Some remarks on recently discovered poems of Ibn Khafjah
Schippers, A.

Published in:
Actas del XII Congreso de la UEAI (Málaga, 1984)

Citation for published version (APA):
SOME REMARKS ON RECENTLY DISCOVERED POEMS OF IBN KHAFĀJAH

Arie SCHIPPERS

The importance of the poet Ibn Khafājah within the development of Andalusian Arabic literature which from the eleventh century of our era, became less dependent on its oriental examples, is a wellknown and often stressed fact. His poetry shows a style very much of his own: he has even developed a way of quoting poems of himself and others in a formulaic manner that deserves special further investigations and which needs to be studied more thoroughly in order to get in insight into the way he composes his poems. Moreover he uses in his poems a kind of cumulative imagery, in which metaphors based on colours and their contrast, or on water or other qualities, predominate. He is also wellknown because of his theoretical views, which appeared from the preface to his diwan (1).

In this connection it will be interesting to dwell a bit on the contents of a recently discovered manuscript of the diwan of Ibn Khafājah in the Leiden University Library which came originally from the Basset-collection and which contains a lot of poems —more than one hundred— which were not in the Gha-zi-edition of Ibn Khafājah’s diwan (2). This edition was based on several manuscripts and quotations from poems of Ibn Khafājah in secondary sources. Moreover in the recently described manuscript I found many prose-sections containing rhymed prose, but also theoretical passages about poetry in general or about love-poetry and certain ‘udhrī-love poets.

The poetry and the prose of Ibn Khafājah in general are written during a quiet easy life free from hardship. He observed certain political events of the time but from a distance.
Ibn Khafajah was born during the age of the petty kings in Alcira near Valencia in 1058, and passed away during the rule of the murabitun or Almoravids in 1139. He preferred to spend almost his whole life in his native town situated on a peninsula in the river Shuqr or Júcar, surrounded by nature and cultivated nature such as orange groves and orchards and gardens of flowers. As a poet he has been inspired by the oriental garden poet as-Ṣanā‘bari, whence he is called "the Ṣanā‘bari of al-Andalus" or the "gardener" (al-jannīn). Other poems reflect his love of pleasures and of both female and male beauty. Furthermore his emotional involvement in the political events of the time such as the battle of az-Zallāqah (Sagrajas), the conquest of Valencia by the Christians, the arrival of the Almoravids and the following reconquest of Valencia by them, is reflected in his poetry (3).

In the following minutes we will discuss some passages of prose and poetry occurring in the Leiden manuscript nr. 14.056, especially some of those which do not occur in the Gha'zi-edition. Besides, the presentation of the material in the manuscript which is a recent copy by three almost illegible Moroccan hands from a much older manuscript, is extremely chaotic, not only in view of the fact that poetry is represented as prose, but also the disorder comes from abrupt changes within the text and also from chaotic alphabetical order: first comes poetry on lām, then on lām, Ṣād, dād, ãyn, rāʾ, ḍāl, sīn, shin, ḥāʾ, kāf and in conclusion another time on lām.

In the following I will shortly dwell upon his description of the battle of az-Zallāqah (Sagrajas), a part of a passage about literary theory and a short satirical poem in conclusion (4).

Hitherto we had no poem at all by Ibn Khafajah about this battle, although this event is one of the most important historical facts during his life. In our new manuscript we have found a long poem in dād of his hand, preceded by a section in rhymed prose, which gives the poet's view on the battle, six years after it took place. From other poems we know that Ibn Khafajah was very much concerned about the situation in the neighbouring town of Valencia. In the year of the poem, 485 or 1092, Valencia was not yet occupied by El Cid. But there was a continuing menace from El Cid in the North and the Almoravids in the South (5). Many rulers of Muslim states had to adhere either to the Christians or to the Almoravids. Yūsuf ibn Tashufin, who considered the Muslim Andalusian rulers too weak, gave order to his generals to remove the Muslim rulers from power. So Muslim Andalusian states one after another fell into the hands of Yūsuf ibn Tashufin's generals. The ruler of Valencia, Ibn Jahhaf, made an attempt to conclude a treaty with El Cid to avoid to be overthrown by the Christians. This attempt turned out to be fatal for him. Because several years later El Cid treacherously conquered Valencia and put him to death. Ibn Khafajah's choice, however, was different. He feared Christian domination first of all, and therefore adhered to the Almoravids. He remembers Yūsuf ibn Tashufin's exploits at az-Zallāqah and hopes that the Naṣīr ad-Dīn—as this prince was called—should intervene and keep El Cid away.

In the passage in rhymed prose, at the beginning of the description of the battle of Zallāqah/Sagrajas, which occurred six years before, in 1086, Ibn Khafajah mentions the passage of Yūsuf ibn Tashufin from Morocco to Andalusia in order to assist the muslims against the Christian tyrant Alphons (at-Ṭaghibiyah al-ʿUdhfunsh) and his march in the direction of Badajoz.

The army of Alphons, who was also going in the direction of Badajoz, has been described in an hyperbolic and expressive way: "He went into that direction, while nearly 14000 horsemen were under his banner, shining in their dark armour, as if they
were under an coat of mail covered with waterstreams. Behind
them came 4000 armoured footsoldiers. They presented only their
breasts to the spears, not their backs”.

Their number was so great, that the plain was too na­
rrow for them. “It was a number, which - if given to drink,
would have left the seas behind as small waters. If they went,
they raised the mountains to the ground and they stirred up to
mountains of dust. The army moved its flanks as a raven agita­
tes his wings”. The battle took place on Friday, although Al­
phons tried to negotiate with the Muslims in order to appoint
Saterday as the battle rendez-vous and then to assault them trea­
erously and unexpectedly on Friday. So the Christians made
themselves ready for the battle on Friday. “Because of a heavy
fog, the moslims were only aware of the Christian vanguard at
the last moment: they were embroiled with them in great confu­
sion. The enemies were uppermost at the beginning of the day,
while the muslims had the upper hand on the end of the day. The
proverbs says: ‘The happy outcome is with those who take care’”.

As evidence that the battle took place on Friday a line
of the poet ‘Abdu-l-JalTl ibn Wahbun is quoted: “When they came
with resolution on the ‘Urubah-day, they did not know that this
day belonged to the Arabs”. In fact, Friday was called in preis­
lamic times: yaum ‘Urubah or yaum al-‘Urubah. I did not find
this line in other sources.

Then, in the next passages, he goes on in describing
the situation of the la'Tin, the accursed and loatheble Christian
tyrant. Coming from Toledo with his army in battle-order in
splendorous array, the beholder is blinded. The light of the
rising sun is reflected in it. The proudness and selfconscious­
ness of king Alphons is reflected in his brutal and haughty sa­
ying: ‘Even God cannot score a victory over me’. The Chris­
tians around him were astonished and bewildered by their masters

impicity. They draw a bad omen from his behaviour: God will gi­
ve him a striking punishment (nakal) both in this world and the
hereafter. They deduce from this event that he will be defeated
and that Fate will be against him. The sword will efface what
the ‘son of the bloody war’ has said. And, in fact, he returned
from the battle with only a few at his cavalry, in great shame.
The bulk of his army had been killed by Yūsuf ibn TashʃIn. Then
the poem on ḍad begins. The first line runs as follows: "Til­
ka-l-maʃarimu la buruqun tumidu/wa-s-sabiriyyatu la ghamamum ‘ab­
yadu’/" - which I translate as follows: "These swords are no
flashings of lightning which shine and the coats of mail are not
white clouds”. So the first line seems to describe an approaching
army.

The second line could indicate the same thing although
it is a bit obscure: (2) "They appear like a drowsy eye which is
anointed with sleep, just as some who appears again after a pe­
riod of divorce”. The third and fourth line are also referring
to the enemy. So perhaps also the first two lines indicate the
army of the enemy, which appears suddenly in the morning mist.
Lines 3-6 describe the enemy, in line 6 El Cid is called by his
name Ludhariq or Rodrigo. This line refers to the present condi­
tions at the time of the poem and the connection with the battle
of Zallaqah is delivered as a warning: the hero of Zallaqah, Yū­
suf ibn TashʃIn, will be dangerous to Rodrigo as he was dange­
rous to King Alphons during the battle of Zallaqah.

We give here our tentative translation of the lines 3-­
6: "(3) How many an enemy (adversary) argues against the Fate
of death with the evidence of a sword not cleaned from the blood
(4) A shivering of terror came over him like a shivering of fe­
ver. (5) The edge of a sword is gilded by the dark blood and a
breast of a horse is silvered by sweat. (6) Beware, o Rodrigo,
of a lion whose lair is between the swords and the stronghoofed
horses.

About Yusuf he continues to say the following lines:

(10) He is the sword whose sharp edge falls upon you and penetrates you while the hand of Fate is on its hilt. (11) Many a day at Badajoz I have known your men while the sword was going around shedding blood. (12) And every Christian commander (he uses the word dumustuq) of your army was falling down, while he breathed his last breath and his eye was closed.

In line 22 Yusuf ibn Tashfin is mentioned: "(23) And Nasir ad-Din the killer was a severe man; he was well known as a stubborn and difficult man, even when he was at peace. (34) He is a king who commits aggression, even when he may be moderate. When he assaults he looks like a lightning in its splendour which distracts". The poem completes the eulogy (36) by saying that "he has entrusted his affairs either with perdition or with generosity, so that he will be praised either for his sword or for his rain (his generosity)".

In the foregoing quotations I dwelt mainly upon mentioning significant names for the setting of the poem: Rodrigo is mentioned, Badajoz, where the battle of Sagrajas began, and Nasir ad-Din, the honorific name of the Almoravid rulers. The rest of the poem which I did not mention, contains the usual war descriptions of horses, dust and blood, and the misfortune represented as a black raven. - So much for the battle of az-Zallaqah. Besides his poems and rhymed prose, Ibn Khafajah has also theoretical passages about poetry and the effect of poetry (6).

In this respect he gives many stories which we find expressed in more or less the same words as in other Arabic adab-books. As the most conspicuous poets he mentions Abu Tammam and al-Mutanabbi and among the prosaists the fursan al-kalâm 'Abdul-Hamid, Ibn al-'Amid, as-Sahib ibn 'Abbad, as-Sabi and al-Mikali. He has a bad judgement about poetry as a means to get a living and satirical poetry. These two things i.e. hija' and the use of poetry in order to get money (making a profession of it in order to get money: istihbahu-hu fi-l-istijda') do not knock on the door of poetry. The followers of these two kinds of poetry are sharing in poetry in quiddity (mahiyyah), but not in substance (jauhar).

But sporadically Ibn Khafajah likes to put a bit of mockery in his poems, e.g. when he addresses a poem in kamal to someone who in his view had better to refrain from writing any poetry in future. As a conclusion I will give here the first line in Arabic and a tentative translation in English (7): "Ash-bahta shi'ra-ka hissatan/wa-sh-shay'u yushbihu-hu qarînu-hu".

(1) You resemble your poetry in quality; the partner of a thing resembles it. (2) Leave the weaving of poetry to someone else: because the poetry likes good qualities. (3) Go and stay in another valley, because poetry hates the man who makes it ugly. (4) Leave the rhymes, because the fact that it has a metre does not necessarily make it beautiful.

So much the material contained in this manuscript; I am preparing an edition in addition to that of Mustafa Ghazi. I am also going to computerise the whole poetry of Ibn Khafajah and to make a concordance of it, so that a better insight is offered in what I call the formulaic character of the poetry of Ibn Khafajah and the manner of its composition.

NOTES


(4) Ms. 8a, 27 a.

(6) Ms. 8a, b, sqq.

(7) Ibid. 27a.