Short poems in Andalusian literature: reflections on Ibn Hafaga's poems about figs

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In the course of my present work on a new text edition \(^1\) of the *Diwān* of Ibn Ḥafṣa (died 430/1139), and my research on the eleventh and twelfth century Hebrew-Andalusian poetry \(^2\), 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 Kūṣagīm (died 350/961) \(^3\) and Abū Ṭālīb al-Maʾmūn (died 383/993) \(^4\). 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-*qāṣīda*. 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 *Kūṭāb bāḍāʾ īʾ al-bāḍāʾ īʾ* \(^5\). One poem from this collection also occurs in the Leiden Ms. of the *diwān* of Ibn Ḥafṣa \(^6\) (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

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\(^2\) 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 *JSQ*.

\(^3\) See for this kind of poems composed by Kūṣagīm: A. Giese, *Warf bei Kūṣagīm, Eine Studie zur beschreibenden Dichtkunst der Abbasidenzeit*, Berlin, Klaus Schwarz, 1981.


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 yalzam).

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:

Li-maḥṣafā min kulli gūfīn 'adda/ṣawwurtu 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.

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 successful in the drinking companies. Many of these poems can be found in the published diwān of Ibn Ḥašāqa 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; satirical descriptions of negro women; description of ugly people, including hunch-backed men; and finally, there are a number of poems about more personal

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subjects, such as the braveness of the poet despite his old age. Within the group of fruit descriptions, Ibn Hafaga 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 Hafaga which was edited by Cäzi, 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. Cäzi gives these verses the same number, but adds the letter mim of mawṣūl. These other fragments are sometimes found in secondary sources different from the normal diwan manuscripts. Because of this phenomenon we may obtain a better insight into a separate life of some of Ibn Hafaga’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 Hafaga wrote concerning figs which have been gathered in the early morning (see appendix no 2):

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 Hafaga’s Dhu‘ān, ed. Cäzi, index, pp. 403 sqq.; one of his unpublished snow poems in the Leiden Ms. is poem no 391 (39b).
10 See the poems no 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 38, 39 in Cäzi’s edition; cfr. the unpublished poems no 336 (4b), 390 (39b), 428 (48a) in the Leiden Ms.
11 See Cäzi’s edition no 144 (p. 191), 144m (p. 374), 322 (p. 374); cfr. Ms. Leiden 46a, 47a.
12 See e.g. Cäzi’s edition no 144 (p. 191), 144m (p. 374).
Many years after the composition of this poem, the poet attempted to recollect this piece of work (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 (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 šīn provides few rhyming possibilities, similarly in the following poem, with the rhyme-letter šīn. This poem occurs in two separate forms in the edition of Gāzi, but in the Leiden manuscript the two poems have been combined, although the sequence has been slightly altered and an extra line added (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 sûra '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 sûra, but also to orchards, fruit and the food of people.

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14 See Ms. Leiden 47a.
15 See Ms. Leiden 47a.
16 See Ms. Leiden 46a; Gāzi's edition n° 144 (p. 191) and 144m (p. 374). Only the sixth line does not occur in Gāzi's edition; the other lines consist of various variant readings, belonging to Ms. Leiden 46a, Gāzi'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. Gāzī’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 Ḥafāga 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 Halbat al-Kumayt or ‘The Race Course of the Red Wine’ of Sams al-Din Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Nawāǧi, 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-Mu‘tazz (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 Kusagim, the figs, when on a plate, are described as smiling; the same qualification is found in one of the poems by Ibn Ḥafāga. 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 Ḥafāga which have been dealt with in this paper, are probably independent fragments. In these poems he often uses the luzūm mā lā yalsam, 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 Halbat al-Kumayt.

Appendix of ARIE SCHIPPERS, Short poems in Andalusian Literature

من ديوان ابن خفاجة
1. (سرعهن لزوم ما لا يلزم)
لم تنتقل عن كرم العهد
2. لا عんな أمتص عنقوده
ثديي كاني بعد في الهد
3. وهل يرى بينهما نسب
من عدل الخصية بالنهد
2. (متناسب)

1. رسود الوجه كلون العمود
تسيم رقت عبوس الغبشي
2. إذا ما جئي بياض الضحى
تطمن في وجه كالتمش
3. كاني اقطع منها ضحى
ثدي صغار بنات الحبش
4. قال في بكر الى جنى التين (متناسب)

1. ألا حبذا التين من مجتنى
وقد صدع الصبح سجف الغبشي
2. وحيت به بكره طلقة
تطلع في وجهها كالتمش
3. فجمشت منه ولوا به
ثدي صغار بنات الحبش

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4. قال كنت قد صفت منذ أعوام خمسة أبيات في هذا المعنى، في هذا
العرض في هذا الروي، ثم أنه ذهب النسيان وأخني عليها الزمان،
طالبت نفسى بهفتها أو تذكر شيء من لفظها فلم يحضرني بصفته ثانية،
نحارت في أمرها وقوع الحافر على الحافر فلم أدر ما الفتى فان وجدت في
غير هذه الصيغة فاختلتها لهذه العلة.

5. وقال في جني التين (متقارب)

1 أ،ما وهتشار غصن البلس وقد قلص الصحيح ذيل الغلس
(لغ، ص 191، 1)

1 أ،ما وتشي غصن البلس وقد مزق الصحيح حبيب الغلس
(مخطوطة ليدن، 1)

2، ومال يسيل جني شهده كما سال ريق حبيب نفس
(لغ، ص 191، 2)

2، ودل سال من فه شهده (مخطوطة ليدن، 2، غ، ص 274، 3)

2، تراه بتبسيم تخطيطه وقد كان بالأساس يتلو عبس
(مخطوطة ليدن، 3)

2، وها هو يبسم تخطيطه (لغ، ص 274، 4)

4، لقد شاق من رائق الجثلي شهي الجنى مستطاب النفس
(مخطوطة ليدن، 4، غ، ص 191، 6)

5، فهمت له ببياض الغفور وأحببت فيه سواد اللبس
(مخطوطة ليدن، 5، غ، ص 191، 6)

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5، وقد كنت أغري بلعب الشفاه كيفك به وهو كل لعس
(اغ، ص، ۲۷۴، ۱)
6، فله درك يا من جنى وله درك يا من غرس
(مخطوطة ليدن، ۶)

6، وقال يصف التين والبكور إلى جناته وقتنه بندها (طويل)

1، وراكة قد قرتقت أدمع الندى والليل فوق الأرض ذيل سواه
2، خلطت إليها نفسها وهي عانس وما حسناء غير جواج
3، وقد مرقت أيدي الرياح أدمعها كما مرقت تكل تقيص حداد

7، وقال في جناته مع العشبي (أوافر)

1، اتيناه نزور بها قبابا وتقرنا مساء من وقود
2، ونهتصر الغصون بها جناء فتحكي من نهود في قدود
3، فرب برائح غازلته خضر هناك لأعين يلاحظن سود
4، ونبت ظلت أخطبها عجوز لم ثم تحضنها ولود

من كتاب حلبة الكمي في الأدب والنوادر المتعلقة بالخرميات لامام شمس الدين النواحي
1- أحببتين جاءتا مثل نهد الخرد
2- داخله مضين قراضة من عسجد
3- قشرها الخارج يبح (م) كي للزبرجد

(كامل)

1- أنعم بتين طاب طعما واكتسي حسناء وقارب مخرج من منظر ريح العبير وطيب طعم السكر
2- في برد ثلج في نقا تبر وتفت خيما ضرين من الحرير الأخضر
3- يحكي إذا ما صب في أطباقها (م) كي للزبرجد

(كامل)

1- أهلا بتيتين جاءتا مبتسما على طبق
2- يحكي الصباح ببعضه وببعض يحكي الفسق
3- كسفرة من ادم مضمومة بلا حلق