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Schippers, A.

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ARIE SCHIPPERS

THE THEME OF OLD AGE IN THE POETRY OF IBN ḤAFĀGA

Much has been written about the problem of the originality of the Andalusia poets and whether there is a proper Andalusian style. In the case of Ibn Ḥafāga we can certainly say that this poet showed an individual style and has his own way of combining metaphors and similes. I will try to introduce you to some of the special characteristics of the poetry of Ibn Ḥafāga (1058-1139) who –as we all know– is especially known for his garden poetry and his description of flowers.

Pérès, in his famous book on Andalusia poetry, found Ibn Ḥafāga merely an imitator of oriental Arabic poets, but his opinion has not been shared by most orientalists, even though Ibn Ḥafāga in the preface of his Diwān mentions his dependence upon oriental poets such as 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Ṣūrī (950-1028) and Mīḥyar al-Daylāmī (d. 1037).

What is generally considered as the originality of Ibn Ḥafāga is the natural oppositions he creates by his imagery, and the manner in which the poet fits different functions of nature together. For instance he constructs nature poems from several harmoniously combined metaphors which are drawn from the human body or a part of it. Thus comes into being a metaphorical and personifying manner of writing.

The poet overburdens his poems with metaphors, and often the real thing he is describing, is not explicitly mentioned. Among his remarkable poems– especially those which are not about gardens– is his poem about a personified mountain (no. 164) who teaches lessons of life experience to his visitors.

1 Cf. al-Saqundi in Dr. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Muṣannāf, Fadā’il al-Andalus wa-ahli-hā, Beirut 1968, pp. 40-41.
2 Henri Pérès, La poésie andalouse en arabe classique du XIe siècle, Paris (Maisonneuve) 1953, p. 36.

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travellers who stay with his for only a short time. Another poem begins with a description of bravery, but halfway through, the poet confesses to preferring a rendez-vous with his beloved boy (no. 278). Furthermore a poem which 'parodies' the sequence of an Umayyad qasīda (no. 82) should be mentioned: it contains the well-known transitions wa-laylin followed in the next lines by saraytu bi-hi and bi-harqin sahāqin each time with several lines in between, as we find in qasīdas by Du 'l-Rumma (696-735), but with totally different imagery.

Other characteristics of Ibn Ḥafṣā's poetry are his combinations of poetry with rhyme prose: sometimes he explains to his mamduh certain features of his poem: such as his use of Hiḡāzī place names. Remarkable also is the use of luzūm ma lā yalzam in the rhymes of many of his poems. Prose texts are interspersed between his poems, and the most important of these texts is his own preface to his Diwān.

All the above mentioned characteristics of Ibn Ḥafṣā's poetry and even more are amply dealt with recent scholarship, not only by Bürgel but also– last but not least– by Magda Mohamed Nuwaihi, who in her Harvard thesis – under the direction of Wolfhart Heinrichs– analysed systematically the personifications, rhetorical figures such as ġinās and tībāq, and genitive metaphor, syntactic devices, and strategies by the poet in order to achieve unity in the poems.

In the following I will deal with a special recurrent theme of Ibn Ḥafṣā's poetry, namely the theme of old age. This is one of the themes which gives the poet the opportunity to show his own feelings, despite the conventionality of them. The theme of old age of course is naturally linked with the theme of

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7 Diwān, p. 131; for Du 'l-Rumma or Çağlan ibn 'Uqba (696-735 AD), see the examples given by Dr. Yusuf Ḥalif in his Du 'l-Rumma, tā'ir al-hubb wa-'l-ṣāḥbā, Cairo 1970, pp. 156 sqq.
8 Diwān, p. 204; Magda Nuwaihi, Literary Analysis, pp. 19-20.
9 E.g. nos. 187, 190=Diwān, pp. 246, 249 and passim.
11 See above note 4.
12 See above the book mentioned in note 3.
love, in the sense that old age, symbolised by white hair, is seen as one of the obstacles to love  

Ibn Ḥaflaqa mentions his age in his poetry several times, like previous poets such as al-Ṭabatūrī (821-897), and the pre- and early Islamic 'aged or longevo us poets' called al-muʿammarūn. The concept of a certain age depends on life expectancy and also on the influence of philosophical conceptions. 'Classical Arabic usage, describing ideal conditions, divides man’s life span as follows: before eighteen one is classed as a child; from eighteen to forty one enjoys full vigour in body and mind; and from fifty to eighty one experiences old age'.

The division is slightly different from classical and medieval views, which, from Galenic medicine, are received in Persian and Arabic literature. In his Convivio the medieval Christian author Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) places the division in ages on the same level as the divisions of the year in 4 seasons and of the day in 4 canonical hours of prayer. According to him, the first period to take into consideration is the period from 8-25 years, the second from 25-45 years, the third from 45-70 years, and the fourth from 70-81 years. Dante's system is also related to the warmth and humidity of the human body (e.g. youth being a combination of warmth and humidity; old age of coldness with dryness). The ideal death is at the age of eighty-one, because Plato died at that age. Dante exclaimed: “Were it not that Christ had to be crucified, he would have reached the age of eighty-one”. This is, by the way, the age, that Ibn Ḥaflaqa must have reached. Galen's ideas as reflected in Persian poems also relates the four tempers to the four seasons. Spring is associated with blood, humidity and warmth; summer with yellow bile, dryness and warmth; autumn with yellow bile and coldness; and winter with coldness and dryness.

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14 Cf. e.g. al-Ṭabatūrī [821-897 AD], Diwān, Cairo (dar al-Maʿārif) - 1978, no. 290: line 11: p. 1198; see e.g. Ignaz Goldziher, Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie, Zweiter Theil. Das Kitāb al-Muʿammarūn des Abū Ḥātim as-Sūjīlīnī, Leiden (E.J. Brill) 1899, pp. IX sqq [Einleitung].
16 Dante Alighieri, Convivio, trattato IV, capitolo xxiii [several editions].
17 The date of his death [533] and his age [82] have been mentioned by Ibn Abbar [d. 1199 AD]’s Kitāb l-Takmila li-Ṣilāt Ibn Baskuwāl, Algiers 1920, p. 175.
autumn with black bile, dryness and coldness; winter with phlegm, humidity and coldness. We see the same ideas based upon Hippocrates' and Galen's teachings in the famous poem by Avicenna (980-1037) on Medicine. Therefore we conclude that a division of seasons and lifetime in four parts exist in European medieval as well as Islamic culture.

In any case, from these sources it appears that in the early and medieval society that precedes our modern age, clear conceptions existed about age and life time. In Arabic literature however, one characteristic is particularly striking in matters of age: namely black hair which determines being young whereas white hair is the mark of growing old. So for instance in the Koran, we have the reference of Zecharia who considers himself too old to have a child. Zecharia said: "O my Lord, my bones are weak, and my head has become hoary with white hair" or in Grunebaum's translation: "My head is lit up with white". This sentence has entered the many treatises on metaphors and other figures of speech, such as Ibn al-Mu'tazz's Kiāb al-Badī', al-Gurgānī's Iğāz al-Qur'ān, and even the famous Andalusian Judeo-Arabic Kiāb al-Muhādarā wa-l-Mūdākara by Moses ibn Ezra.

In poetry references to old age are quite common: black, the colour of youth, many times has been contrasted with the white colour of old age. Lifetime here is dichotomy derived from the contrast between black and white. The system of values which is normally on the side of the white colour symbolising daylight against the black colour of the night, here it has been reversed.

Dealing with Ibn Hafaga's poetry about old age we would emphasize that it is one of his favourite themes, also in love poetry. In several love poems the poet says that he is old and therefore impotent. So in poem no. 278 the poet says during a rendez-vous with a boy: "My loin-cloth remained chaste and my robe unsullied. And but for a debility that touched me..."
—while there was a freshness in him—the moon would have spent the night envying me alone”. Or in another poem [no. 45, p. 84] he says while having a meeting with a young lady, in spite of his old age [line 3]: “There was only a smacking kiss and an embrace, and I was proud that I remained chaste of loincloth”.

In some of the love poems written in his old days Ibn Ḥafṣaḡa confesses his age and the difference in age with his love object [no. 40, p. 81: line 7, 9]:

7. Between youth and me lay 51 years, as if I, while they went away so fast, appeared in them as a dream.

9. Were it that I were fourteen years old, so that I wouldn’t have to call her ‘daughter’, and she wouldn’t have to call me ‘uncle’.

This her calling him ‘uncle’ recalls us the poem of the pre-Islamic poet Zuhayr (d. 609) who describes in his poem the young women who reacted to his greyness [poem no. 15, p. 91, lines 3-4] 26:

3. The young women said: “You are our uncle”. Youth is a like a friendly tribe which we are eventually separated from.

4. Because I became only for them the form they knew when I was young, and they only recognized the black of the head, but greyness is all over now 27.

In the following we will make a selection of Ibn Ḥafṣaḡa’s poems on greyness and old age, followed by an analysis of contents. In poem no. 288 [p. 355] we find one of Ibn Ḥafṣaḡa’s latest confessions of old age. It is only an occasional poem since it is not more than a short response to a question of one of the authorities about how he was doing now that he reached the age of eighty-one. ‘When he [the poet] reached the age of eighty-one, he responded to Abū-l-'Arab ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Tūḡībī 28, who asked him about his condition’. The poem is the following:


27 This is a free translation, due to the difficulty to translate this passage into understandable English. See also Enderwitz, “Die Grauen Haare”, p. 130; R. Jacobi, Studien zur Poetik der altarabischen Qaside, Wiesbaden 1972, p. 42.

28 See for these persons, the sources given by Al-Sayyid Muṣṭalāż Cāżī in: Ibn Ḥafṣaḡa, Dīwān, p. 442.
1. What social life or sustenance or slumber is there for someone, who is eighty-one years old?

2. White Hair has rolled up man’s coat tail, the more Youth dragged along its halter as it pleased 29.

3. At times an unlucky event affects him, which makes the eye burn; at other times it may be a happy event.

The poet considers the weakness of old age which deprives him from the ability to attend parties; he can not even look after his own food, and sleeplessness has come over him. The more his youth [compared to a horses] is left to itself, to pasture as it pleases, the more his hair becomes grey and white, and Old Age has rolled up his tail, which refers to man’s elegance and selfconceit which has diminished during Old Age. The poet characterizes his present life as being dominated by ‘ups’ and ‘downs’.

Earlier the poet said in another poem [no. 220, p. 262] that before he really knew what happened, he had left more than fifty years behind him 30. Previously he had not met anyone who could explain his situation: the swiftness of the journey of life. By only staying, man advances in age and makes a journey through the stages of life. This paradox is presented in the following lines, which he devoted to the subject during an illness. The whole piece is in luzūm mā lā yalzam on lām and ḥā:

[ طوويل ]

جهلتك وما ألقى عليا وإنما
فل تطأ الوجناء بي غير ماحل
أسر و إن لم احتقب زاد راحل
وطلبي لقد أعجلت طي المراحل
तस्कन العين و أخرى حسـٰنـه

29 The more one makes pleasure, the more one comes near to old age. It looks like the message of Balzac’s Peau de chagrin.

30 For a thorough analysis, see Magda Nuwaihi, Literary Analysis, pp. 176-179.
1. I became ignorant, but I did not meet a learned man, my eyes were weakened, but I was unable to pass by an oculist who anoints the eye.

2. So I travelled because I became barren and sought for pasture but the camel with prominent cheeks only trod barren places with me.

3. And it seemed to me as if I was standing still, but [in reality] I was travelling, although I did not pack the provisions of a traveller.

4. So I said, when I had left fifty years [hīgga] behind me: “I have gone through the stages of life in a hurry.

5. I am bent down under the burden of a last generous spark of life and an emaciated body whose flesh is stripped to the bone.

6. I swim in the sea of suffering, maybe one day I will touch a shore of deliverance”.

The expression hīgga for ‘year’ reminds us of earlier poetry in which lifetime is mentioned in the same way by Zuhayr, al-Buhturi or the mu’ammarun.

In another fragment on old age [no. 69, p. 116, lines 8-22], the poet mentions the age of sixty at the end. In it he evokes the time of his youth and he describes in a rather difficult passage how youth flies away from him and old age poses himself between the poet and youth. The first lines of the poem consist of a kind of self praise, in which he looks back upon his youth and asks his two friends from Ḥimyar, who assist him as usually on the camp-site to speak about his lost youth, now that he has become grey. The expression in line 1 matāyā l-ṣibā [‘riding beasts of Youth’] reminds us of Zuhayr’s poem no. 15 in which he complains likewise about his old age. There, the expression afīs al-ṣibā [‘the horses of Youth’] is used, which are now unsaddled, or ‘made naked’. Ibn Ḥafāga’s poem no. 69 begins as follows:

[متقارب

وطلت ثنايا العلى مرقبا

تُوظَّب ظهر السرير مركب

وخشيت إلى سبسب سبسب

شاتت مطايا الصبا مطلبا

وأقبلت صدر الدرج عزمتة

وجبت إلى سدفة سدفة


32 Cf. Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulmā, in W. Ahlwardt, The Divans of the Six Ancient Arabic Poets, p. 91 [poem no. 15, line 1].

149
شميّم الغرار وبرد الصبّا
أخى شبيّة عن ليالي الصبّا
بصدر كريم صبا ما صبّا
فاظحى ولا انقاد حتى أبى
تصدق بها خطيباً أخطبا
وعهدًا لعصر الصبا أطرتا
وترتّعا بالحمرّى متشبّا
وعهدى بهبابتنا ربريًا
وأندى معاطف تلك الربيّة
وصّة ذلك اللّمّى مشربة
تعاطي حديث يحل الحبّى
طريراً وينكرنّى أشبيّا
أجيء هناك بما أذهبنا
لا غفر اللّهّ ما أذنبن
يكان له الصدر أن يلهبنا
إذا لجئت دمعة أعربنا
ففاضٍ بالدمّ ما ذهبنا
شرااباً أرقىجه أصبهنا
وقصر ابن ستيمان أن يندبنا
وقلت وقد شافتى ملقى
خليلى من حميّر حدثنا
 állأ بذكر الهوى غلّة
 وما غام ما غام حتى انجل
وحن هديل على بانى
فانكرنا ليلةً باللّوى
وما بواكي الغضى سلسلا
ليالي هديه بافتية
وما كان أعتر تلك الصبا
ولطيب ذاك الجنى روضة
فرّك من ساكن كامنا
ولم يك يعرفني أمردا
فكنت بدون الصبى شبيّة
وقلّت وجبه الدمي ذنبه
وصعدت عن حبه زفّرة
وأعرب عن لوعة مدعع
وردع أصيل لوى معطى
وشعشت منه بظهر النقى
وأولى أندب عسراً خلًا
1. I preceded the riding beasts of Youth in getting on my way; I was higher than the praiseworthy high things in looking from above.

2. With steadfastness I entered the breast [ṣadr] of darkness, a steadfastness that made the back [zahr] of the nightly travel smooth as a journey;

3. I crossed a darkness to another darkness and waded through a desert to another desert.

4. I said—and the meeting point of the sweet smell of the ox-eye [plant] and the coldness of the breeze excited my desire—:

5. "My two friends from Ḥimyar, tell a man who has become grey about the nights of Youth

6. And quench a burning thirst at the remembrance of Love in the breast of a generous man who longed for what he longed for."

7. Hardly had been clouded that which was clouded, when it became bright, so that it became a bright morning. Hardly had it obeyed when it became unwilling 35.

8. A young dove cooed out of yearning on a ben-tree [an Egyptian willow], antagonizing a preacher [on the same tree] who was yellow.

9. It reminds me of a night at al-Liwa and a graceful period in the time of my youth...

10. And sweet water in Wādi al-gaḍā [the Valley of the Tamarisks] and a spring meadow covered with green herbs in al-Ḥimā.

11. Nights in which I knew we were young men and I knew our lovers were numerous 34.

12. How perfumed was that wind! How moist were the mantles of these hills!

13. And how excellent were those gathered fruits as a garden and the suction of the deep red of the lips as a drinking place!

14. The engaging in a conversation set in motion A Quiet One who was hidden so that He loosened the pieces of cloth used as a support when He was sitting [in order to go away];

15. He [=Youth] did not know me as a beardless and handsome young man and disapproved of me as a white-haired person...

16. So that I was on the point of bringing there the things that Youth had caused to go away, but for the greyness of Old Age that posed itself between me and Youth.

17. I said, admitting that love for the dolls is His sin: "O may God forgive Him [Youth] the sins He committed".

18. I uttered a sigh of love for Him, which made my breast nearly set on fire...

19. And an eye gave expression to a burning passion; when a passion stammers, it is eloquent.

20. And the saffron of dusk enveloped my coat and I silvered with tears which it had gilded.

35 For the meaning in this verse, see perhaps no. 216, p. 278, line 10 where he speaks of protection given by the clouds, and the coldness of the nightly wind [vide infra].

34 I translated rabrabā according to the meaning of the root, without having direct evidence or support for it in the dictionaries.
21. And I mixed with them [those tears] on the top of the sand dune a reddish drink which I spilt.

22. I lament mourning a time which has passed. The incapacity of a sixty year old man lies in the fact that he mourns.

Here you see how Youth is personified as a young man. The poet doesn't succeed to get in touch with him because the poet now looks old and grey, although he was handsome in earlier days. The poet shows himself in love for this boy [Youth], but knows very well that the boy's only attention is given to the young beautiful ladies. Thereupon he weeps about his old age with white tears mixed with red tears of blood and exclaims that when someone has reached sixty, the only thing which remains is mourning.

In a short unpublished poem [no. 375; 35b] Ibn Ḥafaga uses the motif of the raven, normally black and a symbol of departure [the ḡubb al-bayn]. Here however, the raven which causes departure is first spotted and then white as it stands for the black hair which turns white, and which causes separation. Because the young girls do not like men with grey hair. The poem reads as follows:

1. O do not lie about the damage the raven can cause, when the night brings people together and Youth acts as a mediator.

2. For the lovers it suffices to know from a raven of greyness that greyness is a spotted raven.

In another poem [no. 46, p. 85] the poet recalls his black hair during his youth compared to whose blackness the night looked white [line 8].

In the following fragment [no. 178, p. 236, lines 18-26] the poet develops the theme of white-haired-ness and old age. The black raven, symbol of departure and death, is also symbol of youth, the happy period of life, because of the association with black hair. This hair is at first spotted with white, and after that becomes completely white. Old age deserves better to be connected with the bird of separation than youth. Because white hair makes the beautiful ladies go away, and old age, in the end, announces death. The poet describes in the following how suddenly the forerunners of old age arrived:
18. Suddenly appeared the smile of grey hair because of which I did not recognize the face of a young girl, because of all her scowling.

19. I loathed a spotted raven which caused separation and which was black in the time of youth.

20. So a long sigh āḥ and another one because of an advanced age, because of which I wept blood over the loss of youth.

21. The mirror of my glance and my ear became rusty so that I do not perceive the things with those two senses as in former times.

22. Is there any trustworthy friend in Time which conserves a friendship, when even two friends, as these two senses are, betray me?

23. It is as if never the laughing mouth of a morning aroused my desire at al-Liwa and never sipped the deep red of the lips from a darkness under it.

24. And as if I never visited at night a beautiful lady quivering like a branch and trailing behind her a speckled snake that is the abundance of her tresses.

25. And as if I never travelled away from her when I observed that the morning had become grey after having arrived riding on a black horse at night out of longing for her.

26. And as if the wind never competed with me in pulling the abundance of a lock of hair, in which I clothed myself as sealed with the sign of youth.
Remarkable in this poem also is the repeated phrase in which the poet considers his bygone youth 'as if he had never experienced it'. This 'as if never' is typical of the elegy in which is often said about the deceased: 'It is as if I never met him' 35. Here again al-Liwá is mentioned as a place of juvenile love, which is according to Ibn Ḥafāṣ's remark in prose, that he has a certain predilection for Ḥijāzī place names in his poetry 36.

Another fragment [no. 216, p. 278, lines 5-13] mentions the same 'as if' device taken from elegiac poetry. The first lines of this poem are dedicated to the description of the poet's old age and the fever from which he is suffering, which suggests that he thinks about repentance from the sins he has committed during his past life (lines 1-4). In line 5 again the image of the dayl crops up as we saw in poem no. 288 quoted above "Old age has rolled up man's coat tail, the more Youth proudly dragged it along"] 37.

Then he remembers his youthful life between wine parties and beautiful boys or girls [gazelles]. The Ḥijāzī place name 'al-Liwá' stands almost for love remembrances. Then follows the 'as if' motif, as if he had never experienced youth and juvenile love:

[ طويل ]

وتنفسة حُمَى تعترنُ ينفَّص

وأنظر فيما قد عملتُ أمْحَص

وتشترف الدنيا إلى فَحْص

ويعمى علي الامر طُوراً فَحْص

وما كنت أدرى أنَّه سِقَّص

تُدار وظبي بالسَّوا قَيْسَص

ألا إنها سَبَن تزيد فانفَّص

فها أنا أحوى ما جنيت بعبرتي

وأليم أعاقب الأمور فارعَوي

أقبلعين الرأي طوراً فاجتهلُي

ويارب ديل للشاب سحبته

وملحٌ عيش بين كأس روية


36 See above note 8.

37 See above note 29.
فيالیت ذالک العیش لّو کان یتکص

1. O, an age that increases so that I diminish and a feverish shiver which befalls me so that I dance.

2. I am blotting out with my tears what crimes I have committed and I look at what I have done in order to rectify and purify.

3. I behold the consequence of the things, so that I am converted from error but the World looks up to me so that I covet [Her].

4. Now I turn my eye around so that I see things clearly, now again the thing remains obscure to me so that I scrutinize.

5. Many a tail I dragged of the Youth, I did not know that it would be tucked up.

6. And many a glimpse of life which was turned between an abundant cup and a fawn which hunted at al-Liwa.

7. O a life has gone by that was moist of prosperity, o would it that that life came back!

8. A youth that during a long period had been contemptible, now has become precious. O, precious things at one time are expensive, at another time they are cheap.

9. Who wants to bring to those [past] nights a greeting, directing himself to all the nights in general, and some nights in particular.

10. When those clouds do not give protection to me nor the coldness of that wind which travels at night and is pure 38.

11. Now that have appeared the white stars of greyness, I turn my eye to them in order to fabricate lies about them.

See above note 33.
12. It is as if I have never kissed the face of the sun at night, and as if a hollow sole of mine was never shod with the star beneath it \(^9\).  

13. As if I never had spent the night in love with someone, while a sand grouse [a qatā-bird] which had a hollow dug between my ribs, fluttered with my heart \(^{40}\).

Here the poet wants to give a greeting to the bygone nights of his youth, some of which he has a special remembrance. The same elegiac motif ‘as if never’ is also found at the end of this fragment. Youth is precious, now that it can not be recuperated.

We know that the poet showed a predilection in describing \(\textit{hamāsa}\) or ‘bravery’ themes, but sometimes this theme is limited to the description of a horse at night while focusing on the description of the colours of the horse and the contrast between the sword and the black night. Sometimes the poet underlines his own wish to take part in actions of bravery \(^{41}\).

Between the unpublished poems we find one poem [no. 393, 40a] \(^{42}\) about Old Age, with the following title ‘He said about the theme of heroism and courage in spite of his old age and the presence of longevity”. The poet deprecates his not taking part in battle with the following words:

1. Does my eye deceive me and my ears and my arm? No horse of noble breed runs with me nor does the point of the spear drip [with blood].

2. At the gathering point of the cavalry, I like to see a horse complaining and a sword thanking.

3. When the lances thrust and quarrel and I have drenched the lances for the first time, I do not care how I will come out.

\(^9\) With the star can also be meant; ‘The Pleiades’; so the beloved was higher than the Pleiades.  

\(^{40}\) According to Renate Jacobi and Tilmann Seidensticker a common image in early poetry [the bird does not fly away with the heart but flutters with it].  

\(^{41}\) Cf. the poem mentioned in note 6.  

\(^{42}\) The numbers of the unpublished poems are mine; then the \textit{recto} and \textit{verso} numbers of the Leiden Ms. 14.056 are given.
Only perhaps the first line refers to his old age, because he does not really take part in the battle. On the whole his old age is hardly mentioned except in the title.

Another unedited fragment [no. 435, 49b, lines 1-13] takes up another elegiac motif in connection with the loss of youth, namely the famous *ubi sunt* motif. However, in this context the motif does not refer to persons, but to attributes of persons or mental states, and to youth and the nights themselves. The poem has a title, which says that it is a *luzūm mā lā yalam* poem, which perhaps implies that the Ī in the rhyme on ā to should really be a grammatical long Ī. The titles says; ‘He says in *luzūm* etc., describing the change of his Time and addressing one of his famous friends’. The poem starts as follows:

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أين ذاك الصبا وتلك الليالي
ومراء باسم كالالات
وقدود عسالة كالعواالي
وانبالي تختترا واختيالي
وتتراق من التلاع حوالي
ونسيم كنا تنفس سالم
بين جيد من البقاء تلبس
وحمام كمسا شيتين بواك
واصطباح وصلته براوح
وقضيب هصرته في كثيب
ثم ماكان ذاك حتى تولى
فابك إن كنت تستديم البواقي
ولتقل أف للحياة إذامنا
إلى الأرض وهي أوحش دار
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Perhaps even the grammatical long Ī is not always there.
1. Say to the sweet Days that have passed away: “Where is that Youth? Where are these Nights?
2. Where is the glitter of faces like dinars, and the [reflected] images of mouth like pearls?
3. And the seductive eyes like sharp swords and the quivering bodies like lance points.
4. Where is my pride by demonstrating powerful feelings? Where is my nobility with proud and elegant bearing? Where is my arrogance?
5. Between a long neck as valleys and sweet clavicles as hills.
6. Many doves were as wailing women who were lying prostrate and many a wind as someone who seeks comfort sighing deeply.
7. Many a drinking party in the morning I have continued until evening between a past and a future period of time.
8. Many a branch I pulled towards myself on a sand dune. So that it was stable at the lowest part, whereas the higher parts were inconstant.
9. Then hardly had I done this when perfumed flowers appeared, the new ones as well as those finished flowering.
10. So weep with a weeping, if you wish the remaining things to endure, if you don’t get back the things that are gone.
11. And say to life: “It is enough”, when one day my return will be to the earth.
12. Towards the earth, the most desolate house, is the travel of mankind, both subjects and rulers.
13. Fate lies in ambush for the creatures; from its ambush the servants are at the same place as the kings.
[14. The people of the Time are looking for the honour to receive gifts [from Abū Bakr], but Abū Bakr himself is where the bright swords are.
15. He strives there where the lofty deeds last long. So he is [really] high and the other persons consider themselves high.] 44

41 The last two quoted lines are part of the mādiḥ and therefore rendered between brackets. Only a part of the poem is mentioned.
In this fragment we also see the consolation motif ['everyone has to die'] with a reminiscence from the elegy on the younger sister of Sayf al-Dawla by al-Mutanabbi [Yâzîgi, II: p. 240], there a line goes as follows 45:

27. When the old man says: “It is enough”, he is not weary of life, he is only weary of his weakness.

Looking first at the motifs and then the style, we can conclude that Ibn Ħafâga was a conventional poet with an individual style. In many places he mentions his age. Perhaps here he deliberately follows the mu'amma-rūn poets and other poets like al-Buhturi, who had a certain predilection to mentioning their age. In many of the poems Love is described as a reminiscence of youth. Hiğâzi place names are mentioned to denote the youthful and amorous landscape, like al-Liwa, al-Ḥimâ, Wādi al-Ǧaḏā. In one poem Youth is personified, and has no interest anymore for the white-haired poet. The particular manner in which the poet elaborates the motifs is individual. This is also true for his dealing with the famous topic of the black raven of separation, which now is turned into a white bird which causes separation. In some poems the poet dwells on the repentance motif. In one poem is suggested that the tears of his old age [caused by illness] wipe out his sins. In another poem the poet asks forgiveness for the personified Youth, who is only interested in the dolls, the beautiful girls. Next to love bravery is also one of the attributes of juvenile age, with which the poet likes to be connected in his old age. We saw this mixture of love and war earlier in poem no. 287. Another poem in which bravery was connected with his old age is poem no. 393. We learn this from the title above the poem.

Some elements are borrowed from elegiac poetry, specially the ‘as if never’ motif, in which the poet changes the original motif ‘it was as if he had never met the deceased person’ into ‘it was as if he had never experienced the love rendez-vous during his youth’. Another elegiac motif mentioned is the ubi sunt motif, now not referring to persons, but to the attributes of his juvenile life. Speaking about form and style it is remarkable how the poet frequently uses the luzūm mā lā yalsam device. Remarkable also is that the poet uses a syntactic device well-known in pre-Islamic poetry such as that of Zubayr 46 e.g. in line 5 of poem no. 435:

Bayna ḡādin min al biqā‘i talī‘in/ wa-tarāqin min at-tūlā‘i ḥawālī /

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Here the adjective is separated from the substantive to which it belonged, a feature which occurs regularly both in pre-Islamic and Ibn Ḥaṣāqa’s poetry, but not in Abbasid poetry such as that of al-Mutanabbī or al-Buḥturi. So one can consider this as a deliberate stylistic revival of early poetry, but in a totally new individual context. Typically Andalusian and also typical of Ibn Ḥaṣāqa’s poetry is the symmetrical structure of the above quoted line.

Both old motifs and old stylistic and syntactic devices are used by the poet to enhance the expression of his personal feelings and experiences, which are conventional, but at the same time have an individual character.

RIASSUNTO

In quest’articolo viene trattato un tema ricorrente nella poesia di Ibn Ḥaṣāqa (al-Andalus: 1058-1139), cioè il tema della vecchiaia e l’età avanzata. Nella sua poesia il poeta ha l’opportunità di mostrare i suoi sentimenti, anche se il tema è molto convenzionale, legato al motivo dell’amore e delle donne che non accettano i capelli grigi.

In alcuni brani poetici sull’amore il poeta dice che è vecchio e impotente. In un altro poema, il poeta non riesce a venire a contatto con un giovane, apparentemente la personificazione della Gioventù. Questo giovane gli sfugge perché il poeta ora ha l’aspetto vecchio ed è grigio, anche se fu bellissimo in tempi più fausti. Se qualcuno ha sessant’anni, l’unica cosa che rimane è rimpiangere il tempo passato.

Ibn Ḥaṣāqa si serve del motivo del corvo [gurāb al-bayn] che normalmente è nero e simbolo della partenza dell’amata, ma qui invece è macchiato e sul punto di diventare bianco, perché indica i capelli neri, che diventano macchiati e bianchi, e che provocano la separazione dalle donne amate.

Il poeta usa motivi elegiaci come il motivo dell’ubi sunt. Però nel contesto del suo poema il motivo non si riferisce ai personaggi, ma agli attributi personali e stati mentali, o alla giovenezza e le sue notti.

Un altro elemento è toltò dai motivi elegiaci dei compianti funebri. Il poeta cambia il motivo funebre ‘è come se non avessi mai incontrato il defunto’ in ‘come se nella mia gioventù non avessi mai incontrato le persone amate e passato delle notti amorose con loro’.

Ibn Ḥaṣāqa inserisce motivi della poesia araba antica nella sua poesia che sono collocati in un contesto nuovo individuale. Un tratto caratteristico arabo-andaluso del suo stile è la struttura spesso simmetrica dei suoi versi.