Short poems in Andalusian literature: reflections on Ibn Hafaga's poems about figs
Schippers, A.

Published in:
Quaderni di Studi Arabi

Citation for published version (APA):
In the course of my present work on a new text edition of the Diwān of Ibn Ḥafṣa (died 430/1139), and my research on the eleventh and twelfth century Hebrew-Andalusian poetry, I have been struck by the occurrence of short, descriptive poems. These short poems also appear to have been very popular forms in the Eastern Arabic poetry, and were written by such masters as Kūsāqim (died 350/961) and Abū Ṭālib al-Ma‘mūnī (died 383/993). The poems, especially those by Ibn Ḥafṣa are used to describe a variety of objects, such as pieces of fruit, gardens, negro women playing the lute, hunch-backed negroes pouring wine, etc. It is clear that some of these poems also formed part of a much larger wine poem or a eulogy-qaṣīda. Other short, but apt and humoristic, poems appear to be derived from improvised poetry sessions held during drinking-bouts. Examples of this type of poem may be seen in the Kitāb badā‘i‘ al-bada‘ī‘. One poem from this collection also occurs in the Leiden Ms. of the diwan of Ibn Ḥafṣa (see appendix n° 1). The poet recounts the following anecdote:

“One day I was in the company of friends. One of these was a young man, who had realised he had made a faux-pas. The reason for this was their poetry contest

2 See my forthcoming Some Remarks on Hebrew Andalusian Poetry in Relation to Arabic Poetry: descriptions of fruit in the tradition of the "elegants" or "zurafo" in JSS.
3 See for this kind of poems composed by Kūsāqim: A. Giese, Wasf bei Kūsāqim, Eine Studie zur bescheidenden Dichtkunst der Abbasidenzeit, Berlin, Klaus Schwarz, 1981.

QSA, 5-6 (1987-88)
which dealt with the superiority of pomegranates above grapes. The young man had started the contest and had praised the grape exceedingly. In answer to his poem I improvised the following poem in order to tease him:

1. It will be considered a good deed from your side, if you give me a pomegranate which has not been removed from the bountiness of his nature (i.e. it is still fresh).
2. It is not the bunch of grapes which I suck, but a breast, as if I am still lying in the cot.
3. Does someone who equals a testicle to a breast really see any affinity between the two?

Consequently, the young man turned red and left the company”.

In the manuscript there is an addition which says that the poem contains a double-rhyme (luzūm mā lā yatzam).

Another anecdote which deals with a poetry contest in a drinking-bout, but which refers to Hebrew poetry, is found in the work of Samuel ha-Nagid (died 447/1056). He remembers a bowl containing apples and on the bowl the following Arabic verse is written 7:

Li-mahafaM min kulli^fin'adda/sawwarlu nafsā hākafā min fiḍḍa [kāmil]

(From fear of the bite of any lout, I made myself, as you can see, of silver).

One of his friends who was present on this occasion improvised a translation into a Hebrew verse, and consequently Samuel ha-Nagid himself composed fourteen variations on the same theme, namely, the apple as the fruit of love messages, which may only been bitten into by the beloved 8.

We are thus dealing with short poems which are improvised at, and perhaps for, specific occasions. In addition, however, there are a number of short poems which do not seem to have been improvised but, because of the effect of their descriptions, they were still regarded as successfull in the drinking companies. Many of these poems can be found in the published diwān of Ibn Ḥaṣāna and in unpublished sections which are currently being studied. If we look at the subject of these poems, we notice that the poet dealt with those subjects which he found most attractive, for example, snow was one of his favourite subjects, and appeared in one of his very early, but as yet unpublished poems (min awwali qawli-hi). Other favourite topics include the downy beard; the touchstones for gold and silver; the night; satyrical descriptions of negro women; description of ugly people, including hunch-backed men; and finally, there are a number of poems about more personal

---

subjects, such as the braveness of the poet despite his old age. Within the group of fruit descriptions, Ibn Hafṣa does not use the apple motif, although this is usually the most popular fruit subject with other poets. Instead, we find descriptions of bitter oranges (nārang), and frequent references to orange trees with their white blossom. There are also descriptions of grapes, such as were used in the above mentioned poem, in which the grapes are compared with pomegranates. The figs (ān), sometimes compared with a particular type of date called balas, are mentioned in a group of short poems which were composed in a metre such as the mutaqārib, and with rhymes with unusual combinations. These poems probably do not belong to a larger unit. We will also see that the poet had forgotten one of his fig poems and tries to recollect the verses. Another fig poem occurs both in early, short versions and also in a later one, in which various earlier versions have been welded together.

If we turn to the diwan of Ibn Hafṣa which was edited by Cāzi, we see that some fragments on particular themes have ‘twin sisters’, i.e. poems written in the same metre and rhyme, which deal with the same subject and which can thus be easily be added to each other. Cāzi gives these verses the same number, but adds the letter mīm of mawṣūl. These other fragments are sometimes found in secondary sources different from the normal diwān manuscripts. Because of this phenomenon we may obtain a better insight into a separate life of some of Ibn Hafṣa’s poems, and their changing state if we take into account the fact that the poet frequently recomposed his earlier poems and sometimes created a new poem by combining various fragments. To give an example of this ‘re-creation’ let us have first a look a poem which Ibn Hafṣa wrote concerning figs which have been gathered in the early morning:

1. Their hue being black with the colour of rejection, they laugh at the time when darkness frowns.
2. When the whiteness of the morning dawns, they appear like freckles in her face.
3. It is as if I were gathering in the early morning the small breasts of young negro girls.

---

9 See e.g. Ibn Hafṣa’s Ḍhuṭan, ed. Cāzi, index, pp. 403 sqq.; one of his unpublished snow poems in the Leiden Ms. is poem n° 391 (39b).
10 See the poems n° 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 38, 39 in Cāzi’s edition; cfr. the unpublished poems n° 336 (4b), 390 (39b), 428 (48a) in the Leiden Ms.
11 See Cāzi’s edition n° 144 (p. 191), 144m (p. 374), 322 (p. 374); cfr. Ms. Leiden 46a, 47a.
12 See e.g. Cāzi’s edition n° 144 (p. 191), 144m (p. 374).
Many years after the composition of this poem, the poet attempted to recollect this piece of work 14 (see appendix n° 4). He did not succeed, although he did recall the metre, end-rhyme and theme. In this way the poet was able to come to the following reconstruction 15 (see appendix n° 3):

1. What beautiful figs are these, which were gathered when the morning had just torn open the curtain of darkness!
2. The virginal morning with a friendly face welcomes the figs, which appear like freckles in her face.
3. Enamoured of [the figs], she strokes their small breasts, which are so like those of young negro girls.

These poems are short by their nature, because the rhyme-letter sin provides few rhyming possibilities, similarly in the following poem, with the rhyme-letteršin. This poem occurs in two separate forms in the edition of Gazi, but in the Leiden manuscript the two poems have been combined, although the sequence has been slightly altered and an extra line added 16 (see appendix n° 5):

1. Let us collect the branches of the fig tree, now that the morning has broken the train of the darkness which belongs to the end of the night.
2. The harvest of his honey was about to flow [Already the honey dripped from his mouth], like the saliva of a slumbering beloved.
3. Now you see how his wrinkles are laughing, while yesterday he was still reciting the śūra 'He frowned'
4. Belonging to the beautiful, bedecked things they excite desire for the tasty harvest, well-scented by their breath.
5. I cherished a passionate desire for the whiteness of their mouths, while I adored the darkness of their lips [I cherished passionately the redness of their lips: how much more do I love those which consist entirely of the colour of red lips!]
6. From God your perfectness emanates, O you who harvested! From God your completeness springs, O you who planted.

In this poem the fig has a dark colour and is wrinkled, which creates the appearance of a frown. As soon, however, as the white honey drips from his mouth, the wrinkless seem to laugh. The reference to Koran: 80 not only pertains to laughing and frowning, which is specifically mentioned in this śūra, but also to orchards, fruit and the food of people.

14 See Ms. Leiden 47a.
15 See Ms. Leiden 47a.
16 See Ms. Leiden 46a; Gazi’s edition n° 144 (p. 191) and 144m (p. 374). Only the sixth line does not occur in Gazi’s edition; the other lines consist of various variant readings, belonging to Ms. Leiden 46a, Gazi’s editions n° 144 (p. 191) and 144m (p. 374). We use here the order of the lines as present in the Leiden Ms.
Another poem which has not yet been published reads as follows 17 (see appendix n° 6):

1. Bowing, she overflows here and there with the tears of dawn, while the night above the earth was like the train of blackness.
2. I proposed to her, because she was still unmarried, and because a beautiful woman should only be proposed to by a gallant man.
3. The hands of the wind had torn her skin, as if a childless woman had torn the chemise off a mourning dress.

In this poem I cannot find many specific details; the personification of fruit with women is widely used. The dew drops may indicate the honey dripping from the fruit. The concept of virginity points at the fact that the fruit has not yet been touched, although the bowing stalk indicates the ripeness of the fig. The image of the mother who mourns her child is consistent within the context, because on the one hand it goes with the bowing or kneeling and crying woman who is mentioned at the beginning of the poem, while on the other hand, it is set against the virginity of the woman who was proposed to by a gallant lover; this is a well-known procedure in Arabic poetry. The morning is pointed out by the dew drops and perhaps by the wind. The gathering of the figs is indicated by the marriage proposal.

In another unpublished poem, we again find the image of girls and breasts, although in this poem the gathering of the fruit takes place in the evening 18 (see appendix n° 7):

1. We went to see them, thus visiting [tiny] cupolas, while they approached us in the evening when we arrived.
2. We collected the branches that contained the harvest; the figs appeared like breasts above narrow waists.
3. Many green veils which I addressed with flattering words, belonged to dark eyes which looked around.
4. And I repeatedly asked many a girl, who looked like an old woman, for her hand in marriage, to a mother with many children, who then cherished her to her bosom.

It is evident that in line 2 there is a description of the branches with their fruit. The green veils in line 3 are perhaps the green leaves; in that case the black eyes are the figs 19. The girl in line 4 is still a girl because the fig is still virginal, that is to say uneaten or unplucked. At the same time,

---

17 See Ms. Leiden 42b (n° 398).
18 See Ms. Leiden 42b (n° 399).
19 See for similar personification e.g. Gâzi’s edition, n° 230m, line 1 (p. 336) and n° 221, line 7 (p. 281).
however, the girl is an old woman because her skin is wrinkled. The woman giving birth to many children is again the branch with green leaves, cherishing the figs.

It should be mentioned that the poems about figs by Ibn Ḥafāġa specifically deal with the harvesting of the fruit, and not, as is often found in other fig poems, with their being served for eating (for instance in the selection of poems which can be found in the *Ḥalbat al-Kumayt* or ‘The Race Course of the Red Wine’ of Šams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Nawāġī, who died in 859/1455) 20 (see appendix n° 8, 9, 10). In the three poems which we will recount here for contrast, it should be noted that the served figs are described specifically on the basis of their colour; the introductory phrase is something to compare with the modern ‘bon appetit’ or ‘enjoy the meal’. In the first poem there is in line 1 a reference to the breasts of young virgins. In line 2 the interior of the fig is described as a golden kernel. The exterior is compared with topaz or chrysolith gems which have a green colour. In the second poem, by Ibn al-Muʿtazz (died 296/908), there are references to the taste and beauty of the figs, and to the fact that the interior and exterior of the fruit are comparable. In the second line the fig is described as covered with a coat of snow, or a golden hillock. Also the taste and scent of the figs is commented upon. In line 3 it is said that the fruit, when gathered on a dish, look like tents of green silk. In the third poem, by the hand of Kusāğīm, the figs, when on a plate, are described as smiling; the same qualification is found in one of the poems by Ibn Ḥafāġa. There are white figs which look like the day, and dark ones which resemble the night. The figs are also described as a food-laden tables with the leaves raised upwards without the usual tale rings.

In the above, I have tried to give an impression of the short poem, after depicting the function of these often improvised verses within a group of friends. Of course it can not always be said whether these short poems were not later incorporated within a larger group. The poems of Ibn Ḥafāġa which have been dealt with in this paper, are probably independent fragments. In these poems he often uses the *luzūm mā lā yalzam*, which limits the possibilities for extension. In his choice of topics he differs from his predecessors by not using at all the popular apple motif, whereas he frequently uses the rather uncommon fig motif. When describing the fig, he focusses on the gathering of the fruit, and not on their serving, a form which we knew from other collections such as the *Ḥalbat al-Kumayt*.

من ديوان ابن خفاجة

1. (سريع، لزوم و لا يلزم)

1. صلي لك الخير بريمة
2. لا عنبا امتص عنقوده
3. وسهل يرى بينهما شبة

2. (متناسب)

1. وسود الوجه كل من الصدور
2. إذا ما تجلب بالضحى
3. كأنى أطفف منها ضحى

3. قالت في بكرى إلى جنات التين (متناسب)

1. انا حبذ التين من مجننى
2. وكذ من بكره طلقه
3. فبعثت منه ولوها به

714
4. قال كنت قد صفت منذ أعوام خمسة آيات في هذا المعنى، في هذا العروض في هذا الرواي، ثم أن ذهب النصيئ وأخنى عليها الزمان، رطالبت نفسى بحفظها أو تذكر شيء من لفظها فلم يحضرني بصفته ثانية، نحاولت في أمرها ووضع الحافر على الحافر فلم أدر ما الفني فان وجدت في غير هذه الصيغة فاختلتها لهذه العلة.

5. وقال في جني الثين (متقارب)

1. أما واهتصار غصن البلس وقد قلص الصحيح ذيل الغلس
(اغ، ص 191، 1)
1. أما وتشتي غصن البلس وقد مزق الصحيح جيب البلس
(خطوطة ليدن، 1)
2. ولا يسيل جني شدها كسا ريق حبيب نعس
(اغ، ص 191، 2)
2. وقد سال من فه شدها (خطوطة ليدن، 2، غ، ص 374، 2)
3. تراه تبسم تخليطه وقد كان بالأمس يتو عبس
(خطوطة ليدن، 3)
3. وها هو يبسم تخطيطه (غ، ص 374، 2)
4. لقد شاق من رائق الجيلي شهي الجنى مستطاب النفس
(خطوطة ليدن، 4، غ، ص 191، 2)
5. فهبت له بياض الثغور وأحببت فيه سواد اللبس
(خطوطة ليدن، 5، غ، ص 191، 4)
5، وقد كنت أغري برس السفاح فكيف به وهو كل لعس
(اغ، ص 274، 1)
6، فلله درك يا من جنى وله درك يا من غرس
(مخطوطة ليدن، 6)

6، وقال يصف التنين والبكور الى جناته وقطنه بنداة (طويل)

1، ورامة قد رخرقت أدمض الندى
2، خضعت اليها نفسها وهي عانس
3، وقد مرقت أيدي الرياح اديها

7، وقال في جناه مع العشبي (来袭)

1، أتيناها نزور بها قبابا وتقربنا للسما من وقود
2، ونهب العصور بها جناء فتحكي من تهدى في قدود
3، فرب برائع غارلت خضر هناك لأعين يلحظن سود
4، وبنت ظلت أخطبها عجوز لام تحنها وولد

من كتاب حلبة الكبيت في الأدب والنواذير المتعلقة بالخريات لامام شمس الدين النواحي

716
1. أحبب بتين جاءنا مثل نهر الورد الخردة
2. داخله مضمن قراءة من عسجد
3. قشرها الخارج بـ (م) كي للزيرجد

(كامل)

1. أنعم بتين طعما ورختي حسن وقارب مخرج من منظر
2. في برد ثلج في نقا تجرف رفي ريح العبير وطيب طعم السكر
3. يحكم إذا ما صب في أطباقها خيمة ضِرب من الحرير الأخضر

(كامل)

1. أهلا بتين جاءنا مبتسما على طبق
2. يحكم الصباح بعضه وبعضه يحكم الفسق
3. كسفرة من أدم مضمرة بلا حلق

717