Abu Tamman and the Poetics of the Abbasid Age [Review of: S. Pinckney Stetkevych (1995)]
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This study by Hamori is to be considered as a milestone in the study and analysis of Classical Arabic poetry. This book devoted to Abu Tammam's poetry, as well as the poetry of the 'Abbasi, is the result of a thorough investigation of the Arabic literary tradition and the Arabic language. The book deviated from the approach of previous studies, which were based on the reception of the poems by the Arabic readers. Instead of analyzing the received poems, the author explored the Arabic cultural context and the Arabic poetic language. This approach enabled the author to provide a fresh perspective on the study of Classical Arabic poetry.

The author also devoted a chapter to the analysis of the battle events, emphasizing the role of the battle in the narrative of the events. The author argues that the battle events are an important part of the narrative, as they provide a bridge between the different parts of the narrative. The author also discusses the role of the battle in the development of the narrative, highlighting the importance of the battle as a turning point in the narrative.

In conclusion, the book by Hamori is a valuable contribution to the study of Classical Arabic poetry. The author's approach and analysis provide a fresh perspective on the study of the Arabic literary tradition and the Arabic language. The book is recommended for students and scholars interested in the study of Classical Arabic poetry.
but ritual and exegetical qualities. They used archaic rhetorical forms to express their cultural identity, their pledge of allegiance to Arabism. The effect of badi’ poetry with its madhhab kalami [stylistic device taken from the muta-kallimun] is exegetical, because of its manipulation of abstractions, which deserves ta’wil (exegesis).

The present author deals with five panegyric odes, from which she quotes a typical Abu-Tammamian rhetorical expression in the chapter heads: Time’s Beardless Youth (in a panegyric on the Caliph al-Ma’mun), The Tragacanth’s Fruit (in a panegyric devoted to Abu Sa‘id al-Thaghtari), a Morsel in Destruction’s Hand (in a panegyric to al-Mu‘tasim on the Capture of Babak al-Khurrami), the Virgin whom the Hand of fate had not deflowered (in a panegyric dedicated to al-Mu‘tasim on the occasion of the conquest of ‘Ammariyyah), and the brilliant gems set by the poet (dedicated to al-Mu‘tasim on the occasion of the immolation of al-Afshin). It appears that Abu Tammām manipulates the traditional images and structures freely, abandoning, gradually, the traditional structure of the ode with its sequences. The author of the book apparently postulates a surface structure and a deep ritual structure in the odes of Abu Tammām. The surface is old, the old traditional sequence, the deep structure evens goes back to “the Ancient Near Eastern paradigm of sacrifice”. In ode no. 133, there is still the classical nasib-rahīl-madhī surface structure, but as a vessel for new imagery. “The imagery and epiphets of the Jahili madhī are Islamicized; the mamdīh is now the agent of Allah and the inexorable fate of the Jahiliyyah is replaced by a foreordained Islamic teleology”. In the other odes, Stetkevych notes that the nasib is no longer determined by the classical ode form but by the chronological and cosmological or mythic order of the historical events that are its subject. In one of the odes, the mamdīh (the praised person, in this case the heir-apparent) is identified with the beloved (mahl-babāh). “Contemporary events have been integrated into the poetic tradition to create a unified Arab-Islamic vision of the future as well as of the past”. Abu Tammām reforges the classical ode by means of transposition of the traditional motifs through metaphor and antithesis. He progressively uncovers “the deep sacrificial structure beneath the classical qasidah-form”. He recasts its form and motifs. By manipulating metaphorically, logically and philologically the traditional motifs, the poetic tradition is able to embrace new ideas. The experiment with badi’ led to “uncovering the deep paradigmatic structure that had originally generated the classical Arabic qasidah as the ‘Abbasid critics conceived it’”. The Arab-Islamic was reintegrated with the Ancient near Eastern, so that “the ‘Abbasid concept of the Caliphate and the Ummah (...) could (...) go beyond the analogy to the chieftain and tribe of the Jahiliyyah, to the sacerdotal kingship of Ancient Mesopotamia”.

In the third part of the book the present author derives Abu Tammām’s opinions about poetry from his well-known Hamdsah-anthology, In the Hamdsah, as in his own poetry, metaphors and the dialectical interaction of opposites function as means of perception and exegesis. The chapters of Abu Tammām’s Hamdsah are not neat compartments or concise self-contained subjects, but they indicate attitudes, relationships and topics, subcategories of a “larger and all-embracing tradition”. Tribal institutions such as blood-vengeance and hospitality, or the custom of kindling a fire to light the way of travellers at night abound in them. The chapter on elegies and the one about the weeping on the deserted encampment are interrelated. The hierarchy expressed in the poems is reflected in the structure of the Hamdsah: it starts with the praising of noble manhood, and ends with the vituperation of womanhood. Abu Tammām’s Hamdsah is at the same time a poetic and metapoetic work, which is clear from its metaphorical and antithetical interconnection. The Hamdsah of al-Buhturi, with its 174 chapters, is totally different. It looks like the musammah type of hadith collection arranged on subject and with poems added at every subject. Abu Tammām’s categories embrace an entire system of values, while al-Buhturi’s ones are discrete topics illustrated by literal examples without expansion into the tropical, metaphorical, the archetypal, symbolic or ritual connections. Al-Buhturi’s Hamdsah is not held together by any unifying concept of a literary tradition that expresses a coherent system of values.

This is in contrast to Abu Tammām’s dynamic concept of the literary tradition as appears from the interrelationship and organization of the poems in his Hamdsah. This book by Stetkevych is very stimulating and thought provoking. Furthermore, it is useful for those who want to comprehend the change of function in the Arabic poetry from a Bedouin type to a sedentary type. The emergence of the badi’ style and the problem of the Ancient and the Modern is certainly linked with this change of function). Finally it is useful to connect Abu Tammām’s selection in the Hamdsah with his opinions on poetics and poetry, as Klein-Franke did earlier). If one closes one’s eyes for the use of metaphorical expressions, such as “rite de passage” for the transition between nasib and madhī, old fashioned structuralist terminology (surface structure, deep structure), and too far-fetched associations such as the “sacerdotal kingship of Ancient Mesopotamia”, then it is all in all a very readable, interesting and useful book. Five difficult poems are translated by the author herself, extensively commented upon while the original text can be consulted in the appendices. Of course, this will not be the last book on Abu Tammām, who has written far more than five poems, but it will be a useful contribution to scientific discussion. To my knowledge, it is the first monograph about Abu Tammām, written by an orientalist. A monograph on this poet deserved to be written much earlier.

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