
Schippers, A.

Published in:
BiOr

Citation for published version (APA):
Arabic poetry more accessible. On the Arabic title-page the book is entitled Riwâh al-bâdi‘ ("Quenching One's Thirst of BadV") or BadV, translated as "Abundance of Vapors". Let me suggest another title: Fā' tā safahat al-ashūr dar Bâdi‘ safahat al-ashūr. Perfuming the Pages of Poetry by Diffusing the "Watts of Flowers", to end with a suitably flowery figure of speech.

Oxford, July 1999

Geert Jan van Gelder

---

This book deals with ghazal poetry in the 9th and 10th century C.E. The definition of ghazal used by the author is the one shaped by Arabists, who differentiate between the terms nasib and ghazal, which in the minds of medieval Arabs meant, equally and indiscriminately, love poetry. However, there is a big difference between the traditional love prologue (introduction to the polythematic ode or qasida), but also and its difference from ghazal, poetry in the 9th and 10th century C.E. The definition of ghazal used by the author is the one shaped by Arabists, who differentiate between the terms nasib and ghazal, which in the minds of medieval Arabs meant, equally and indiscriminately, love poetry. However, there is a big difference between the traditional love prologue (introduction to the polythematic ode or qasida), but also and its difference from ghazal, poetry in the 9th and 10th century C.E. The definition of ghazal used by the author is the one shaped by Arabists, who differentiate between the terms nasib and ghazal, which in the minds of medieval Arabs meant, equally and indiscriminately, love poetry. However, there is a big difference between the traditional love prologue (introduction to the polythematic ode or qasida)

On page 196, Thomas Bauer produces a synoptic table which contraposes ghazal with nasib on the basis of its respective contents: so ghazal can be directed to male as well as female beloved, whereas nasib has only female beloved persons as its subject. In ghazal the love relationship is actually existent, or not yet existent, whereas the nasib refers to love relationship in the past. In a ghazal the beloved can be reached, in a nasib the beloved cannot be reached. Ghazal plays a role in the present time — it is possible to identify oneself with the lover — whereas a nasib is a predominantly literary composition with references to Bedouin places with aflatl (ruins of the camp site) etc. However, according to Bauer, his synoptic table cannot give definite criteria as to whether some poetry is nasib of ghazal, because this depends ultimately upon the line of intertextuality in which the poet places his poem (p. 197).

According to Bauer, the above-mentioned problem of definition has its origin in the fact that the Arab poets used techniques and followed conventions of genres for which theoreticians had only marginal or no interest, whereas the literary theoreticians invented imposing systems of figures of speech and style, which were only of little relevance to poets.

In this manner, the scholars of Arabic literature of the last decade noticed a series of techniques and proved that the total structure of a poem had always been conceived systematically and consciously, whereas Arabic literary theory, strangely enough, has not much to say about it. The long-fostered error that lack of theory also means lack of consciousness of the poets may now be considered as cleared up.

Thus, similar attitudes can be observed regarding the distinction between nasib and ghazal. Arabic literary theoreticians did not have much interest in conventions of genres and structures of poems (which would be relevant in the case of nasib and ghazal), and therefore did not care much about the corresponding terminological distinctions.

Nevertheless, both poets and their public were acquainted with such conventions, and their knowledge of them was an important condition for the functioning of literary communication. Nothing proved this more clearly than poems in which such conventions are obviously played with, or the fact that modern Arabists, speaking about ghazal and nasib respectively, irrespective of which definition their works are based on, in the end always refer to the same phenomenon.

The contents of a ghazal are thus different from those of the nasib. In later centuries, the introduction of a polythematic poem could be a wine passage, but also a ghazal passage (and even in Hebrew Spanish Literature, a passage about the complaint about Sion instead of the complaint about the aflatl, next to real nasib, wine introductions and ghazal introductions A.S.).

Bauer says (my translation):

"According to the present-day current definition, a Qasida is defined as a polythematic poem, which at least consists of an introductory nasib and a conclusive part (in this case also a madlîh). The nasib can also be replaced by an introductory part with another theme. The most known example is the substitution of nasib by a wine scene, which occurs for instance in al-Buhturi's Dîwân.

Since the conception of nasib cannot be deprived too much from its original on the basis of contents defined meaning and reduced to but a structure unit, one ought not to say the nasib has become a wine passage, rather one has to say: the nasib has been substituted by a wine passage. In the case of a poem by al-Buhturi the nasib is even substituted by a ghazal."

The book begins with an Introductory chapter (Chapter 1) in which the author talks about questions such as love poetry in connection with the history of Arabic mentality and literary history. In this chapter, Thomas Bauer also tells us about his method: trying to reconstruct the literary communication process of the 9th and 10th centuries, without interfering with our own twentieth-century preconceptions of a priori convictions about poetry. "A poem from the 10th century has only sense within the context of a literary communication process. The question what the poets want to say to us, can a priori only be answered with 'nothing at all.'" As an observer, the researcher has the task of reconstructing the literary communication system of a past period in order to reconstruct the "meaning", "sense" and "quality" of a text.

"Because the participants in the literary communication system of the author's period of research cannot be interviewed directly, research will be possible only by analysing transmitted texts. From different kinds of text one can get information about producers (poets) and receivers (their public), and transmitters (such as scribes, booksellers, singers), and the literary theoreticians of the time. But it is an illusion to believe that one can reconstruct literary life without taking refuge in the texts themselves."
To get a complete, representative idea of what a ghazal is, the author has the intention of presenting as much of the total spectre of themes of the Arabic ghazal of the selected period as possible (from Chapter 7 on).

Chapter 2 deals the history of love poetry before the Abbasid ghazal. It treats the old-Arabic nasib and the Omayyad ghazal.

Chapter 3 deals with ideologies of love, such as can be distilled from 'Abbâs ibn al-Ahnâf's poetry (p. 56) and developed by the “Elegants” [zurâfat] in relation to so-called courtly love, and what the effect of the ideologies of love are on Arabic literary history, ending with a part called “Triumph of Realism” about the domination of “realistic” love poetry, one of whose representatives is of course Abu Nuwas. The author does not believe that we can speak of courtly love in Arabic poetry, even in the ambience of the zurâfat (elegants) or with regard to 'Abbâs ibn al-Ahnâf's poetry. If the qualification courtly love is used too widely, it will be deprived of meaning, rightly observes Thomas Bauer contra the often quoted opinion of the famous English medievalist Peter Dronke, that sentiments and conceptions of courtly love are universally possible, at any time or place on every level of society.

Chapter 4 [Der Individualismus der Abbasidenzeit] relates the individual character of the poets to the structure of society in Abbasid times (p. 93) which results in a plurality of poetical styles. The chapter ends with the “conceptualistic” mentality, which makes possible poetry with concetti. In this chapter, Hugo Friedrich’s book of the periods of Italian lyrical literature still seems to cast its shadows. Thomas Bauer deals amply with the question of periodization in both Arabic and European literature, especially with regard to so-called manneristic poetry.

Since the degree of “mannerism” oscillates more from poem to poem and from poet to poet than from century to century, this phenomenon cannot be a criterion which constitutes the characteristics of a period. This is also the opinion of Sperl in his book on mannerism in Arabic poetry.) The concept of mannerism is not fit to describe an Arabic literary period, although the mentality of those who lived in middle Abbasid times finds its closest parallel in the Cinquecento, and ghazal poems of this period have strikingly similar counterparts in the poems of the petrarchismo. Manneristic in the sense of Sperl may be an element which can only be traced in Arabo-Islamic culture from a certain time, but does not constitute a period. This is for more than one reason: firstly there is nothing which has come to an end by mannerism. A glance at ath-Thâ'alibî's Yâtîmah will suffice to show that “manneristic poems” and “Classical” poems stand side by side and that it often depends on a genre whether the poems of a poet incline to one or another pole. Thus “mannerism” is more frequently found in panegyrics than for instance in wine poems, which without any doubt is connected with the different manner in which the poets looked upon its relationship with reality and with the different expectations one had about the reception of the different genres. There is also the fundamental question to what extent literature can be described as per se a phenomenon inherent to a period, when not initiated as an instrument of a conscious change.

The in the course of the 9th century born possibility of “manneristic mimesis”, which is always one of the possibilities of the poet, can be considered a reaction to a change of mentality. This change of mentality was a coexistence of beliefs and ideological and religious convictions which was unthinkable in Europe at the time. In the East in the 9th century, it was not uncommon for one person to hold different world views. The individualism and subjectivism and the plurality of society which resulted have been able to guarantee for a long period a balance between conceptualism and rigourism.

Chapter 5 deals with the object of love in poetry, whether female or male. The author goes deeply into the manner of love relationships between men and its various forms, including Abu Tammâm’s affair with 'Abdallah.

Chapter 6 discusses the difference between ghazal and nasib, which we mentioned above, Thomas Bauer then describes the different “themes” and “motifs” of the ghazal, and how the five theme areas distinguished by the author are combined within a sequence of affections as within a kind of musical score.

In the next five chapters, the author describes the five theme areas with their subdivisions, amply illustrated by poetic quotations. Chapter 7 is devoted to the description of the beauty of the beloved, which constitutes the praise of the beloved. The praise of the beloved itself is discussed (p. 208), and then follow all the motifs of praise, such as: beauty in general; the face of the beloved one; hair; cheeks; the locks of the temples; a mole; soft down on the cheeks; eyes; eyebrows and lashes; teeth and saliva; the neck, breast and bosom; posteriors and waist; figure; legs and fingers; the walk; elegance; fragrance; other characteristics of the body; and intelligence, character and education.

Chapter 8 describes the situation of the lover, his sufferings and complaints (p. 336); the causes of his complaints in pre-Abbasid times; being seized with love; separation and aversion; disturber; grief; sufferings, nostalgia and affliction; weeping; languishing, yearning, complaints, heaviness, heart-flutterings; illness, madness, death; fire, burning, thirst; sleeplessness, worrying; seldom mentioned symptoms; reactions and effects.

Chapter 9 deals with the declaration of the love of the lover and its contents (p. 386); the expressing or keeping secret of love; being seized with love; love passion; being unsurpassable; inevitability; sincerity; constancy; unconditionality; submissiveness and abandonment; exclusiveness; and supplication.

Chapter 10 deals with the reproach of the lover who has problems with his beloved (p. 426); the beloved shows his denial; coquetry and haughtiness; inconstancy; iniquity; cruelty; and mercilessness; and indifference.

Chapter 11 deals with the description of the beloved and the forms of communication between lover and beloved (p. 455); the name of the beloved; rank and profession of the beloved; religious allusions; particular bodily and other characteristics of the beloved; actions of the beloved and the lover; union and rejection; places and reasons; forms of communication; third persons; maximes, reflections, monologues.

The book ends with a bibliography (p. 529) and indices of persons, poems, themes and subjects, and a register of secunda comparisonis (p. 541).
All in all, this work provides a treasury of examples of various types of love themes in Arabic poetry by which is structured the 9th and 10th century ghazal poem, together with an informative and stimulating discussion of them. This book will be welcomed by any scholar interested in Classical Arabic poetry and literature in general, but also by those who are dealing with love poetry in general.

It is a thorough, well written and much needed description of the development of love poetry, and the problems which are involved with it, such as the relation of the poetry with medieval literary theory, poetic style, love ideology and conceptualism, with an open eye for plurality existing in the poetry and the society of the time. It not only fills a gap in the coverage of medieval Arabic literary themes, but will also provide a basis for further research in love poetry in later ages by providing us with an analysis of global thematic fields of love poetry, such as the praise of the beauty of the beloved, the complaints of the lover, the declaration of love by the lover, his reproach with the beloved, and the communication between lover and beloved.

Amsterdam, May 1999

Arie SCHIPPERS

* * *


Cet ouvrage répond à un souhait exprimé (en exergue) par P. Marty, grand connaisseur de l'Afrique du Nord: permettre aux colons de comprendre et même d'utiliser les expressions proverbiales et les devinettes populaires, marquant en cela leur volonté d'insertion et d'appréciation de la culture de leurs hôtes. Dans les pays de culture arabe, citer un proverbe, dans la conversation, évoquer un conte, poser une devinette, c'est chose fréquente. Le but recherché, c'est instruire et divertir. Les Arabes anciens en user sous la tente, au cours des soirées d'hiver. La littérature proverbiale et anecdotique arabe foisonne d'exemples du genre. Les catégories et leurs viseurs en raffolaient.


A l'édition de 1944, André Dubus, conscient de la perte progressive, chez les jeunes générations, du recours à ces énigmes — ce qui conduirait à la disparition d'un aspect de la culture nationale — décida d'ajouter, à un 2e tirage, les résultats d'une recherche qu'il entreprit, dans les années quatre-vingt, entre Béja et Tabarka, au cours de laquelle 169 devinettes ont été réunies (parues, d'abord, dans IBLA en 1992, t. 55, n° 170, pp. 235-274, et en 1993, t. 56, n° 171, pp. 73-99).

Ce nouvel apport est classé en: I. Sujets religieux. II. Animaux. III. Corps humain. IV. Botanique. V. Le monde physique. VI. Divinités à trois. VII. La devinette. Tandis que la première partie est classée sous huit rubriques: L'homme; La femme et la maison; Le monde physique; Les Animaux; Les plantes; Les sujets religieux; Les personnages religieux; Énigmes à réponses disparates.

Dans son introduction, J. Quéméneur étudie les noms qui désignent l'énigme en Tunisie (luğ, ḥabū, tchenchina (Tunis), ḥurāfā, ḥuğṣiya...), la manière de proposer et de deviner, les espèces d'énigmes, les auteurs d'énigmes, leur transmission.

Sur le dernier point, le nom le plus fréquent est celui d'un certain 'Abd as-Šamad, qui est considéré comme l'inventeur légendaire de l'énigme; il aurait vécu à Batna; nombreux sont les énigmes qui mentionnent son nom; elles commencent par: 'Abd as-Šamad gāl kełma ou kełmā... (p. 20 sqq.). Il est aussi bien connu en Algérie.

J. Quéméneur précise, enfin, les règles de composition et les procédés littéraires, dont il se dégage que le parallélisme et la rime constituent les règles fondamentales du genre énigme. C'est une caractéristique commune au style oral (proverbes, sagesse, oracles, art oratoire...).


La langue de ces énigmes présente souvent des difficultés; les collecteurs s'en tirent bien. En dépit de la liste des errata (p. 225 sq.), il subsiste de nombreuses corrections à faire dans le texte arabe. En voici la liste:

P. 34, n° 8,1,2: 1. كَيف
P. 44, n° 33,1,3: 1. ثم
P. 52, n° 51,1,7: 1. الكمية
P. 62, n° 76,1,1: 1. سبع
P. 76, n° 103,1,2: 1. يأخذ
P. 82, n° 110,1,3: 1. يضعوه
P. 89, n° 128,1,5: 1. فاركها
P. 95, n° 138,4,1,7: 1. بت
P. 113, n° 179,1,1: 1. بنينه
P. 122, n° 198,1,10: 1. العظمة
P. 136, n° 232,1,1: 1. مصق
P. 138, n° 236,3,1,7: 1. القار
P. 149, n° 256,1,6: 1. البراقان
P. 157, n° 276,1,2: 1. بلهد
P. 158, n° 280,1,4: 1. ونيرت
P. 172, n° 304,1,1: 1. حاضر
P. 184, n° 324,1,1: 1. وتقت
P. 187, n° 328,1,4: 1. ومجريحها
P. 189, n° 330,3,1,14: 1. ونيرت.