana Richmond 'suffered from an underlying feeling of European superiority, both towards the Bedouin and towards Islam ... The author has, therefore, "rewritten the stories entirely", and has aimed at re-creating their original fluency, richness and choric pride'. She cannot possibly have achieved this end without having had recourse to Arabic editions, but she does not say she had, nor does she say that she listened to a narrator of the stories or that she saw them performed. It is not possible therefore to assess the value of her work. The fact that she has made available these stories in a modern guise is worthy of our thanks. The volume, moreover, has been beautifully illustrated by Ulicra Lloyd.

Leiden, December 1981

C. N. H. LAND


This translation has been based on the two editions of the Arabic original of Nissim ibn Shāḥīn's storybook entitled Kitāb al-Faraj ba da sh-Shiddah (the Book of Relief after Adversity). The first edition of it appeared in 1933 (ed. Julian Obermann, New Haven 1933; Yale Oriental Series, Res. XVII). The editor had only a single, imperfect manuscript at his disposal, although he also made use of the well known and widely circulating medieval Hebrew version, entitled Ḥippūr me-ha-Yeshī'ah (A Composition About Comfort). Among the difficulties Julian Obermann had to cope with was the little experience one had in those times with Middle Arabic and Judeo-Arabic. Another incomplete manuscript of the Arabic text was published in 1965 by Shraga Abramson including other fragments which had come to light since. The translation of William Brenner is based on these two editions taking into account additional remarks made by scholars like Baneth, Hirschberg and Blau.

R. Nissim ben Yacob ben Nissim ibn Shāḥīn was born around 990 in Kairouan (North Africa) where his father was the Head of the Jewish Academy. Among his teachers was the well-known R. Hushiel who had come over from Italy. Like his father R. Nissim became a Talmudic scholar; among his works is one in which the legal material was systematically organised in order to make it more accessible.
to his students. As a scholar he became widely known in the Jewish world. However, his later years were troubled by unhappy events, especially due to the destructive invasion of the Banū Hilal and Banū Sulaymān Bedouins which made life in Kairouan insecure and which compelled the inhabitants to look for a safe home in one of the coastal towns. In these difficult years R. Nissim was supported financially by Samuel ha-Nagid, the wealthy patron of Jewish writers and scholars, who was minister and general at the court of the Zirid rulers of Granada, Hābūs and Badīs. R. Nissim died in Sīsah in July 1062, after having been gravely ill. The most important work of Rabbi Nissim was his collection of stories written in Judeo-Arabic called Kitāb al-Faraj ba'da sh-Shiddah (the exact title of the work was established by Shraga Abramson). As appears from the title of the work, the author refers to the Arabic "relief and adversity"-genre, which consisted in collections of stories in which God gives relief to someone who finds himself in a difficult situation. Maybe the idea of this genre of stories is based on Quran 65:verse 2, which says: "Whosoever fears God, He will appoint for him a way out, and will provide for him from whence he had not reckoned". The faraj ba'da-sh-shiddah genre was very popular among the Arabs. One of the most famous scholars to practise it was Abū 'Ali al-Muḥassan at-Tanukhī (938-994). But there were many others too. The stories also had influence on Persian and Turkish literature. The popularity of the Arabic genre of which at-Tanukhī was the classical representative can be ascribed to the universality of the theme. Man is seen as subjected to the vicissitudes of Fate. Sometimes by his own wit, sometimes by mere chance he is able to liberate himself from a difficult situation which has suddenly overtaken him. God and His religion are only mentioned in the first chapters. The other chapters of Tanūkhi's genre have a merely secular character. In European literature, e.g. in Boccaccio's Decameron we find stories of the same type: e.g. a man who averts his master's anger by a frank remark (in Italian: dire onestamente villania; cf. the story of Chibioso). The 'relief after adversity'-theme fits remarkably well with modern theories about the structure of stories, especially Bremond's theory (which is in fact an elaboration of Vladimir Propp's theory about fairy tales). According to Bremond a story consists in a development from a 'dégénération' in the beginning to an 'amélioration' or vice versa. The 'relief after adversity'-theme is one of the basic schemes within this narratology.

There is however a difference between the Arabic Faraj-genre and the Hebrew genre of R. Nissim. Significantly, the translator cites in his introduction (p. xxv note 32) the remark of Baneth (Qiryat Sepher II [1935] p. 350): "Instead of the Islamic and secular material which fills the Arabic works, he (Nissim) used only Jewish material, taken entirely, or to a great extent from the two Talmuds and various Midrashic texts". The translator makes a comparison between At-Tanukhī's and Nissim's faraj and comes to the conclusion that "al-Tanukhī's work is much larger and more varied in content and that it belongs to a specific type of literature, adab or courtly prose, whereas the Hībūr is primarily a work of moral and ethical content".

He then gives the division in chapters of the work of at-Tanukhī i.e. 1) what is mentioned in the Koran on the theme of relief after misfortune; 2) mention of this theme in the hadith; 3) about those whose deliverance was foretold by omens, and those who were relieved from distress by words or by prayer; 4) about those who averted a ruler's anger by a frank remark or by an admonition; 5) about those who came forth from imprisonment to freedom etc. up to 14] and concludes that "its orderly and predominantly literary approach ... has no parallel in R. Nissim's work" (p. xxviii).

"Although we can impose some sort of order on R. Nissim's themes, he himself seems to have been aware of his frequent digressions and his inability to maintain consistently the theme of relief after adversity" (ibid.)

Hirschberg, who made a translation in Modern Hebrew from the Arabic original of Nissim ben Jacob ibn Shāhīn's Hībūr Yafeh me-ha-Yeshā'ah (Sifriyyat Meqorot, 15, transl. H. Z. Hirschberg, Jerusalem 5714/1953), tried to give some outline of the contents (e.f. 1) chapter 1-10 deal with the theme of God as a righteous judge, no matter how mysterious His ways may seem to men. Chapters 8-10 have the subtheme of reward given for even the slightest of good deeds; 2) chapters 11-13 — first part —, deal with good and bad women and their effect upon their husbands; 3) chapters 13 — second part — 14 deal with the duty of studying Torah and with the qualities of scholars etc. up to 8]). It is clear that in R. Nissim's work the connection with the original Faraj-idea is only slight. He used the faraj-genre only as a point of departure. Maybe we should understand the title in another way: R. Nissim's book gives comfort to the readers who are suffering from a heartbreak due to the loss of a relative. In the prologue we read (transl. W. M. Brinner): "My lord and friend ( ), you have complained to me in your gracious letter about the soul's break, spirit's grief and heart's sorrow that have befallen you upon the death of your son. May God requite you and grant you [other] sons worthy of long life. You mentioned in your letter that it is your desire to read a book which might relieve you, cheer your heart, and remove your grief and the distress of your sorrow. ( ) I have hereby compiled with your request ... " Also in the Geniza Correspondence we find some evidence of this function of Nissim's faraj-tales. In an appendix to the Introduction made by S.D. Goitein we read (p. xxxi): "In a long letter of consolation, sent by a man named Barakat ( ) to his sister Rayyisah ( ) on the occasion of the death of their mother, he entreats her not to mourn excessively. He advises her to read the book of Ecclesiastes and sends her al-Faraj ba'da al-Shiddah with the recommendation that she study it. Obviously he was confident that the reading of this book would soothe the mind of his disconsolate sister". From this we may conclude that the Kitāb al-Faraj served as a consolation for people who had to mourn a loss.

The importance of this Judaeo-Arabic storybook lies in the fact that it opened a new era in the publication of Hebrew tales and legends directly inspired by (or even translated from) Arabic literature. Especially the Hebrew translation of the book, Hībūr Yafeh had a wide diffusion. A century after Nissim's death began to appear a stream of collections of stories, from among which Ibn Zabārāh's Book of Delight (sepher ha-Shashim) was the most important.

To give an idea of the kind of stories Nissim ibn Shāhīn's
book contains, we will quote some passages of a misogynic story from it, which Ibn Zabarah included in his Book of Delight. The importance of the story lies in the fact that from the XIIth century on in Andalusian and Provençal Hebrew maqāmah-literature a strong misogynic tendency appears, which has its sequel in mediaeval French and Spanish literature. It must be said however, that in the story books of Nissim ibn Shāhin and Ibn Zabarah stories about wise and faithful women do occur as well, so that misogynic stories and stories in praise of women are more or less equally balanced with each other. One of the misogynic stories runs as follows: King Solomon (in Ibn Zabarah’s version: “a king of the Arabs”) is gathered with his wise men (the Sages of Sanhedrin). Against the protests of his sages he wants to prove that the Ecclesiastic is right in saying that there is no good woman to be found. He thereupon proves this by inviting a man to his court whose wife has a comely appearance. When he appears, he is ordered to marry the king’s daughter after having killed his wife and having brought her head to the king in the morning. The man however, cannot bear to kill her because she is so beautiful and because she is the mother of his little children, although he has a deep internal struggle. After having approached his wife to cut off her head, the storyteller says: (translation Brinner, p. 56)

“But when he uncovered her, he found her sleeping, with the younger child lying on her chest and nursing at her breast, while the other child rested his head on her shoulder. He then resumed addressing himself, saying: “O my soul, how can I kill this wife of mine as well as my children, and thus lose both this world and the next?” Whereupon he sheathed his sword, saying: “The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan! (Zech. 3:2)”. But then once again he reverted to his thought and remembered the king’s promises, so he arose once more, drew his sword, and approached [her], and found her hair loose and shading the younger child. Again he said: “By God, I will do nothing of the kind. My God bless neither the king’s daughter nor her riches!” So he sheathed his sword [a second time] and slept until the break of dawn, when behold the king’s messengers were at his door. They take him to the king who let him go after he has explained his attitude.

Several days later the king asks for the man’s wife. When she has come, he tells her that she should marry him after having killed her husband. But the king gives her deliberately a soft lead sword [Arabic qasdir, rev.], with which, though it looks like an iron sword, it is impossible to execute any murderous design. She goes to her house and intends to execute the king’s order without any internal struggle. She keeps the sword hidden in her house. The storyteller tells us the following about how she was going to perform the deed. (translation W. M. Brinner, p. 57):

“When her husband came in the evening, she met him with a deceitful heart, kissed his eyes and his head, and asked him, “My lord, what has kept you until now?” He replied, “Some business that came my way” and sat down, happy and at ease, while they ate. She then said, “Master, I would like to drink with you to night, so that we might have some pleasure and enjoyments”, to which he replied, “I grant your request and your desire”. So they drank and enjoyed themselves, while she pined him with drink until he fell drunken upon his couch and slept. She then seized the sword and struck him with it, secure and trusting in what the king had told her, but the husband was awakened by the violence of the blow, to find her standing over him with the drawn sword in her hand. When she saw that he was awake and that the blow had not affected him at all, she fell to the ground in a faint. He rose to her [assistance] and said to her, “What made you do this?” whereupon she told him the whole story and what had passed between her and the king. The next morning they were taken to the king and the king ordered them to tell what has happened to them in the presence of the Sages. Thus the king has proven the truth of Ecc. 7:28 which is rendered in Arabic as: “I have not found a woman who is as perfect as she should be.”

Thus every story is concluded by a Bible-text: the stories in which the truth-fulness of women is proved, are confirmed by Proverbs 18:22: ‘Who so findeth a wife, findeth a great good, and obtaineth favor of the Lord’. For bad women is also used another quotation from Ecclesiastes: ‘And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets [Eccl. 7:26a]’. In a rather difficult passage which follows the above-mentioned story, the storyteller remarks that “woman” in the above-mentioned passages of the Bible might well be understood in the metaphorical sense. (p. 58). So the “good woman” can be explained as the Torah, while the “bad woman” can be explained as Hell (Gehenna). After this excursion the storyteller gives us sentences and examples from the Sages. They spoke about a bad woman, the amount of whose marriage-writ is large” (Arabic in the text, quoted from the Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 63a-b. Rev.) and “She has ready for him both the dining tray and her mouth” (ibidem).

The anecdotes about sages which follow, remind one of similar misogynic anecdotes about Socrates and other Greek wise men. The protagonists are here Jewish Ge’onim (Heads of the Babylonian Academies). One of these anecdotes we could not refrain from quoting: (translation Brinner, p. 59):

“Some of the Sages were afflicted with wives of unsavory natural and moral qualities. Among them was Rab, whose wife contradicted everything he commanded her and everything he said to her. If he told her, “Cook small peas” She would cook lentils; and if he told her, “Cook lentils”, she would cook small peas. When his son Hiyya grew up and saw her contradicting his father in everything he said to her, he would, when his father told him, “Ask your mother to prepare lentils for us”, say to her, “My lord tells you to cook small peas”, whereupon she would cook lentils, as his father had desired; and similarly everything that Rab would request him to ask her to prepare, he would tell her the opposite thereof, so that in contradicting his words she would in fact be doing what his father wished. One day Rab said to him, “My son, I see that your mother’s disposition has improved, and her contrari­ness has been mended”. He replied, “By your head, my lord, her nature has not changed, nor has she turned from her [former] ways. It is only that I tell her, the opposite of what you say, so that as she turns your words around, she prepares what you wish”. Whereat his father said to him, “Your thoughtfulness and intelligence are admirable, and I rejoice at your insight, for this is what is meant by the saying: ‘Out of your own loins comes forth he who teaches you wisdom’. However do not continue to do
The book at hand contains a general introduction followed by three parts. In his introduction the author discusses the manuscripts containing the Kitāb al-Qarāštūn, the known translations and the origin of the treatise. The first part of the book is divided into two sections: the first places Tābit’s work within the context of other works on mechanics known from antiquity and concludes with a genealogical chart relating these with one another. The author puts forward arguments that the widely popular treatise De canono is posterior to the work of Tābit. The second section is devoted to a “genealogical study” of the propositions found in the work of Tābit. The second part of the book gives an “analytical commentary” of the treatise and the third part contains the Arabic text with French translation on opposite pages, followed by critical notes, an Arabic-French glossary, a short bibliography, and an author index.

E. Wiedemann has edited a German translation “Die Schrift über den Qarafstun” in Bibliotheca Mathematica, Vol. 12 (1911-12), pp. 21-39. For this translation he used a manuscript which was in Beirut. At that time there was also a copy of the work in Berlin (MS No. 6023). Both manuscripts are lost now. The Arabic text is therefore based on the only known manuscript from the India Office (London, MS 767, VII, fols. 198-208) and on the translation of Wiedemann, which the author used to complete some of the lacunae found in the manuscript. Dr. Jaouiche has earned the gratitude of students of both Islamic science and of history of mechanics for making available the text in its original language. A greater merit might be the fact that he has opened to question several conceptions which were until then generally accepted.

Venlo, January 1982

H. L. L. BUSARD

Travels in Arabia

