ARABICA


This book was originally the result of Behzadi’s “Habilita-
tion” (a German examination to become a professor at a Ger-
man university) which took place in 2004 at the Faculty of
Humanities of the University of Göttingen. The author inves-
tigates Arabic medieval linguistics by Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Bahr al-Kinnānī al-Fuquāmī al-Ǧāḥīz, who lived from 776/7 to 868 in Basra and Baghdad, being one of the most prolific Arab polygraphs who not only compiled the wisdom of oth-
ers but sometimes also gave expression to his own original
ideas. After the introduction (the first chapter), the second
chapter is devoted to the circumstances of Ḥāẓiz as for
instance the history of his time with its periods and theo-
logical discourses, and its links with political power. The
scientific discipline of the Arabic language is discussed:
poetic mastery, justification of linguistic criticism, criteria for judgement of value, grammar, and Koran commentary. At the end of the second chapter the Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-Tabyīn (Book of Eloquence), its formal structure, and the order of its material and its style, is discussed.

The third chapter deals with finding the best expression, the themes or meanings, the signs for it, and how a certain concept can be best translated. Sections are devoted to word sound (laflat), gestures (what we would call in the present time “body language”, AS) (tiṣāra), calculation (aqīd), scripture (kāṭīf), and signification by its existence (Zeichenhaftigkeit des Seins, sometimes translated into English as “contextual indicators”, AS) (nisba). Then the qualities of speech, the art of the reciting or having a speech, eloquence (balāla), the correct high speech (fiṣṭāha), conciseness (ṣyāsa); and silence (aṣ-sant) are dealt with. Follows a section about language defects, like inability to speak and faultiness (iyiy), dialect and spoken vernacular language (laftan), and also the relation between signifier and signified. The special and unique place of the Arab language, and the role of the Bedouins is also dealt with.

The author recapitulates Jāhiz’s linguistic thoughts as follows. The concept of bayān must be seen in relation to human observation. In Jāhiz’s system, the human being can grasp the reality in which he exists only by means of signs which refer to reality. He orientates himself principally with the help of language which God gave him the disposal of. The task of the human being is to reinstall the lost uniformity of understanding between signified things and signifiers. At the same time there is always the danger to persevere in ambiguity while not being aware of it. A man wants to have real knowledge. Vanity and stupidity is at the basis of one’s inability to judge in a good manner. The second dimension of expressing yourself clearly (bayān) is related to the communication between men. According to Jāhiz it is one’s duty to use the richness of the communication material given at our disposal by God. Jāhiz encompasses a large spectre in his consideration of the language. The Arabic language is for him the only language in which the required unequivocal clearness can be produced. His regret is mainly about the fact that apparently only a few people are aware of the relatedness between language and world knowledge. So Jāhiz devotes a chapter to grammatical faults and errors, difficulties of articulation, and the phenomenon of the grammatically and phonologically falsified and worn out vernaculars. Word play and word jokes are also treated, and also the exercises to say something briefly and concisely. When looking in different manners for uniformity of meaning — in grammar, stylistics and rhetoric — and also in the non-verbal domain, Jāhiz bluntly refutes some phenomena of use of the language, especially brainless talk and deviation from pure high Arabic — his essential criterion being the measurability and uniformity and especially the suitable clearness of expression which needs no further explanation. He has some propositions how to reach this clearness of expression. He refuses to come with a canon of allowed style figures and beautiful wordings. Not the noble, aesthetic beauty only is to be endeavoured for, but a correspondence between sign and signified.

In his Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-Tabyīn Jāhiz speaks about the relation between the defective and the perfect. This point is also approached in the Kitāb al-Hayawān (Book of Animals) about the multiplicity of creation and stages linked to world hierarchy. Jāhiz sees in the world good and bad things, pleasant and horrible things, he considers the mix of these anti-theic ingredients as a successful principle of world arrangement, as a prelude of the existence of the Hereafter. When evil (al-sharr) would be unmixed, the creation would perish. And if there would be only good (kayr), examination was not necessary, and reasons for reflection (fikra) were cut off. Without reflection and wisdom (fikra), and without the possibility to choose (al-takyyīr), disappears the virtue of distinction (al-tamyiz). Then there would be no verification (tātābbat), time schedule (tawaqqut), eagerness to learn (ta’āllum) and science (‘ilm) anymore. One would not know how to increase clarity (tabayyun). There was not anymore rivalling to find the best possible expression (al-bayān). The quest for the most adequate sign for the visible and observable things, the action of distinction and denomination, of erring and correcting is both symbol and point of culmination of the human existence. Although Jāhiz allows other systems of signs (e.g. language of the animals or language of irrational peoples), the language of the humans and especially the Arabs has a special relationship with the Creator of the world. The human being is a kind of microcosm (al-‘ilam al-aṣ-ṣāqīr) in which all nuances of creation are found, and because of which heaven and earth are created and are subordinated to him. The human being is considered a microcosm because he can imitate everything with his hand and also imitate sounds with his mouth and the total of all parts is to be found in him. A lot of contrastive things follow: doubt versus certainty etc. “Wherefore God has given to human beings intellect (aqīd) if not for thinking (taqīd)? Human beings should know their incapacity and shortcomings in all humility.

According to Behzadi, Jāhiz’s concept of understanding lies in an undisturbed equivalence of signifier and signified. He is conscious of the fragility of communication among humans as well as communication of mankind with God. The whole creation is a sign of God, and man is called to decipher it.

The fourth chapter is about the reception of Jāhiz. Here Abū Hilal al-‘Askārī (d. 1005) and ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078), authors of rhetorical works, are mentioned and some passages of their work that recall Jāhiz’s opinions are analyzed and compared. Jurjānī’s concept of nasrī (pp. 142 ff.) which can be linked to modern literary theory is also found in al-Jāhiz’s theories. They tried both to find the circumstances in which signifier and signified, sound and meaning, laft and ma’ānī, come together and how the human speaker can reach this point. Jāhiz sometimes gives human partners the responsibility to reach successful communication with each other, while Jurjānī comes to a somewhat diffuse inspiration by which the intention of the speaker meets the right expression and the right image is met by the well chosen word.

The fifth chapter gives the conclusions about Jāhiz and the role of early Arabic linguistic and literary theory in general. Here views on language, and its role in communication, are discussed. Those who have the gift of the language, should do their utmost to develop this gift. We dispose of examples of khatāb (sermons, orations) to be studied, documented and conserved from the Arabic tradition by Jāhiz, such as sermons by the prophet Muhammad, Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Ali. As Jāhiz seems to suggest, Muhammad would have had all the capacities to exercise the complete use of the language,
though by his own choice not using all his resources. With modern theories of semiotics and linguistics in mind, we should recognize Jähz’s adherence to a theory of signs, with his endeavour of linguistic perfection and his insights in the nature of communication. Behzadi’s study wants to “elucidate an aspect of the vivid debates on the Arabic language in the 9th century and analyse to what extent people were thinking in an unconventional way and tried at the same time not to harm the consensus of the young Islamic community.” (p. 172)

The book ends with an English summary (pp. 173-175), abbreviations of much quoted titles (p. 176), a bibliography (pp. 177-182) and an index of words and names (pp. 183-186).

We are grateful for Behzadi’s analysis of Jähz’s thoughts. This book is well organized, well written, and presents Jähz’s theory in a clear way. The texts used are quoted according to their best available editions. The author is well versed in the secondary literature, which she quotes when needed. Her presentation makes consultation easy for non-specialists, such as cultural historians and general linguists. She has an excellent knowledge of the cultural climate of the time and the debate in Jähz’s time. Her interpretations are reliable and based on firm evidence. We hope this work will stimulate further research on the theoretical conceptions of Jähz, whose texts were read by most of us mainly because of their entertainment and the funny anecdotes they contain echoing Arabic cultural life of the early Middle Ages.

University Amsterdam, April 2010 Arie SCHIPPERS

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This book is a model German dissertation, since the contents of the book about the love poetry of the well-known early Arabic poet Jamil, lover of Buthayna, represent a format which can easily be repeated in the same manner in studies on the poetry of other Arabic poets. Pages in Arabic from Isbahâni’s Kitâb al-Aghânî and Ibn Khallikân’s Biographic Dictionary which deal with the Akhâbar (biographic notes) of the poet Jamil Buthayna are reproduced at the end of the book. The author has translated these two biographic sections.

The book starts with quoting the famous poetry line by Heinrich Heine mentioned by Stendhal in his De l’amour, where the characteristics of ‘Udhrâte love are listed. The tribe ‘Udhrah is referred to by him as “Asra welcher sterben wenn sie lieben”, an expression also quoted by Francesco Gabrieli in his Storia della letteratura araba (Firenze, Milano 1967). The author, however, comes to the conclusion that Jamil was not really a characteristic ‘Udhrite poet. After having introduced the medieval Arabic biographical sources and the modern editions of Jamil’s poetry, among which the editions of the poet by Francesco Gabrieli, Jagonak comments upon the tradition chains and musical notations, and translates and comments both the sections from the Aghânî and from Ibn Khallikân’s biographical work.

He deals also with the characteristics of Jamil’s poetry: verse structure and language, enjambment, and the structuring of a poem. Interesting is that he discusses the relationship between nasib and ghazal (p. 184), a subject amply dealt with by Thomas Bauer’s Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts (Wiesbaden, 1998) based upon the western distinction nasibghazal. According to Bauer, the ghazal developed from the nasib, but Jagonak is of the opinion that in Jamil’sghazal poetry the song form is so various and many-sided that one can see in it rather an independent longer existing tradition than an example of a recently established type (p. 187). Jamil’s poetry can not serve as support for the thesis that the Umayyad ghazal goes exclusively back to the nasib.

Also the themes of Jamil’s poetry are discussed. He does not tell us about unrequited love like ‘Udhrâte love normally is, but he often looks back on really consummated love affairs. His poems are often examples of Hijâzû love poetry. On p. 189 Jagonak does not agree with the concept of secrecy as defined by Wagner: according to Jagonak the lover did not submit himself voluntarily to this as a kind of virtue. Another remark by Wagner (p. 190) is about the pleasure or satisfaction (ridâ) with the distance of the beloved. However, Jagonak is unsatisfied with this opinion because the time of separation and hardships was felt as thoroughly painful and exhausting for the poet-lover. And he also quotes some lines about the thinness and meagreness of the poet-lover.

The author’s conclusion is that Jamil’s poetry shows in so many places parallels with Hijâzû love poetry that one can not speak of only sporadic borrowings of some motifs by Jamil from it. One can ask oneself how far the present distinction between Hijâzû and ‘Udhrâte love poetry can be maintained in the present form. Perhaps the secondary literature about Jamil has dominated in ascribing ‘Udhrâte characteristics to his poems. The present book presents the now available source materials to shed more light on Jamil’s poetry and reduces its so-called ‘Udhrâte character to normal Hijâzû proportions. The book is useful as a work of reference for this and other early Arabic love poets.

The book contains a bibliography (pp. 197-200), an index of rhyme words (pp. 206) and an appendix with the relevant Arabic texts (76 pp).

University Amsterdam, April 2010 Arie SCHIPPERS

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The London based Institute for Ismaili Studies has taken the laudable initiative to publish a critical edition with translation and commentary of the whole of the Rasâ’il Ikhwân al-Ṣafâ‘.
The book under review, the volume edited by Nader El-Bizri, is intended as an introduction to the project. The contributions, all by leading specialists, discuss various topics connected to the Pure Brethren and their Rasāʾil. Poonawala about the need for a critical edition; de Callataÿ about the classification of knowledge in the Rasāʾil; Hamdani about arguments for an earlier dating than is usually assumed; Baffioni about the scope of the ideas presented in the Rasāʾil; Netton about their role in the history of ideas; Michot about Ibn Taymiyya’s views on the İkhwān-al-Ṣafā; El-Bizri about the parts on arithmetic and geometry; Wright about music and musicology; Goodman about The Case of the Animals. The volume starts with a useful and clear prologue by El-Bizri himself, which also includes a synopsis of each chapter. El-Bizri also contributed a clear and factual article on the way Ibn Taymiyya’s views on the İkhwān-al-Ṣafā are connected to the Ismailis, another point of discussion for instance her previous article on quotations of Nicomachus of Gerasa in the Rasāʾil. Goodman translated Epistle 22, 23, 24 (Dieterici’s translations), 25 (Dieterici’s translations and editions were mentioned in the bibliography). The volume also contains a selective bibliography, which basically contains the publications referred to in the various contributions and is not an attempt to present an exhaustive bibliography on the İkhwān-al-Ṣafā. It struck me, by the way, that none of Fuat Sezgin’s reprints (1999) of studies on the İkhwān-al-Ṣafā and of Dieterici’s translations and editions were mentioned in the bibliography. The 9th-century Arabic translation of the İkhwān-al-Ṣafā has recently (2009) been photographically reprinted: Bibliotheca Arabicorum Orientalium, series Islamic: Philosophy, vols. 20 and 21 (articles); 22, 23, 24 (Dieterici’s translations), 25 (Dieterici’s edition and translation of The Case of the Animals, plus his vocabulary to the text). It is true, of course, that these reprints appeared in small numbers, often not more than eighty copies, and were sometimes quickly sold out.

The volume thus presents an idea of the state of the art in this field, and contains some excellent articles. Godefroy de Callataÿ carefully compares the classification of the sciences as it is presented in the Rasāʾil with the actual arrangement of the chapters, and discusses the implications which this may have for the dating of the Rasāʾil. Michot’s article on Ibn Taymiyya and his views on the İkhwān-al-Ṣafā is full of fascinating new material, and equally clear and useful is Owen Wright’s analysis of the chapter on music.

Carmela Baffioni contributed a useful and insightful article about the scope of ideas presented in the Rasāʾil, in which she makes ample use of her own previously published work. She is one of the most knowledgeable specialists on the İkhwān-al-Ṣafā and has, over the past two decades, published a vast number of books and articles on the subject. The İkhwān’s extensive use of Greek sources has got special attention in her work.

In this contribution, ‘The Scope of the Rasāʾil İkhwān-al-Ṣafā’, she admirably tackles, among other things, one of the most fundamental issues in the discussion about the İkhwān, namely the ‘extreme variety (and often inconsistency)’ of the ideas found in the Rasāʾil. She argues that the way in which the İkhwān systemically reworked the Greek philosophical heritage to fit in with their aims was ‘anything but inconsistent’. Their aims were very different from those of the Ancients. They saw philosophy as a way to salvation, and consequently approached the Greek heritage from a religious point of view. She also emphasizes the philological accuracy with which they reproduced their Greek sources, a topic on which she is eminently suited to give evidence (see for instance her previous article on quotations of Nicomachus of Gerasa in the Rasāʾil). Baffioni strongly advocates, with ample reference to the Rasāʾil, the view that the İkhwān are connected to the Ismailis, another point of discussion among scholars. Epistle 31, says Baffioni, contains the core of their Ismaili commitment. Maybe speaking, as she does, (p. 120) about their ‘unwavering ‘Alid devotion’ is a bit strong, given the İkhwān’s positive attitude towards the caliph ‘Uthmān and to ‘A’isha; the suggestion has of course been made that these were due to taqiyya, but I do not find this convincing.

Just a remark: on p. 107, speaking about the transmission of Aristotle’s zoological works, Baffioni states that the zoological parts of the Corpus Aristotelicum reached the Arabs in abridged form, with the exception of De Partibus and De Generatione Animalium. These two works, however, together with the Historia Animalium, circulated in the Arab world as one book under the title De Animalibus, just as in late antiquity and in the medieval European tradition; there is no question of abbreviation. The 9th-century Arabic translation of De Animalibus, edited in separate volumes, has been available to scholarship since the 1970-s.

Baffioni’s contribution brings into focus how the frequent inconsistency of what is said in the Rasāʾil may lead to widely divergent views among scholars. One such issue is brought forward in Hamdani’s contribution: this is his early dating of the Rasāʾil -before 905- against the majority opinion that they were composed between 961 and 980. As stated in the volume, Hamdani’s article is an updated version of an earlier (JSS, 1984) article about this matter.

Of course, contributors make ample use of their previous publications on the subject. This is fine and often useful for the reader, especially in an introductory volume such as this. In such cases, by the way, it would be helpful to the reader if authors referred to the text of the Rasāʾil itself instead of to their own publications for source references. One should also be careful, especially in these days of copypasting, that articles not simply rehash old and easily accessible material: Netton’s contribution is a case in point. It largely consists of material (often in the form of extensive quotations) from his Muslim Neoplatonists (1982), plus some bits from his Allah Transcendent and a few additional publications. The attempt to discuss the ‘encyclopaedic’ aspect of the Rasāʾil within the wider framework of later European encyclopaedias does not add much, and offers no new insights.


In the first chapter of the volume, Poonawala argues the need for a scholarly edition and translation of the Rasāʾil, including a survey of three printed editions of the complete text: Bombay 1887-9 (this is the date Poonawala gives, but the edition itself gives 1888-9), Cairo 1928, Beirut 1957, and their relation to extant manuscripts. The ‘Arif Tāmir edition of 1995 is not included in the discussion.
The current situation as to editions of the Rasâ’il is indeed far from satisfactory. In addition to what is said in the various chapters and the bibliography, I may summarize it here: printed editions start with partial editions, namely the Calcutta edition (1812) of The Case of the Animals against Man (title: Tuḥfat Iskhwân-ūs-Sūfâ), which forms part of the 22nd Risâla. Friedrich Dieterici in 1879 also published the Arabic text of the Case of the Animals, and to him comes the credit of editing, for the first time, a substantial part of the Arabic text (635 pp.) of the Rasâ’il, duly indicating the MSS which he used: Die Abhandlungen der Iskhwân es-Safî in Auswahl. Zum ersten Mal aus arabischen Handschriften herausgegeben. Leipzig 1883-1886.

The reason why I mention Dieterici’s work explicitly is that I could not find it among the editions, partial editions and translations of the Rasâ’il that are listed in the bibliography of the present volume, and his text editions seem to have been overlooked in the Prologue (p. 20), where reference is only made to his publications that appeared between 1861 and 1872: these, however, are just his translations of parts of the Rasâ’il and the edition of the Arabic text of The Case of the Animals.

The omission, I am afraid, may be part of a wider problem, that maybe should receive attention in connection with the project as a whole. This is that some of the contributors hardly seem inclined to use any other than English secondary literature, and German literature is especially poorly represented. It is hard to see how one can work adequately in Islamic philosophy, and especially the Iskhwân al-Safî, without access to German, French (Marquet, Zghal Hatem) and (Baffioni!) Italian literature, however hard this may be on scholarship. As to German, Diwald’s monumental translation of Part III of the Rasâ’il, with extensive commentary, study of the sources and references to the different manuscripts, is a case in point. It is duly mentioned by Poonawala (p. 34), but otherwise hardly makes an appearance in this volume: de Callataÿ (p. 58) and Hamdani (p. 84) simply refer to it as an edition (which it isn’t!), and only Baffioni includes it in one of her arguments (p. 103 n. 5).

As to Dieterici, anyway, scholars embarking on a critical edition of the Rasâ’il certainly should not deny themselves the pleasure of consulting his work, if only for the fun of reading his views on the editing problems. I venture here to translate the relevant passage (pp. XVII-XVIII of his introduction to the 1883-1886 edition):

‘This edition is based on Cod. Paris. 1005. I have collated it with the Vienna cod. 1 and the cod. Oxford, listed under Mathesis Marsch. 189 (……). The innumerable textual variants in the various MSS, the obvious confusion in the sentences that again and again start with “Know”, and the frequent lacunae could have added about ten more sheets to this book. For material reasons, this is impossible. We need not regret this too much; in the editiones principes of Arabic literature it is the philological skill of the editor that counts, i.e. his sure way of dealing with the manuscripts and putting the meaning together in case of unclear or defective writing, and the philological awareness of individual readings.

The manuscripts that we have in Europe are mostly made by ignorant professional copyists. Not much scholarly knowledge and trustworthiness can be found there. Since how long already has national education in the East faded away! There an unskilled (stumper) Oriental sits on a street corner, copying on his knee the works of scholarship. He daily has to produce two quires (Hefte) to earn his livelihood. Cheap manuscripts he has to produce. Not even the vaguest notion there of scholarship or accuracy, and then we are obliged to reproduce carefully in print all the mistakes that he makes from carelessness and lack of understanding!’

Dieterici’s partial edition was followed by the editions of the complete text mentioned by Poonawala and by the bibliography of the present volume: the Bombay edition (1888-9), now, by the way, available on the Internet, http://www.antiochgate.com/index.htm, the Cairo edition of 1928, the Beirut one of 1957 and its reprints, and ‘Arif Tâmir’s Beirut edition of 1995. None of these editions, as Poonawala pointed out, made clear on which MSS or other text witnesses the edition was based (as opposed to Dieterici, we may emphasize again). So the need for a critical edition of the Rasâ’il is indeed obvious, and we eagerly await the volumes that will be forthcoming.

Leiden, March 2010

Remke Kruk

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In the field of oral literature and particularly in the field of folktale studies tale-type indexes and motif indexes play a crucial role. A tale-type can be defined as the full narrative that may recur cross-culturally in variants and subvariants, whereas a motif denotes one of the details out of which narratives are composed. Both tale-type and motif are the classificatory concepts by means of which the identification and comparison of tales is undertaken.

In 2004 two important works concerning the identification of tale-types were published, one covering European folktales, the other covering the folktales of the Arab world. Hans-Jörg Uther (University of Duisburg-Essen) published an enlarged and drastically updated version of the famous Aarne-Thompson Tale-Type Index. Though focussing mainly on folktales from European traditions, it should be shortly mentioned here because of its importance for folktales research of the Arab world. [Hans-Jörg Uther, The Types of International Folktales. A Classification and Bibliography, FF Communications edited for the Folklore Fellows by Satu Aapo, Hermann Bausinger, Martha Blache, Alan Dundes, Anne-Lena Siikala, Part I (= Vol. CXXXIII, No. 284), Part II (= Vol. CXXXIV, No. 285), Part III (= Vol. CXXXV, No. 286), Academia Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki 2004.]

The second book is the tale-type index published by Hasan El-Shamy, Types of the Folktale in the Arab World. Hasan El-Shamy, professor of Folklore at the department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures and African Studies at Indiana University and a famous scholar in the field, also published a motif-index entitled Folk Traditions of the Arab World. A Guide to Motif Classification (Indiana University Press, 1995).

In Types of the Folktale in the Arab World El-Shamy presents a preliminary analysis of folktales found in the Arab world, including folktales from traditions of population groups such as Kurds, Berbers, Nubians and others.
Like Uther, El-Shamy used the ground pattern of the Aarne-Thompson tale-type classification for his section “Types of the Folktale in the Arab world” (pp. 1-977). This is also the most impressive part of the book because of the wealth of well-organised information presented. It is followed by a section called “Bibliography and Other Sources”, a section called “Register of Tale-Types” and a section called “Register of Motifs”. The book is concluded by an “Index of Authors and Sources”, a “Register of Countries” and a “Tale-type subject index”, all three valuable tools by means of which the reader can tackle the information given in the section “Tale Type classification”.

Two points will help to understand the importance of El-Shamy’s work: 1. Before the publication of El-Shamy’s work, systematic classifications of folktales in the Arab world were virtually lacking (apart from a few small scale attempts such as the one by Ursula Novak, Beiträge zur Typology des arabischen Volksmärchens, doctoral dissertation, Freiburg, 1969). Therefore El-Shamy’s work can be said to be the first to fill in this gap. 2. The academic study of folktale traditions in the Arab world or, to put it more generally, of oral literature in the spoken forms of languages in the Middle East, suffers from neglect. Universities and other academic institutions seem to encourage and defend the study of written forms of literature in the Arab world almost exclusively and usually allow but limited space for the study of oral literature, the spoken or sung artistic expression of speakers of a language. It is safe to say that, also in this respect, El-Shamy’s work contributes greatly to the emancipation of the academic study of folktale traditions in the Arab World.

Leiden University, May 2010

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