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The series Arabische Studien edited by Hartmut Bobzin and Tilman Seidensticker is one of the series about Arabic literature published by Harrassowitz at Wiesbaden, next to the Diskurse der Arabistik, edited by Hartmut Bobzin and Angelika Neuwirth, and the earlier series Studies in Arabic language and literature. Both series edited by Hartmut Bobzin have a green cover and give more or less the impression to be one and the same series. I congratulate the publishing house of both series for having recently published works about early and Classical Arabic poetry. Ewald Wagner made his appearance in the second volume of Arabische Studien and recently also in the seventh volume (Ewald Wagner, Abû Nuwâs in Übersetzung: eine Stellensammlung zu Abû Nuwâs-Übersetzungen vornehmlich in europäische Sprachen, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 2012, 218 pp.).

The present work is one of Wagner’s studies that are the result of his lifelong dedication to the work of the famous Abbasid poet Abû Nuwâs (756-814). In it he mentions the verses ascribed to Abû Nuwâs which he found in secondary literary works. The work comprises 537 fragments of poems, most of them with more than one line, making the total amount of verses some 1500.

In the Introduction Ewald Wagner has 31 preliminary sections (Abschnitte). Many fragments are ascribed to Abû Nuwâs by negligence, but there are also cases of deliberate forgeries in the name of Abû Nuwâs. In section 5 Wagner says about his collected verses that completion of the Diwân of Abû Nuwâs was not the only objective of the book: he has assembled in his book everything that somewhere was
ascribed to Abū Nuwas according to someone. It is often difficult to determine what was the purpose of an author in ascribing certain poetry lines to Abū Nuwas. Wagner says to have included texts which were very uncertain with respect to the authorship of Abū Nuwas. The most extreme case, according to Wagner, is fragment no. 496, a verse by Suhaym b. Wathil which starts with a famh rhyme. This verse, Ana-bnu jalan wa-tallâ u-l-thanâyâl matâ ada' il-imânata ta此iñnano-r, was so well-known, that al-Hajîj placed it at the beginning of his speech. In the secondary literature Wagner could find 23 quotations with Suhaym as the author (next to 17 anonymous quotations). Thus the authorship is clear without any doubt. But Ibn Maššùm(1) quotes in his Anwâr al-Rabî' the verse twice, once with Suhaym as the author, and another time after a series of verses in which Abū Nuwas is implied as the author. With all probability, Ibn Maššùm did not want to imply that Abū Nuwas was meant with the pronoun suffix in ka-qawli-hi, meaning: "as (the same poet) said". Although it is highly improbable that Abū Nuwas was really the author of the verse, one cannot exclude that someone at any time concludes that the verse belongs to Abū Nuwas.

In other sections other cases are dealt with: section 17 focuses upon falsifications on purpose: the forgers wanted to save the soul of Abū Nuwas, who on the basis of his poems and his way of life would be a candidate for hellfire. For instance, no. 225 is a poem that saved him, as he communicated to his friend after his death in a dream. We find in Wagner's remark at no. 225: "Muhammad Nâfi' al-Nâsik saw Abū Nuwas after his death in a dream. Abū Nuwas declared him that he was now in Paradise because of a poem which lay under his pillow. Muhammad went to check it and found the above mentioned poem." In section 21 the fact is signalized that verses of some contemporary poets were wrongly attributed to Abū Nuwas because of his fame.

In section 22 falsifications are found because of obvious literary historical reasons, they have often a fairy tale background and are originating from later times, evoking the world of 1001 Nights. In some of these stories slave girls and caliphs are involved. In section 25 the reader is reminded of Emilio García Gomez's pre-Muwashshah, a prefiguration of the strophic genre, which occurs in the Diwân III 332-3. No. 198, a poem from Damûn's Hayâh I, pp. 16-107, consisting of 12 strophes according to the rhyme scheme zzzz/ aaaa/ bbbz etc. is discussed here by Wagner who says: "Although a strophic poem by Abū Nuwas is fundamentally possible, I would nevertheless consider the mukhammasa no. 198 as spurious for literary historical and other reasons. The mukhammasa has a girdle rhyme and has therefore reached its complete form. Such poems are only known from the 10th century. Nevertheless consider the mukhammasa no. 198 for spurious for literary historical and other reasons. The mukhammasa has a girdle rhyme and has therefore reached its complete form. Such poems are only known from the 10th century. Section 7 of the introduction)."

The remarks at the poetry fragments are often enlightening, such as at fragments 86 and 148 which says: "In this line the night of the birth of Jesus is addressed, which is considered as especially long". Other fragments receive a characterization such as the remark at fragment 139 from al-Ḥâtimi's Ḥiyâh which indicates that the two lines constitute a mujûn riddle in the form of the beginning of a hunting poem. Again another fragment (no. 138) contains a two liner from Ibn Manẓûr's Akhkhâr II 79 with the remark: "Abū Nuwas was alleged to have written these verses on the wall of a tavern in Qurṭîbîl" [metre: kâmil]:

("Let my drinking companion not be angry, when I fuck him/ Because I am accustomed to fuck my drinking companion/ And in the same way I will not blame him when he fucks me/ Because I knew that just like I am a deceiver, I will be deceived."

(Transcribed and translated by the reviewer; however, in the book the poems are given in Arabic script, without translation [AS]).

The works in which the fragments from Abū Nuwas are to be found are listed in the "Literatur und Abkürzungsverzeichnis" (Literary Sources and Abbreviations, pp. 221-236). This is followed by an index comprising Koranic passages (p. 237), personal and tribal names (pp. 237-245), and place names (p. 245).

This volume discusses the poetry ascribed to Abū Nuwas within the Arabic literary traditions outside the Diwân of the poet. Over 200 medieval literary works are taken into account. We learn lots of anecdotes about Abū Nuwas and his contemporaries. This is an excellent book to become aware of the widespread interest in Abū Nuwas in the Middle Ages and to become aware of the authenticity problems inherent of medieval Arabic poetry. We congratulate the author that he has compiled this volume on the basis of his life long experience with poetry and life of Abū Nuwas.

Amsterdam, July 2012 Arie Schippers

1) For sources mentioned in this review see Wagner's chapter "Literatur und Abkürzungsverzeichnis".

In section 27 are rejected as non-Abû Nuwasian the two liners which express love for craftsmen (weavers, tailors, chess players etc.) on the basis of their contents: this kind of poems transmitted by al-Ishhîî (d. 1446) belong to Mamlûk rather than Abbasid times.

In section 30 the author concludes: "In the preceding pages I have tried to show some of the reasons which have caused the fact that so many poems occur under the name of Abû Nuwas which, with all probability, originate from other authors. Many things may be interpreted otherwise by others. In any case are the many Abû Nuwasian verses which appeared outside the Diwân in later literature, a proof of the continuing interest in this poet."

The then following poetry fragments are numbered 1-537 and at every fragment is mentioned its metre, its source(s), possible variants, attributions or conjectures, and if necessary, some remarks are added. The poetic fragments are arranged according to the alphabetical order of their rhymes which makes it easy to retrieve certain lines (explained in section 7 of the introduction).

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