Animal description in the poetry of Ibn Hafaga

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Everyone who occupies himself with the *Diwān* of the Andalusian poet Ibn Ḥafṣa will be confronted sooner or later with his animal descriptions. If we look at the index of his *Diwān* compiled by Muṣṭafā Gāzī, we see how frequently the horse in particular is described by Ibn Ḥafṣa, whereas among birds the dove description is one of the poet’s favorites. Other animal descriptions which occur in his *Diwān* are those of camels, dogs, and wolves. His horse descriptions belong to the themes of bravery, dove descriptions belong to garden and nature poetry, wolf descriptions or descriptions of the desert by night to the realm of the *raḥīl*. Other orientalists such as Henri Pérès and more recently Manfred Ullmann have devoted attention to animal descriptions by Ibn Ḥafṣa and translated small portions of his poetry.

The reason, however, that I have occupied myself with a poem of Ibn Ḥafṣa in which animal descriptions are prominent, is that I wanted to make a brief analysis of the structure of *qaṣīdas* by Ibn Ḥafṣa and

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1 See Ibn Ḥafṣa, *Diwān*, ed. al-Sayyid Muṣṭafā Gāzī, Alexandria 1960, nos. 67 (p. 114), 73 (p. 123), 157 (p. 211), 158 (p. 211-212), (horses) and nos. 65 (line 11; p. 113), 74 (line 13; p. 125), 78 (line 1; p. 128), 82 (line 3; p. 132), 99 (line 9; p. 143), 105 (line 5; p. 148), 235 (lines 1 sqq.; pp. 289-290) (doves). Gāzī lists all the *qaṣīdas* with horses (p. 407) and doves (p. 408) [Numbers and pages of Ibn Ḥafṣa’s quoted in the following are referring to this edition].


others, especially with regard to the succession of the different themes. Ibn Hafaga's poem no. 2 was one of the poems which struck me because of their thematic sequence. Its structure looked at first sight like that of most of Dū r-Rumma's poems, with the difference that his animal descriptions are developments of the camel description: the camel's speed is compared with the speed of other animals. The structure of Ibn Hafaga's poem no. 2 also resembles the structure of many poems by al-Buhturi, which often are preceded by visions of the beloved and contain passages in which the poet is surrounded by fitya (youthful people) such as the fitya of the Nāğiyya family in al-Buhturi's poem no. 903.

Poem no. 2 (Diwān p. 33), a laudatory poem on Abū Yaḥyā, begins with a nasīb in which there is also an appearance of the poet's beloved in a dream (ta'yf al-ḥayāl). There is also a description of the night (lines 1-12). Then a visit to a garden in the morning is described (lines 13-18); this brings the poet into the company of young men (fitiya; lines 19-35). Then follows a description of these young men on horses while hunting. Animals which are hunted are described, such as a fox (rawwāg) and apparently an ostrich (tayyar; lines 40-43).

Then follows the transition to the laudatory passage (line 44-90): if the animals had asked help from Abū Yaḥyā, then he would have helped them. In the final passage the poet asks his maecenas for a gift in return for his poetry and poetry in general (line 90-99).

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7 See al-Buhturi, Diwān, ed. Hasan Kāmil al-Ṣayrafi, Cairo (Dahāʾir al-ʿarab) 1963-78 [I-IV], no. 903 [IV, pp. 2375-2382].
We will quote some of the more interesting passages from this qaṣīda and, where necessary, refer to the animal descriptions of Dū r-Rumma and passages quoted by al-Ǧāḥiẓ in his Kitāb al-ḥayawān.

The poet begins the poem by combining several love motifs: the tayf or phantasm comes to visit him at night, when the morning already announces itself; the motif is combined with the description of the poet’s burning love, because the phantasm is portrayed as a night guest who drinks the water of the lover’s weeping and avails himself of the fire of his burning pain. But by means of this visit he quenches his lover’s thirst. But because of the pangs of love, the lover is clothed in emaciation, which means he is stripped, he has become transparent, he has become invisible because of this extreme emaciation.

In the meantime it has become morning, which gives the poet the opportunity to describe the heavens, beginning at line 8. Various personifications and comparisons occur in this passage: the night whose clothes become wet in the morning; clothed with the galaxy, it is compared with a monk wearing a zunnār turning and tossing in his bed; lightning and rain or tears go together.

In the morning the winds are looked for as messengers at the places where the rainstars and the lights are setting. The rain is introduced as a tearful glance of one looking at the lightning coming from the Najd. In this way the poet links this passage with the introductory passage with its love motif.

Thereupon the morning inspires the poet to describe a garden. This passage is well-known and often quoted in anthologies. In this description the central verb is not introduced until several lines after the mention of the object. This is perhaps a pre-Islamic or early Islamic feature which we find in the poetry of Dū r-Rumma. In Dū r-Rumma we find many times the phrase ‘many a desert’ (ḥarq) followed after a few lines by ‘I have traversed’²⁸. In the meantime the poet describes the

²⁸ See e.g. Dū r-Rumma, Diwān, ed. Macartney, no. 46: line 26 sqq. (p. 347 sqq.) no. 41: line 32 (p. 318); ed. ʿAbdalqaddūs Abū Ǧāliḥ, no. 23; lines 26 sqq. (Vol. II, pp. 732 sqq.); no. 36: line 31 (Vol. II, 1131).
desert. This device is reversed by Ibn Hafaga in another poem, no. 81, where the poet says: ‘In many such a night I undertook a journey’ and the phrase ‘through a desert’ some lines later. In poem no. 2 the desert description has been replaced by a garden description.

The garden description begins with the object ‘many a place where a cloud drags its train (wa-maγari dayli gamamatin)’ followed three lines later by the verb ‘I visited in the early morning (bakartuhu)’. The garden description itself contains a number of personifications such as the rivers who have their shoulders clothed in embroidered garments produced by the rain; the branches, which bend their necks; and the white blossoms which are mouths; the wind slapping the buttocks of the hills and kissing the faces of the flowers; the doves acting as preachers on the branches of the trees.

13) And to many a place where a cloud drags its train, the shoulders of the rivers clothe themselves in embroideries of bubbles,
14) The shadows of the [thick] wood wave [their] forelocks, the swail of the stream quivers [its] buttocks,
15) The branch bends its long neck, which the mouths of the white blossom have kissed.
16) I came in the morning while the cloud is a piece of ambergris blazing, the lightning is the burning of a fire.
17) And the wind slaps the buttocks of the hills in play, and kisses the faces of the flowers.
18) While on the pulpits of the trees the eloquent preachers are the birds.

The next passage contains hunting motifs. The poet is accompanied by young men (fitya), who make an expedition with him. The brightness of young men is contrasted with the darkness of the night and the dust cloud of battle: they are moons and their anger sparks. Their high hopes are described.

19) Amidst young people who have dispelled the cloud of dust at night and frequently display [faces like] moons.
20) The darkness assaults them with smoke and the flint of [their] anger causes sparks of fire to fly from them.
21) I saw their ambition as lofty mountains and their beneficence as overflowing seas.

They chase the quarry with so called qayd ṭarīda, which expression reminds us of the pre-Islamic expression qayd al-awābīd, translated by Lane as ‘the light or active horse which overtakes the wild animals and which they can hardly or never escape’⁹. But here apparently birds of prey are meant, noisy of wing, and red painted of claws. The birds have golden eyes and are wrapped in variegated garments.

26) They chase the quarry each with something that fetters the tracked beasts, noisy of wing and red painted of claws;

27) Its sides are wrapped in a newly made variegated garment, and its eyelids anointed with pure gold;

28) By which he aims at a distant hope so that it bends the painted claw and beak which are like the letter rā’. Its claws and beak are coloured red, I think, because of the blood of its prey. Apparently, dogs are also assisting at the hunting party. They are introduced in line 29. They are trained to the chase and hungry and wide ranging. I quote:

29) And each with something that is wide ranging and open jawed and small eyed, hungry [thin, folded up of intestines], adorned by the wearing of a collar, trained to the chase;

30) Showing the teeth in smiling like the blade of a sword and walking as if on brandished spears;

31) Asking hospitality from the traces of the quarry on the stones while the night wrapped itself in a cloak of pitch [tar];

The next animal which is described, a rawwāq, is apparently a fox, although Gāzī thinks perhaps it could be a hare or a rabbit¹⁰. The fox

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¹⁰ I deduce Gāzī’s interpretation from the index of his edition of Ibn Hafāga’s Diwān, pp. 407, 408.
is described *atlas al-atmär* ‘grey as worn out clothes’, an expression borrowed from a poem by Dū r-Rumma used by him for a hunter in a *bā’īyya*. The fox is running away, jinking to right and left: it is like a ball thrown by one desert to another.

36) How many a *rawwāḡ*, white spots on the side, sharp of ears and grey as old garments;

37) Running cautiously and gathering his stretched body, while speeding down so that it is curved like a bracelet.

38) Pushing himself to the limit; going quickly; deceitfully deviating from the track – he nearly escapes the hands of Fate.

39) Doubling back, while fear of perdition throws it like a ball which hands of bare deserts toss one to another.

The next creature that runs away is apparently a bird, I would say an ostrich, because its eggs are not laid in nests. It is portrayed with a neighbour flying behind it which Péres claims to be its tail.

40) And many an ostrich running lightly, departing with a neighbour flying behind it;

41) Whose stride is short; swaggering like a girl dragging the train of her garment.

42) Painted of beak, you would think that it had sipped, from thirst, a cup of wine;

43) The places where they lay their eggs are not constant from fear of a night of distress or a day of perdition;

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12 Apparently Gāzi thinks here a partridge or bird is meant although the word *udhīyy* usually refers to ostriches (see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, p. 857 ‘The place of the laying of eggs and of the hatching thereof, of the ostrich, in the sand’).

Then follows the transition to the laudatory passage. The animals would have been safe, if protected by the poet's addressee.

44) And if either of them had sought refuge with Abū Yaḥyā, then he would have rendered it secure with a most glorious [powerful] protection.

45) It would be sacrosanct, without having fear for an injustice taking place, if a fugitive beast put itself under his protection,

46) The winds stand still at his side out of fear [veneration]; and the sea of the tremendous army drinks its fill;

47) And the gazelle of the sand hill takes its rest in safety guaranteed by him, in the very mouth of the den of the roaring lion.

48) The Divine Decree serves his will and it is as if his hands grasp the bridles of Fate.

al-Ḡāḥīz mentions that in an elegy hounds are killing wild cows; in a laudatory poem however, camels are compared with wild cows. In which case the dogs are usually killed. The remark of al-Ḡāḥīz is confirmed by elegiac poetry of Abū Duʿayb and the laudatory poetry of Dū r-Rumma. In this laudatory poem by Ibn HafāQA the end of the hunting party is not described, but the poet makes a skillful connection with the description of the powerfulness of the Maecenas, to whom even the Divine Decree is subservient.

In the succession of themes within Ibn HafāQA's qaṣiṣda analogies are to be found with the structure of al-Buḥtūrī's qaṣīdas.

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Moreover, the poet Ibn Hafaga deliberately used ancient concepts from hunting description by Dūr-Rumma; but he made some innovations. He replaces the desert description with a garden description. In Ibn Hafaga’s poetry the hunt is not a part of the comparison of the speed of the animals with his camel, but it is a celebration of travel amidst his fitya, or young companions.

The innovation here is perhaps that the outcome of the hunting party remains suspended, whereas the hunting party itself serves as a rahil, which does not consist of a camel description, but of the hunting party itself.

APPENDIX

Quotations from the Arabic text from Gāzī’s edition of Ibn Hafaga’s Diwān, no. 2 (pp. 33 sqq.).

lines 13-18

وَشَنَّى ال۪حَبَّانَ مَعَانَاهُ ال۪آث۪ارِ
وَآرَتَحَ رَدَفًا مَنَايَ النَّبَارِ
فُقِتْنِهَ مِنِّبَاسِمَ النَّوارِ
مَتَخَيَّبَةً وَبُرُقٌ لَفْحَةٌ نَّارٍ
لَعِيَاءٌ وَّكِتِّيَمُّ أُوْجُهُ ال۪آرَامَ
خَطِّبَةَ مَنۡصَبْحَةَ مِنَ ال۪أَط۪یَارِ
وَلَرۡبَمَا سَفُرُوا مِنَ ال۪آث۪ارِ
فِی فِتۡیَةٍ جَنِبُوا ال۪عَبَاجَةَ لِیۡلَةٍ
فَانۡتَشَمُّ بِهِمَّ دَخَانًا وَأَرۡتَمَیٍّ
شَاهِدَتْ مِنۡهُمْ مَهۡتِهِمۡ وَفَبۡانِهِمۡ

وَفِنَّطْلَ ذِبَلَ عُمۡامَاً لِیَسَتُ بِهِ
خَفَّتَ ظِلَالَ ال۪آیَكَ فِیهِ ذۡوَآئِیٍّاً
وَلَنَوَّفَ النَّغۡصِبِیْبِ هَنَّاكَ جِیۡدَاً أَتۡلُعَاً
باکَرَتَهَ وَالۡغِیۡمُ قِطۡعَةً عَتِبَرٍ
وَالۡرُّحُ تَلِمَتْ فِیهِ أَرۡدَافَ الرَّبۡنَى
وَمَنۡتَاَیِّ الۡشَّجَرَ قُدْ قَامَتْ بِهَا
lines 26-31

ذكر الجناح موزور الأقطار
مكحلولة أجنحة بخمار
مختصب رأي الطائر والمشرار
نادرة حتى حنف المعتقل مشار
وتعتبر على ميل العين المخطار
والليل مشتغل بضيغة قار

lines 36-48

ذوق العصاهم أطلس الأقطار
يهرؤ فيختفي المنخفك سوار
فتكده يغشط أيدي الأقدار
كورة الجهادا كأضعاق قفار
فنجا بجاح جماله طيار
منتفع الفتناء تجرا فصول إارتفاع
كشمون على ظحاء بكأس عمار
من دليل وبيل أو هنار أو ياو
يحكي لا منها أمر جوار
لم ينفع من جوز منكش كنار
ويعبى نصر المسكر جزار
في جذر حيس المعش الوقار
ملكت بدءا أبعية الأقدار