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The author of this book on the poetry of the Hudhaylīte poet Abū Saḥr (seventh century CE) has a Russian, USA
and German academic background: he lists several Russian
studies in his bibliography, and mentions in his acknowl-
edgements Wadad al-Qadi, professor of Arabic at Chicago
University at that time, who stimulated him to begin this
research in 2002, while having submitted his dissertation in
Germany (Freie Universität Berlin) with Renate Jacobi in
2005/2006. Other professors from Germany were helpful to
him such as Angelika Neuwirth, Tilman Seidensticker, and
Rotraud Wieland.

The book contains the text of the poems by Abū Saḥr
with Arabic text, and translation into German with remarks,
preceded by a thematic analysis of their contents. The older
editions were from long ago such as J. Wellhausen's Letzter
Teil der Lieder der Hudhailiten, Berlin 1884, and ZDMG 39,
pp. 411-480, and the Neue Hudailiten-Diwane by J. Hell
(Hannover 1926; Leipzig 1936). The author uses for his
study A.A. Farrāj and M.M. Shākirí, Sharh aslıl al-Hudhali-
iyyīn, Cairo 1965, vol. 2, pp. 915-976 (p. 29). I wonder what
the relation is between this edition and the Diwān al-Hudhali-
iyyīn, also edited in Cairo 1965 in two volumes.

The book starts (Chapter One: Introduction, pp. 11 ff.)
with a scholarly literary sketch of the characteristics of old
Arabic poetry, in which conventionality played an important
role, and where we have to distinguish the more individual-
istic authorship from the collective poetics. Important is also
to distinguish between reality and fiction. In this sketch the
life and works of Abū Saḥr al-Hudhailī are considered. The
author is of the opinion that early Islamic poetry has a tran-
sitional character, one finds in it conventional as well as
innovative themes, and ancient Arabic as well as Islamic
ideas. This poetry would be a product of cultural change and
would be visible in the overlaps of ancient and Islamic world
views in it (pp. 26-27). Partly those world views intermingle,
partly they stand next to each other. One has to take into
account the motivation of the poet and his psychology, and
to try continuously to throw a glance 'behind the coulisses'.
This can be done by looking at the artistic form as such and
with the help of a factual content analysis.

The changes of the structure and motives in the poetry of
Abū Saḥr are considered in the second chapter according
to the schemes and methods of Renate Jacobi's works (p. 35).
After some preliminary remarks the nasib in old Arabic
poetry is discussed, focusing on its structure in Abū Saḥr's
poetry. It starts of course with the allāl motives and espe-
pecially how they developed within Abū Saḥr's poetry, nasib
as well as ghazal. Other clusters of motives belonging to
nasib or ghazal comprise the morning of separation, and the
tayf al-khāyāl (the appearance of the phantom of the
beloved). There are also nasibs without special frame
motives, but with only reflections of the poet. The contents of
a nasib consist often of the lover's grief, his complaints
about the deceit of the beloved, and the lover who realizes
that he is becoming older. The description of the beloved
is dwelt upon in the nasib as well as the ghazal. Description
of episodes of the love affair and other narrative parts are
almost lacking in Abū Saḥr's poetry, there remain only
short indications.

The author goes deeply into the difference between nasib
(love introduction of the ode) and the new emerging genre
of ghazal (independent love poetry). The transition between
nasib and madih (laudatory part) in the qasīdas is amply
discussed, including the relationship between madīh and
elegiac poetry. On p. 82 the author says about the contents
of the madīh: "Abū Saḥr does not manifest himself as an
ancient Arabic tribal poet and is even prepared to deny his
ties with the tribe in favor of his political loyalty" (cf. poem
XIII, 14-16). From this appears the new social conscience
in early Islamic society which correlates immediately with a
changed consciousness of the Arabs of the time. Ancient
tribal ties are loosened not only from outside by new political
leagues, but also from inside, by the changing consciousness
of the individual. A confirmation for this is the fact that
the overcoming of the old tribal ethics is brought to expression
not only in the politically motivated laudatory poetry, but
also in the love poetry of the Umayyad period, whose char-
nacteristics are very personal. He gives some examples of love
poetry in which the affairs of the beloved are placed above
tribal affairs (cf. poem XII: 1; and poem XVII: 24-25).

Now follow chapters on the individual (pp. 82 ff.), Fate
(pp. 105 ff.) and Time (pp. 129 ff.), because these three sub-
jects have undergone a change from pre-Islamic society into
Islamic society which entails also a change of consciousness.
The author speaks of "a crisis of identity of the Arabs in
early Islamic society, which led to a deepening of the con-
sciousness of the individual." (p. 87).

In the chapter on the individual the ethnic and cultural
social development are considered, in connection with the
tribal society in Central and North Arabia, and also the early
Islamic state is discussed. "The new heroes do not try any
more to respond at the expectations of the collectivity, but
go their own way." (p. 88).

The author dwells upon the place of ghazal in this society
and the change of the idea of love. Love is analyzed as an
individual relationship. "The possibility to make love poems
without the description of the beloved is a proof that love is
not reduced anymore to the pleasure of the woman's outer
appearance. [...] Love is felt as subjective and thematised as
a personal feeling (p. 92)". The time perspective moves
sometimes from past, the usual tense of the nasib, to present:
"The new individualistic understanding of love and the
acquired freedom to utter it make it subsequently possible to
speak about love in the present. In the place of the turning
away from the love memories comes the affirmation of
the love feelings and the virtue of faithfulness in love. In more
than one poem Abū Saḥr speaks explicitly about his present
love feelings which also in future will not diminish" (p. 96).
In his love poetry Abū Saḥr has hardly any motif in com-
mon with the 'Udhrite love legend in which the lover dies of
love (p. 99). Abū Saḥr's love poems are also dedicated to
more than one woman (p. 100).

In the chapter on Fate (pp. 105-128) the ancient Arabic
notion of Fate is discussed: Fate as Death, as Time and as
Destiny, and how people looked at Fate. In the old imagina-
tion the author recognizes two notions of Fate, the Fate of
the individual based on the experience of death, and the Fate
which goes beyond reality or stands on the threshold of it (p.
107). The different terminology for Fate of Death (al-manman,
himān), Fate as Time (dahr, zamān) and Fate as Destiny (qadar) is mentioned. The hero has a supernatural power subduing Fate, but every man is inseparably connected with his Fate and subjected to it. He manifests himself as a hero when countering the blows of Fate without fear, although Death is inescapable and unavoidable (p. 113).

The ancient Arabic conception of Fate is seen as connected with the concrete experience of daily life. However, between man and Fate remains an impersonal relationship (p. 115).

The notions of Fate in pre-Islamic times remain in the poetry of Abū Khirāsh, Sā'īda ibn 'Uyayna and Abū Dhu'ayb, but "the motif at times gets new forms which underline that the relation with Fate is more and more felt as a personal experience". Perhaps also the position of the poet has changed by "the removal of the criteria of the ancient Arabic poetic collectivity" (p. 122). The theme of Fate can also be more prominent because of the unquiet epoch.

Finally, the author deals with how we find this notion in the poetry of Abū Šakhr al-Hudhali: "By means of the poetry of Abū Šakhr can be observed that the change of the imagination of Fate in Umayyad times and the individualizing tendency in the observation of Fate, which was already discernible in the poetry of the mukhadramun (the poets from the transitional period between pre-Islam and Islam), is also supported by the influence of new religious ideas of Islam. The Islamic concept of godly predestination is given priority and the blows of Fate are understood as the power of God. For this development is indicative that existing beliefs are perceived in new religious categories and are adapted to the system of Islamic dogmatics" (p. 127). "Essential functions of ancient Arabic Fate are transferred to God" (p. 128).

In the chapter on Time (pp. 129-148) a study of the notion of Time is made with a discussion of the following aspects: Time in archaic thought, Time and Space, Time and Individual, the literary Time of ancient Arabic poetry, discontinuity, the cyclic character of the literary Time, gradations of Time, e.g. the dominance of the past in love passages instead of the future, and the change of literary Time. Also a special passage is devoted to the notion of Time in Islam, and finally the literary Time in Abū Šakhr’s qasidas is dealt with. To sketch the notion of Time in early Islamic poetry Lyons’ remark is still valuable: “Time still represents the remote past and illustrates the inevitability of change and, in particular, the transition from life to death” (quoted on p. 140). The author adds: “In the works of the Umayyad period religious contents increase, including eschatological representations”.

“The Islamic idea of eternity and the notion of Time connected with it were certainly an innovation in ancient Arabic culture, although the distinction between ancient and new time imagination is not as radical”, or with the words quoted from Massignon (on p. 140): “for the Muslim theologian time is not a continuous ‘duration’, but a constellation, a ‘galaxy’ of instants”.

One of the concluding sentences of this chapter is that "the observation of Time in early Islamic culture can be seen in connection with the increasing consciousness of the individual”. Here also eschatological expectations play a role (p. 147).

The sixth chapter (pp. 149-156) contains the conclusions about the relation between Islam and the change of the image of mankind in Arabic poetry. However, the author declares explicitly (p. 150): “In the context of the literary history the influence of Islam upon Arabic poetry of the early Islamic period must be considered as little. The new religion is hardly to be recognized in language and ideas of its works.” Also the following and final remark (p. 155) should be taken into account: “The present research is restricted to the poetic heritage of Abū Šakhr. The results can only under certain conditions be transferred to his whole period. However, they show some tendencies in the development of Arabic culture of the early Islamic period which have overall importance for its understanding. The literary and philological material and the methodological elaborations will achieve a contribution for further studies in this field.”

The seventh chapter (pp. 157-277) mentions all of Abū Šakhr al-Hudhali’s poems: texts, translations and notes. Then follows a Bibliography (pp. 278-289), and Indices (pp. 290-349), consisting of vocabulary, geographical names, proper names and names of tribes, rhyme and metrical indices, and an index of names and subjects.

I congratulate the author with this book, which is very useful to get an insight in the poetry of Abū Šakhr and his time. I am also grateful because of the fact that he published again the whole text of his poems and I appreciate his valuable translations into German.

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